

Brimstone-Free' Hell: a new way of saying the same old thing about judgment and hell?

William M. Schweitzer

I. Introduction

Tim Keller is right to preach the importance of the doctrines of judgment and hell.² While we must always contend for the faith generally (Jude 1:3), these interrelated doctrines in particular serve as a theological 'canary in the mineshaft'—when orthodoxy deteriorates, they tend to be among the first to die.³ Beyond the familiar historical instances that might be cited as demonstrative of this function, it is not terribly difficult to see why it would be the case theoretically.⁴ If the prevailing cultural winds are blowing in the direction of absolute human autonomy, then there could hardly be anything more abhorrent to this culture than a future judgment in which the sovereign Lord will condemn sinners to everlasting torment. Or as Dr. Keller puts it in *The Reason for God*, 'In our culture, divine judgment is one of Christianity's most offensive doctrines.'⁵ So he is absolutely right to take a stand on this issue. If we manage to keep this 'canary' alive, there is some hope that we are also preserving the basic theological integrity of the church.

Although this essay will question aspects of Keller's teaching on hell, we should make clear the important difference between his sincere efforts and those who have given up the fight. Rob Bell is an infamous recent example of an evangelical leader who wants to be known as orthodox but who has simply capitulated to universalistic conclusions.⁶ For every Bell, however, there are probably a hundred less daring souls who express their doubt concerning the doctrines of judgment and hell simply by not speaking on these things at all. Dr. Keller simply could not be put in either of these categories. Hell is routinely included when Keller articulates the Christian faith in print, and it features among the topics preached at his church.⁷ Indeed, he devotes an entire message to the very 'Importance of Hell'.⁸ Keller reasons in this message, 'If Jesus, the Lord of Love and Author of Grace spoke about hell more often, and in a more vivid, blood-curdling manner than anyone else, it must be a crucial truth.'⁹ Amen and amen.

So what, then, might be questionable? Keller has two different ways of communicating the doctrine of hell, one for 'traditionalists' and the other for 'postmoderns'.¹⁰ Now this contextual approach itself raises a whole host of issues regarding anthropology, effectual calling, and the means of grace.¹¹ Assuming for the moment that there is nothing wrong with this contextual approach, however, we still ask whether both of Keller's messages are good representations of the biblical doctrines of judgment and hell. Aside from a quibble, Keller's teaching for the traditionalists seems consistent with the traditional doctrine.¹² The real questions come regarding the message for the postmoderns. On this point, Keller takes his cues from one of his favorite Christian thinkers, a man to whom he is frequently compared—C. S. Lewis.¹³ No doubt

Lewis's concept presents a powerful apologetic strategy; after all, how many people are going to be offended by a hell that God does not send anyone to, where the punishment is self-inflicted, and from which no one ever asks to leave? However, one wonders whether this depiction is altogether a consistent communication of the biblical doctrines of judgment and hell, and this consideration is the subject of this essay. In addition, since Keller has another favorite Christian thinker who is well known for his work in this area of theology, we shall also consider what support Jonathan Edwards might or might not possibly lend for this teaching. First, a preliminary word about the nature of doctrine.

Doctrine: Name and Content

Doctrines have names such as 'justification' to describe what they teach, but these do not remain as empty shells eligible to be filled with just any content. Rather, the name must go along with all the constituent parts of the orthodox doctrine. In the case of the teaching we are discussing here, let us imagine that the requisite elements of the doctrines of judgment and hell were simply that a) hell is unpleasant, and b) people inevitably stay there forever. If so, we would have an enormous degree of flexibility in the way we might communicate such a doctrine. We might, for instance, say that hell's unpleasantness consists chiefly in its terribly unfashionable uniforms, and that people choose to stay there because they are too embarrassed to leave. Our minimal elements would hypothetically have been upheld, yet it is clear that truth would have been obliterated.

More to the point, the words 'judgment' and 'hell' indicate sets of specific doctrinal content that must be conserved in our formulations. This applies not only to systematic theologies, where doctrine is explained at length, but also to popular and apologetic works. Even if such occasions do not permit us to completely explain every last element of a given doctrine, what we do say must be consistent with the fuller explication. After all, what would be the use of rendering a doctrine acceptable by altering its content when the person thus convinced will soon enough encounter the 'real' doctrine, which would remain just as offensive as ever?

With these things in mind, we shall consider three specific points of the biblical doctrines of judgment and hell: that God himself sends people to hell, that God himself keeps people in hell eternally, and that punishment in hell is meted out by God himself. At each point, we shall compare these elements of the biblical teaching with representative statements of Keller's teaching for postmoderns. Our first interpretive question is, Who condemns people to hell?

Who Condemns People to Hell?

Who condemns people to hell? The Bible would seem to be clear on this matter: God does, through Christ.¹⁴ The heavens declare that 'God himself is judge!' (Ps 50:6).¹⁵ God proclaims himself to be sovereign over the destiny of all mankind, and specifically to be the Judge of the wicked.¹⁶ God's judicial office is included in the list of divine attributes in the Westminster Confession (WCF 2:1). The news that Christ has been appointed to carry out this office forms

part of the apostolic message in Acts 10:42: 'And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.'¹⁷ Christ's coming judgment then features in the Mars Hill discourse, where Paul speaks of it as one of the great truths verified by the resurrection: '[God] has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead' (Acts 17:31).

Furthermore, God has seen fit to provide us with a preview of Christ's condemnation of the wicked on Judgment Day. He will say to the goats, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels'; and likewise to the hypocrites, 'Depart from me, all you workers of evil!' (Matt. 25:41; Luke 13:27). It is for this reason that Jesus solemnly warns us, 'fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell' (Luke 12:5). It would seem difficult to miss the point that is so clear in these texts: God, in the Person of Christ, is the One who sends people to hell.

That point is not so clear, however, in Keller's teaching for postmoderns. Keller begins his discussion in *Reason for God* in this way:

Modern people inevitably think that hell works like this: God gives us time, but if we haven't made the right choices by the end of our lives, he casts our souls into hell for all eternity. As the poor souls fall through space, they cry out for mercy, but God says 'Too late! You had your chance! Now you will suffer!' This caricature misunderstands the very nature of evil. The Biblical picture is that sin separates us from the presence of God, which is the source of all joy and indeed of all love, wisdom, or good things of any sort. Since we were originally created for God's immediate presence, only before his face will we thrive, flourish, and achieve our highest potential. If we were to lose his presence totally, that would be hell—the loss of our capability for giving or receiving love or joy.¹⁸

This is a curious statement. The 'caricature' here is the idea of a God who, at a definite point in the future, condemns sinners to eternal hell regardless of all their pleas for mercy. The objection is obviously painted in colors sympathetic to the objector's point of view; yet even so, this 'caricature' is essentially indistinguishable from the orthodox truth. When Christ himself explains what will happen on that Day, not only does he make it abundantly clear who is doing the condemning, he betrays no embarrassment at the damned pleading for reconsideration: 'On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?"' Notwithstanding such pleas, the Lord replies, 'And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness"' (Matt. 7:22–23). Moreover, we have Christ's warning to the Pharisees, 'You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?' (Matt. 23:33). 'Caricature' or not, God certainly does cast sinners into hell against their will.

Returning to Keller's doctrine for postmoderns, we move on to ask, who sends people to hell if not God? The answer seems to be, no one sends anyone else to hell *per se*; people send themselves to hell. In a sermon bearing the provocative title 'Isn't the God of Christianity an

Angry Judge?', Keller examines 'the Christian teaching that God is a judge, and a judge who consigns people to hell'.¹⁹ The sermon builds a consistent case that we send ourselves to hell apart from any judicial condemnation by God:

Summary: hell is just a freely chosen identity based on something else besides God going on forever ... And that's the reason why the idea, that you might have in your mind, and that people give you in your mind, that God is a God who sort of throws people into hell, you know he sort of throws them into this pit, and they're climbing up the sides, saying, 'Please no, let me out!' and God is saying, 'No! It's too late now; it's hell for you!' C. S. Lewis puts it like this, he says: 'In the long run, the answer to those who object to the doctrine of hell is itself a question: what are you asking God to do? To wipe out past sins, and at all costs give them a fresh start? He did, on Calvary. To forgive them? But they don't ask for forgiveness. *To leave them alone?* That's what hell is. There are only two kinds of people in the end. Those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in hell, choose it. Without that self-choice, it wouldn't be hell.'²⁰

There are two sides to the coin of self-chosen hell. One side is that God does not condemn people to hell, and the other is that people send themselves. Notice that Keller appears to affirm both sides of the coin. It is difficult to see how this is compatible with the biblical teaching that God is the One who condemns sinners to hell, summarized in the Westminster Larger Catechism: 'At the day of judgment, the wicked shall be set on Christ's left hand, and, upon clear evidence, and full conviction of their own consciences, shall have the fearful but just sentence of condemnation pronounced against them ...' (WLC 89).

Keller would respond to our questions on this point by saying that there must be some way in which hell is self-chosen. It is true, for instance, that people know deep down that judgment is coming and yet choose to continue in sin (Rom 1:18–32). In that limited sense I suppose you could say that hell is self-chosen; but to say so without extensive qualification would be misleading. It would be akin to saying, 'All that are in jail, choose it. Without that self-choice, it wouldn't be jail.' With some exceptions due to the unprecedented levels of creature comfort found in contemporary prisons, criminals do not willingly give up their liberty to be locked up in jail. Given a choice between the two, they tend to evade arrest, employ skilled lawyers to thwart prosecution, enter into plea bargains to reduce the judge's sentence, and ask for parole as soon as possible. That is because criminals choose the pleasures and rewards of their lawbreaking, *not* the jail term that is the unpleasant consequence imposed involuntarily by the state. Likewise, sinners choose their sin, not the God-imposed consequence of hell itself.

Moreover, to say that hell is self-chosen without making it clear that this choice is fully subordinate to God's sovereignty would also be misleading. Consider the parallel case of how we explain salvation. We could say, 'All who are in heaven choose it,' and we would have better biblical grounds. Yet we have a word for a theology that emphasizes the self-chosen aspect of salvation to the exclusion or subordination of God's sovereignty. We call it Arminianism. It is a debatable point whether the Bible teaches that hell is in any proper sense self-chosen; but even if it did, to speak only of this aspect would be a distortion inconsistent with the faith that

teaches that God 'hath most sovereign dominion over [all people], to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever himself pleaseth' (WCF 2:2).

This being the case, it is a bit surprising to read statements in Keller such as the following:

That is why it is a travesty to picture God casting people into a pit who are crying 'I'm sorry! Let me out!' The people on the bus from hell in Lewis's parable would rather have their 'freedom,' as they define it, than salvation. Their delusion is that, if they glorified God, they would somehow lose power and freedom, but in a supreme and tragic irony, their choice has ruined their own potential for greatness. Hell is, as Lewis says, 'the greatest monument to human freedom.' As Romans 1:24 says, God 'gave them up to ... their desires.' All God does in the end with people is give them what they most want, including freedom from himself. What could be more fair than that?²¹

I am unsure why Keller would so condemn a picture that—unsympathetic colors notwithstanding—is consonant with the orthodox doctrine of divine judgment. It is one thing to want to find new ways to explain the traditional doctrine; it is quite another to label it a 'travesty'. Moreover, the reference to Romans 1:24 is more specious than solid. Romans 1 is concerned with the limited foretaste of wrath that is experienced in this present world, not hell. We soon enough come to the subject of eternal judgment and hell in Romans 2, and here the picture is altogether traditional: 'you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who "will render to each one according to his deeds": [...] indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil ...' (Rom. 2:5–9, NKJV). Far from warranting statements such as that hell is 'the greatest monument to human freedom', or that 'God simply gives people what they most want', the relevant passage in the book of Romans expresses precisely the opposite sentiment:

You will say to me then, 'Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?' But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me like this?' Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction ... (Rom. 9:19–22).

God's unconditional sovereignty, concerning both the elect and the reprobate, permeates the Bible. We imagine that Keller would like to bring his audience to the Reformed position, but one wonders how sound a foundation he lays for it when he speaks as if hell is a matter of God simply deferring to human free will.

Who Decides that the Damned Stay in Hell?

Our second question is, Who decides that the damned stay in hell? This seems a useful question to ask because Keller's depiction of God's deference to human decision extends beyond the initial condemnation to hell. It also includes the damned's ongoing determination to *remain* in

hell: 'In eternity ... [t]here is increasing isolation, denial, delusion, and self-absorption. When you lose all humility you are out of touch with reality. No one ever asks to leave hell. The very idea of heaven seems to them a sham.'²² This is another curious statement. We have heard Christ explain that there will be many pleading with him to be admitted into heaven and to be spared from hell before they have actually been condemned (Matt. 7:21–22). Why would we suppose that this inclination would be reversed *after* they have experienced for themselves the unimaginable horrors of hell?

Keller finds exegetical support for his claim in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. His questionable handling of this text is dealt with at length elsewhere in this book.²³ However, let us just summarize the main problems that Holst identifies with Keller's exegesis. First, Keller's reliance upon a parable for his main support violates the principle that clearer Scripture ought to interpret the less clear.²⁴ Second, the fact that a character in a parable does not actually ask to leave hell does not constitute sufficient warrant for Keller's idiosyncratic assertion 'No one ever asks to leave hell.' Third, Keller does not give sufficient weight to the fixed chasm (Luke 16:26) being an externally-imposed barrier preventing any movement in or out of hell *irrespective of human choice*. In other words, the God who decides to send people to hell also determines that they must stay there eternally.²⁵

This conclusion is precisely in harmony with the statement we have already seen in Matthew: 'Then he [Christ] will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels"' (Matt. 25:41). Hell is defined not merely as fire but as '*eternal fire*'. Eternality is as much an integral part of the sentence as the fire itself, from the very moment of condemnation. Indeed, the force of the repeated statement in Mark 9 is not the simple presence of fire, but that this will be a place where '... the fire is not quenched' (Mark 9:48). God is the One who decides that the damned remain forever in hell, and his edict is known at the very outset of condemnation.

Who Metes out the Punishment in Hell?

Our third question is, Who metes out the punishment in hell? Since we know that God never changes (Mal. 3:6), we might begin by considering the prototypes of judgment of which we already have a record. Indeed, the worldwide flood of Noah's day, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Exodus all serve as 'an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly' (2 Peter 2:4–6; Jude 1:5). These prototypes of judgment vary greatly in detail, but in each case it is made explicitly clear that God himself metes out the punishment associated with judgment.

We consider first the great flood. The Lord proclaims that he is the one who will bring about this worldwide destruction:

And God said to Noah, 'I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth ... For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under

heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die ... For in seven days I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground' (Gen. 6:13, 17; 7:4).

Notice that the initiative to punish, the choice of means to punish, and the execution of that punishment all belong to the Lord himself.

There are similar themes in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The angels warn Lot that 'we are about to destroy this place' and explain, 'the Lord has sent us to destroy it'. Lot, on the other hand, simply tells his sons-in-law 'the Lord is about to destroy the city'; but these statements all amount to the same thing (Gen. 19:13–14). When the event itself is described, Scripture points to both the means and the one who is making use of them: 'Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground' (Gen. 19:24–25). Once again, the initiative, the choice of means, and the execution are all manifestly of God.

Throughout the exodus, the great emphasis is on the public recognition that it is the Lord God of Israel who is personally executing judgment. 26 He says to Pharaoh, 'I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth' (Exod. 9:14). He explains his actions in the death of the firstborn: 'I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord' (Exod. 12:12). Likewise, 'the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen' (Exod. 14:18). God's glory in personally meting out punishment upon Egypt was not merely incidental to his glory in personally saving his covenant people. Both are fully integral because, in the final analysis, God's salvation cannot be extricated from God's judgment.

Moreover, God's actions in inflicting punishment became the specific object of mandatory commemoration. Moses was divinely instructed to tell his descendants 'how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the Lord' (Exod. 10:2). The Passover is, among other things, a memorial to God's very personal judgment upon Egypt: 'By a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt ... For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt' (Exod. 13:14–15).

The story of the desert wanderings is also one of personal judgments against unbelievers, epitomized by the incident of Korah. God first sets up a Mount Carmel-like demonstration for the leaders of the rebellion (Num. 16:28–32). He then deals with the men who had joined in with them, 'And fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men ...' (Num. 16:35). Finally, the sympathizers are likewise dealt with in highly personal terms: 'wrath has gone out from the Lord; the plague has begun' (Num. 16:46). To summarize, if the Lord ever judged in a

way that did *not* manifest his direct, personal involvement, it would constitute a radical departure from his methods thus far.

With this background in mind, we consider some representative material that speaks of the future judgment and hell. We find that the eschatological antitype is fully consistent with the foreshadowing types—God himself will mete out the punishment. John the Baptist says of Christ, ‘He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire’ (Luke 3:16–17). The Lord’s direct activity is likewise emphasized in the warning of Matthew 10:28: ‘And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.’ Unless we mistake this verse to teach annihilationism, the whole point is that we should fear the God who will mete out ongoing, everlasting destruction upon both body and soul in hell.

The Lord will make use of means such as angels to carry out his judgment, but they act at his express command: ‘The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (Matt. 13:40–42). This intermingling of Christ’s personal work and his direction of angelic activity in judgment is entirely consonant with the doctrine of God’s sovereignty. If people are suffering in hell, it is because God has somehow sent them there and has determined that they will suffer. Indeed, God determines even the precise degree to which they will suffer, some more than others.²⁷

It is the persistent message of Scripture that God will personally mete out his wrath on rebellious mankind. The writer of Hebrews gathers a couple of the relevant texts together—‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay’ and ‘The Lord will judge his people’—to make the point that ‘It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God’ (Heb. 10:30–31). Paul emphasizes the personal role of Christ: ‘... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus’ (2 Thess. 1:7–8). And of course, a number of passages in the Book of Revelation point to how God will pour out his wrath on sinful mankind in the judgment to come.²⁸ At length, one begins to wonder if there is any truth that is taught more clearly in Scripture.

This message is not quite so clear, however, in Keller’s teaching on hell for postmoderns. Following Lewis, Keller suggests in *The Reason for God* that the punishment in hell is just the inevitable outworking of our own refusal to let go of sin:

In his fantasy *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis describes a busload of people from hell who come to the outskirts of heaven. There they are urged to leave behind the sins that have trapped them in hell—but they refuse. Lewis’s descriptions of these people are striking because we recognize in them the self-delusion and self-absorption that are ‘writ small’ in our own addictions. [quotes from Lewis’ *Great Divorce*] The people in hell are miserable, but Lewis shows us why. We see raging like unchecked flames their pride, their paranoia,

their self-pity, their certainty that everyone else is wrong, that everyone else is an idiot! All their humility is gone, and thus so is their sanity. They are utterly, finally locked in a prison of their own self-centeredness, and their pride progressively expands into a bigger and bigger mushroom cloud. They continue to go to pieces forever, blaming everyone but themselves. Hell is that, writ large.²⁹

Keller's explanation for why the damned are miserable does not seem to have all that much in common with the message we have just seen in Scripture.³⁰ Instead of making it reasonably clear that God will mete out the punishment, we have a description that sounds as if he were not involved at all.

The misery in Keller's hell seems rather to originate from the damned themselves, in the form of psychological self-torment. Yes, the people in hell are miserable, 'but Lewis shows us why'; not because the wrath of God is being poured out upon them in hell fire, but because their own pride, paranoia, and self-pity are 'raging like unchecked flames'. Now Keller is exegeting C. S. Lewis at this point rather than Scripture, but nonetheless it would be reasonable to suppose that there will be some sort of psychological self-torment in hell. However, this will surely be a *response* to the external reality of divine punishment, rather than the substance of the punishment itself.

When Keller is speaking to fellow preachers on the subject, he explains the nature of hell in similar ways:

C. S. Lewis's depictions of hell are important for postmodern people. In *The Great Divorce*, Lewis describes a busload of people from hell who come to the outskirts of heaven. There they are urged to leave behind the sins that have trapped them in hell. The descriptions Lewis makes of people in hell are so striking because we recognize the denial and self-delusion of substance addictions. When addicted to alcohol, we are miserable, but we blame others and pity ourselves; we do not take responsibility for our behavior or see the roots of our problem. [quotes from Lewis' *Mere Christianity*] Modern people struggle with the idea of God's thinking up punishments to inflict on disobedient people. When sin is seen as slavery and hell as the freely chosen, eternal skid row of the universe, hell becomes much more comprehensible.³¹

Keller implies that we might want to shy away from an idea 'modern people struggle with', which is that God 'thinks up punishments to inflict on disobedient people'. Instead of such things, it is advisable to preach hell as 'the freely chosen, eternal skid row of the universe'.³² Such a move would admittedly render the doctrine of hell much more 'comprehensible' to contemporary people, but does it remain recognizable as the biblical teaching?

Consider how Keller explains sin and its eternal consequences in one of his latest books, *King's Cross*:

Sinful behavior (the reference to the hand and foot) and sinful desires (the reference to the eye) are like a fire that has broken out in your living room ... Fire is never satisfied. It can't be allowed to smolder; it can't be confined to a corner. It will overtake you eventually. Sin is the same way: It never stays in its place. It always leads to separation from God, which results in intense suffering, first in this life and then in the next. The Bible calls that hell.³³

Once again, Keller seems to depict sin as something that inevitably leads to negative consequences without reference to God's personal role in judicial sentencing or inflicting wrath. Yet this personal involvement seems to be precisely the element that God wants the world to recognize: 'all the nations shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid on them' (Ezek. 39:21).

Keller also claims that the Bible essentially equates 'separation from God' with hell.³⁴ Is there not some truth in this? After all, the NIV says 'They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power' (2 Thess. 1:9). And does not even WLC 29 say that the punishments of sin in the world to come include 'separation' from the 'presence of God'?

First, the words 'and shut out from' in the NIV's rendering of 2 Thessalonians 1:9 is an over-translation of the common Greek word *apo*. The basic gloss for *apo* is 'from', and its semantic range would include origin ('from') as well as opposition ('away from'). Thus the simple meaning of the verse is better captured by the NKJV: 'These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power'. This indeed is the reading incorporated into the Confession itself, as it is found in the Authorized Version.³⁵

More importantly, we have the unambiguous statement in Revelation 14 which sheds additional light on the matter:

If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name (Rev. 14:9–11).

Those who worship the beast will be 'tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and *in the presence of the Lamb*'. I suppose one could elude this by dividing the reprobate into a) the beast worshipers, who are punished in the presence of Christ and b) the other sinners, who are punished away from God's presence. However, in addition to various other difficulties, keep in mind that Keller thinks the most awful situation imaginable is to lose the presence of God.³⁶ If that is the case, why should the beast worshipers receive more favorable treatment than other sinners? Rather, it seems clear that there is only one class of reprobate, all of whom are punished in the most awful situation that God can imagine—the wrathful presence of his Son.

In the case of WLC 29, here is the whole text: 'The punishments of sin in the world to come, are everlasting separation from the comfortable presence of God, and most grievous torments in soul and body, without intermission, in hell-fire for ever'. The key term here is '*comfortable presence*'. God is of course present everywhere, but not in the same way. Heaven or hell could well be defined, not in terms of the mere presence or absence of God, but in terms of the wrathful or the beneficent presence of God. Thus we understand WLC 89: 'At the day of judgment, the wicked ... shall be cast out from the *favorable presence* of God, and the glorious fellowship with Christ, his saints, and all his holy angels, into hell, to be punished with unspeakable torments, both of body and soul, with the devil and his angels for ever.

Finally we might just note that J. I. Packer, who mainly supports Keller's view regarding the self-chosen nature of hell,³⁷ stands quite firmly against the idea of hell being the mere absence of God:

The concept of hell is of a negative relationship to God, an experience not of his absence so much as of his presence in wrath and displeasure. The experience of God's anger as a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29), his righteous condemnation for defying him and clinging to the sins he loathes, and the deprivation of all that is valuable, pleasant, and worthwhile will be the shape of the experience of hell (Rom. 2:6, 8–9, 12).³⁸

We could only concur. The terribleness of hell is not the absence of God. It is rather the awful, wrathful presence of God.

In what way did Jonathan Edwards think that hell fire was symbolic?

Keller states that 'virtually all commentators and theologians' agree that 'the Biblical images of fire and outer darkness are metaphorical ... even Jonathan Edwards pointed out that the Biblical language for hell was symbolic'.³⁹

Keller explains what he means in these words:

To say that the Scriptural image of hell-fire is not wholly literal is of no comfort whatsoever. The reality will be far worse than the image. What, then, are the 'fire' and 'darkness' symbols for? They are vivid ways to describe what happens when we lose the presence of God. Darkness refers to the isolation, and fire to the disintegration of being separated from God. Away from the favor and face of God, we literally, horrifically, and endlessly fall apart.⁴⁰

To be clear, Keller does not claim that Edwards taught the full postmodern version of hell, only that he 'pointed out that the Biblical language for hell was symbolic'. However, the force of the reference is '*even Jonathan Edwards*'; a nod to Edwards' well-earned reputation for impeccable orthodoxy on the doctrine of hell. Because of this implicit authority, it is worthwhile to consider whether Edwards would really offer any meaningful support to Keller on this issue. Edwards

does indeed say that fire is metaphorical in 'The Torments of Hell are Exceeding Great'; but does he give any further indication as to what kind of metaphor it is, or what relation it might bear to Keller's conception?⁴¹ Did Edwards think that hell fire would forever remain metaphorical only, or did he think that it would become quite literal after the general resurrection? We shall consider these questions.

First, it is rather strange that Keller should point to this particular sermon for support of any kind. Edwards makes it explicitly clear in this sermon that he did not think that fire was metaphorical for mere separation from the presence of God.⁴² In fact, he prefaced his sermon with a pointed denunciation of this very position:

There have been some of the Freethinkers, as they call themselves, of the present age, that have denied that the torments of hell are so great as they are generally pretended to be [...] They therefore endeavor to make themselves and others believe that they ben't so intolerable as many imagine.⁴³ They make the misery of hell to consist principally in the punishment of loss: they shall be cast out of God's sight and shall not have God's favor as others shall; they shall lose the enjoyments of this world and the pleasures of heaven.⁴⁴

Edwards is preaching this sermon against those who teach a doctrine of hell in which the punishment is defined in terms of being 'cast out of God's sight'. This means, first of all, that any use of this sermon as support for the very approach that Edwards is preaching against would be ill-advised. Moreover, it is an indication to us that Keller's teaching 'for postmoderns' is not really postmodern. Its basic element, that hell is defined in terms of mere separation from God's presence, was around in the 1720s. We know this because one of the Reformed tradition's leading theologians knew of it then, labeled it as an innovation of 'Freethinkers ... of the present age' and preached against it.

With this preface in mind, we consider the sense in which Edwards thought that fire was 'symbolic'. Edwards did not think that fire signifies something bearing only a vague connection to physical fire, such as psychological disintegration. Rather, he was concerned to show that hell torments would be very much like real fire, only vastly more intense.⁴⁵ Keller astutely reasons that, 'Since souls are in hell right now, without bodies, how could the fire be literal, physical fire?'⁴⁶ Obviously, it could not be, at least not in the intermediate state into which unbelieving souls are immediately cast. For this reason, when Edwards is speaking about the intermediate state (as he was in this particular sermon) he admits that fire must be in some way metaphorical. Yet even here, the overall impression he gives is of an extremely close relationship, pointing to something that could not possibly be better described than as a kind of fire.⁴⁷

We can now reveal the actual content of Edwards' metaphor. Edwards thought that the fire of hell was metaphorical ... for the unmitigated wrath of God poured out on the damned.⁴⁸ The severity of hell torments was to be seen precisely in that 'the punishment that is threatened to be inflicted on ungodly men is the wrath of God'.⁴⁹ This torment is not at all to be thought of as merely permissive or self-inflicted, but consists of God's personal infliction of punishment upon

sinner: 'God will set himself to execute wrath upon that man and will give his vengeance full scope.'⁵⁰ Indeed, Edwards thought that fire was generally used in Scripture to indicate the divine presence.⁵¹ This fiery presence is a comfort to God's people, but for unbelievers, 'he will be a consuming fire to them. They will be exposed to all the fierceness of the flame of God's vindictive justice ...'⁵² All this is put together in a relevant notebook entry:

And the angry God will appear as most intimately present with [them]: he with his wrath will be in them and before them and everywhere round about them, expressing his furious displeasure; and they shall see and feel and be as sensible of God's presence, as we are of a man's that stands before our eyes. [...] The appearances of the presence of [an] angry God in them and everywhere round about them, can be represented by nothing better than by their being in the midst of an exceeding hot and furious fire.⁵³

The wrath of God can be 'represented by nothing better' than fire.

Finally, although Edwards is focusing on the intermediate state in the sermon we have been looking at, he also discusses the post-resurrection situation when sinners will once again have physical bodies. Edwards thinks that 'metaphors of fire will probably be no metaphor after the resurrection'.⁵⁴ Indeed, in a notebook entry written within months of 'The Torments of Hell are Exceeding Great',⁵⁵ we find Edwards working out the physics of hell fire:

Hell is represented by fire and brimstone; and if by that is meant such fire as lightning, then without doubt the torments of hell are inconceivably great. For the fire of lightning is many degrees hotter than the fire of the hottest furnace ... Lightning is a stream of brimstone; and if that stream of brimstone which we are told kindles hell be as hot as streams of lightning, it will be vehement beyond conception. 'Tis probable that this earth, after the conflagration, shall be the place of the damned.⁵⁶

This is not the only place in which Edwards makes it abundantly clear that he held the most literal belief imaginable that there would be physical fire in eternal hell. He notes the correlation between the literal water of Noah's flood and the literal fire which will be used to destroy the world.⁵⁷ He wonders that 'some divines should be at a loss for fire to enkindle the last conflagration, when the Scriptures plainly tell us that the visible universe shall all be rolled together [Is. 34:4], and it is all now made up with little else but fire—vast globes of infinitely fierce and vehement liquid fire'.⁵⁸ He wonders if perhaps the final conflagration will in turn fuel the fires of hell.⁵⁹ Now there is no need to follow Edwards in every tentative speculation found in his unpublished private notebooks, but the point remains crystal clear: his idea of eternal hell is categorically antithetical to the 'brimstone-free' conception that is the subject of this essay.

If not Jonathan Edwards, which theologians might provide Keller with solid support for this idea of hell? The obvious answer begins with C. S. Lewis. However, on this point Lewis was largely transmitting the teaching of someone he called his 'master', George MacDonald.⁶⁰ This is significant because MacDonald thought that 'nothing could be worse' than the 'vile', 'monstrous', 'pagan notion' of the penal substitutionary atonement and developed his theology

in self-conscious opposition to it.⁶¹ MacDonald's doctrine of hell was no incidental side-show to this anti-penal substitutionary system of theology, but was an integral part of it. Now we know that Keller received the 'postmodern' doctrine of hell from an intermediate source, unaware that it was hardwired to function within a heretical system. However, it nevertheless comes with dangerous systematic implications and it is only a matter of time until it does exactly what it was designed to do: render the penal substitutionary atonement unnecessary.

Conclusion

We have considered three basic questions concerning the doctrines of judgment and hell: who sends people to hell, who keeps them there, and who metes out the punishment in hell? The traditional and biblical answer to all three questions is God. God sends people to hell, God keeps them there, and God inflicts the punishment in hell. Keller's teaching for postmoderns, on the other hand, gives a rather different set of answers. Man sends himself to hell, man never asks to leave hell, and man inflicts upon himself the punishment of hell.

This brings us to the larger question concerning Keller's teaching for postmoderns. Is it just a new way of saying the same old thing? If it were, we might expect the language to be different but the answers to questions like 'who sends people to hell?' would necessarily remain the same. That is, of course, what we mean by 'saying the same old thing'—however you want to get there, you still have to come up with the same answers.⁶² Yet we have before us two mutually incompatible answer sheets. They cannot both be reflective of the very same eternal truths about judgment and hell.

As we conclude, we consider the value of warnings. We mentioned at the outset the particular importance of the interrelated doctrines of judgment and hell as an indicator of the general theological health of the church, as a 'canary in the mineshaft'. The value of the 'canary' is precisely that it is exceedingly offensive to the culture and thus perpetually vulnerable to theological weaknesses in the church, always running the risk of an untimely demise at the hands of an insider wanting to placate the world. It would not do us much good to dress up an urban seagull to look like a canary. Such an animal would survive all but the most complete departures from orthodoxy, and we might not even notice the toxic winds of compromise already at work among us. We should therefore take care to ensure that our 'canary' is the real thing.

However, there is an even more important warning that we ought to think about, and that is the Lord's warning to speak clearly to sinners about the dangers of hell:

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand' (Ezek. 3:17–18; see also Ezek. 33:7–9).

The church, and particularly ministers, have been given the mission to communicate the ‘whole counsel of God’ (Acts 20:27). And the principle in Ezekiel 3 is that we must communicate clearly and accurately to unrepentant sinners the reality of what awaits them. Imagine for a moment if Jonah had preached, ‘Yet 40 days, and you Ninevites will be left to your freely-chosen identities apart from God!’ Or imagine if the angels had said to Lot, ‘The Lord is about to give the Sodomites what they most want, separation from him!’ These things just might be true in some indirect way, but how clear do they make the warning? For this reason, it is my hope that Dr. Keller and the countless men who look to him for leadership will reconsider whether the postmodern teaching is indeed the clearest way to speak about judgment and hell.

Endnotes

1. ‘With intellectual, brimstone-free sermons that manage to cite Woody Allen alongside Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Keller draws some five thousand young followers every Sunday.’ *New York Magazine*, dust jacket comment on USA edition of *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*.
2. ‘Understanding what the Bible says about hell is crucial for understanding your own heart, for living in peace in the world, and for knowing the love of God’ (Keller, ‘Hell: Isn’t the God of Christianity an Angry Judge?’ http://download.redeemer.com/sermons/Hell_Isnt_the_God_of_Christianity.mp3, accessed 15 May 2013); ‘Last-day judgment and the reality of hell’ is included in Keller’s list of thirteen topics that should be regularly included in sermons. (Keller, *Center Church*, p. 308) See also Keller, ‘The Importance of Hell’ (http://www.redeemer.com/news_and_events/articles/the_importance_of_hell.html, accessed 15 May 2013).
3. J. H. Moorehead ‘... finds that the real decline in that traditional hell came as a result of a silence about, rather than explicit attack upon, that doctrine’ (J. H. Moorhead, ‘As though nothing at all happened: Death and Afterlife in Protestant Thought, 1840–1925’, *Soundings*, 67, 1984, p.457, quoted in David Powys, ‘The Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Debates about Hell and Universalism’ in N. M. de S. Cameron, ed. *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1993), pp. 113–114)
4. Late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century English Latitudinarianism, British Deism, German Liberalism, and late nineteenth/early twentieth-century Anglo-American Liberalism would be macroscopic examples. See Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); David Powys, *‘Hell’: A Hard Look at a Hard Question* (Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998); and Albert R. Mohler Jr., ‘Air Conditioning Hell: How Liberalism Happens’, *IX Marks Ministries eJournal*, January/February 2010.
5. Reason for God, p. 69.
6. ‘Universalistic’ is more accurate than ‘universalist’, because Bell’s fully consistent Arminian position on the self-chosen nature of hell precludes him from making any certain pronouncement on the eternal destiny of people, whether universalist or otherwise. However, this hardly clears Bell of the substance of the charge of universalism. See Bell, *Love Wins: A*

Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2011).

7. Most importantly, hell has a prominent place in Keller's apologetic bestseller, *Reason for God*, pp. 68–83.

8. 'The Importance of Hell'.

9. 'The Importance of Hell'.

10. Timothy J. Keller, 'Preaching Hell in a Tolerant Age', in Craig Brian Larson and Haddon Robinson, *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). An excerpt is available online at <http://www.sermoncentral.com/article.asp?article=Tim-Keller-Preaching-Hell-Tolerant-Age&Page=1&ac=true&csplit=9060> (accessed 15 May 2013).

11. It would seem that the message we proclaim is in various ways contrary to every culture, yet the Bible nonetheless insists that we have but one supernaturally-empowered message to declare to the entire world. In Mark 16:15, Jesus tells the apostles to proclaim *the* gospel to the entire world without any hint of differentiation in the message. Likewise in Matthew 28:18–20, the apostles are to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the one name of the Triune God, and teaching them without differentiation or adaptation *all* things that Christ had commanded them. In I Corinthians 1:22–24, there are two different cultures in view, the Jewish and the Greek, both of which are offended by the Christian message, though at different points. Nonetheless, Paul insists that he preaches the very same message of Christ crucified to them both.

12. In 'Preaching Hell in a Tolerant Age', Keller says that for moderns, 'Hell must be preached as the only way to know how much Christ loved you.' This is what Scripture affirms (Rom. 8:31–39, Eph. 5:2, and 1 John 4:10–11.) However, this is not the fullness of the biblical doctrine. Most significantly, we might query Keller's warnings about how 'Traditionalists are motivated toward God by the idea of punishment in hell. They sense the seriousness of sin. But traditionalists may respond to the gospel only out of fear of hell' (*ibid.*). The Bible does not betray the slightest hint of such concerns. For examples of the Bible's use of fear of hell as a motivation to believe the truth, see Matthew 10:28–33; Luke 12:1–9; 2 Peter 2:1–9; Jude 23. The potential counter-example of 1 John 4:17–18 is concerned with the Christian's assurance of salvation and not the unbeliever's motivation to come to Christ.

13. Keller was hailed by *Newsweek* magazine as 'a C. S. Lewis for the twenty-first century', a quote that is repeated on the dust jackets of several of his books.

14. See Isa. 66:14–16; Matt. 7:21–23; 25:31–46; Luke 12:4–5; 13:23–28; John 5:21–30; Acts 17:31; 2 Thess. 1:6–10; Heb. 10:26–31; 1 Pet 4:5; 2 Pet 2:3–9; Jude 14–15; Rev 11:17–18; 20:11–15.

15. All Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

16. Regarding sovereignty, see Rom. 9:11–29. Regarding God as the Judge, see Gen. 18:25; Exod. 12:12; 1 Sam. 2:10; 1 Chr. 16:33; Ps. 7:8, 11; 9:7–8, 16; 50:6; 58:11; 75:7; 82:8; 94:2; 96:13; 98:9; Isa. 33:22; Jer. 11:20; Nahum 1:3; John 8:50; Rom. 3:4–7; 1 Cor. 4:5; and Heb. 12:23.

17. For more on Christ's office of judge, see Ps. 110:5–6; John 5:21–30; 2 Tim. 4:1; James 5:9.

18. *Reason for God*, p. 76.

19. 'Hell: Isn't the God of Christianity an Angry Judge?'

20. 'Hell: Isn't the God of Christianity an Angry Judge?' The quotations are from C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 116 and *The Great Divorce* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 69.
21. Lewis, quoted in *Reason for God*, p. 79.
22. *Reason for God*, p. 78.
23. See chapter 5.
24. See Matt. 13:10–15 and Luke 8:10; see also WCF 1:9. Keller seems to acknowledge this problem (*Reason for God*, p. 76) but does not always act consistently with this understanding. Indeed, a failure to reckon with the seriousness of this problem is something of a trend in Keller's writings, as I have noted elsewhere (see my review of *The Prodigal God and Counterfeit Gods* in *Westminster Theological Journal* 72, no. 2 (2010): 444–47).
25. Incidentally, Lewis taught not only that people voluntarily remain in hell but that they can actually leave hell of their own accord, in which case hell serves as 'Purgatory' for them (*The Great Divorce* [New York: Touchstone, 1996], pp. 66–67). Keller does not affirm this part of Lewis' teaching; but neither does he anywhere notify his audience of his disagreement with Lewis on this important point.
26. Exod. 9:14–16; 12:12; 14:15–18; see also Exod. 8:19, 9:20–23; 10:1–2, 12, 21.
27. See Matt. 11:24; 18:6; 26:24; 2 Peter 2:21.
28. See Rev. 6:16–17; 14:19, 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 18:8; 19:15.
29. *Reason for God*, pp. 78–79.
30. Keller does not tend to use the term 'damned', perhaps because it is offensive or perhaps because it does not reflect his conception of how people go to hell.
31. 'Preaching Hell in a Tolerant Age.'
32. 'Skid row' is an American colloquialism for a place where homeless people live in squalor.
33. *King's Cross*, pp. 75–76.
34. *King's Cross*, p. 76.
35. '... but the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power' (WCF 33:2).
36. *Reason for God*, p. 76.
37. See J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), pp. 262–263.
38. J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology*, p. 262.
39. 'The Importance of Hell'.
40. 'The Importance of Hell'.
41. Edwards, 'The Torments of Hell are Exceeding Great,' in *Works* vol. 14 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 310–312.
42. See 'The Importance of Hell'.
43. Ben't is an archaic contraction for 'be not.'
44. Edwards, 'The Torments of Hell are Exceeding Great,' in *Works* vol. 14, p. 303.
45. 'The metaphors and similitudes that the Scripture makes use of to signify it, do signify an extreme degree of torment' (Edwards, 'The Torments of Hell are Exceeding Great', in *Works* vol. 14, p. 310).
46. 'The Importance of Hell'.

47. 'But the principal metaphor made use of to signify it is that of fire, which is used here in this place and the most commonly of any throughout the whole Bible ... But as the Scripture represents the matter, this fire is not any fire of an ordinary degree of heat, but it is a furnace of fire. Matt. 13:42 ... But when metaphors are used in Scripture about spiritual things, the things of another world, they fall short of the literal truth: for these things are the ultimum, the very highest things that are aimed at by all metaphors and similitudes' (Edwards, 'The Torments of Hell are Exceeding Great', in *Works* vol. 14, pp. 310–312).
48. See Edwards' 'Blank Bible' notes on Gen. 19:20–22; Exod. 19; Lev. 10:1–2; Deut. 5:25; 32:22; 1 Kings 18:33–35; Ezek. 5:3–4; 9:2; 10:7; Rev. 1:15 in *Works* vol. 24 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).
49. Edwards, 'The Torments of Hell are Exceeding Great', in *Works* vol. 14, p. 304.
50. Edwards, 'The Torments of Hell are Exceeding Great', in *Works* vol. 14, pp. 305–306.
51. Edwards, 'Blank Bible' notes on Exod. 13:21; Lev. 10:1–2 in *Works* vol. 24.
52. Edwards, 'The Torments of Hell are Exceeding Great,' in *Works* vol. 14, p. 306.
53. Edwards, 'Miscellany' 232, in *Works* vol. 13 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 350.
54. Edwards, 'The Torments of Hell are Exceeding Great', in *Works* vol. 14, p. 316.
55. Schafer estimates that 'Miscellany' entry 275 was written in Jan–Feb 1728. See Schafer, 'Editor's Introduction' to *Works* vol. 13, p. 97.
56. Edwards, 'Miscellany' 275, in *Works* vol. 13, p. 376.
57. See Edwards, 'Blank Bible' note on 2 Peter 3:6–7 in *Works* vol. 24.
58. Edwards, 'Miscellany' 929 in *Works* vol. 20 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 174.
59. Edwards, 'Miscellany' 931 in *Works* vol. 20, p. 185.
60. 'This collection, as I have said, was designed not to revive MacDonald's literary reputation but to spread his religious teaching. [...] I have never concealed the fact that I regarded him [MacDonald] as my master; indeed I fancy I have never written a book in which I did not quote from him. But it has not seemed to me that those who have received my books kindly take even now sufficient notice of the affiliation. Honesty drives me to emphasize it' (C. S. Lewis, ed., *George MacDonald: An Anthology* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), pp. xxxii–xxxiv; xxxvii).
61. 'Very different are the good news Jesus brings us from certain prevalent representations of the gospel, founded on the pagan notion that suffering is an offset for sin, and culminating in the vile assertion that the suffering of an innocent man, just because he is innocent, yea perfect, is a satisfaction to the holy Father for the evil deeds of his children. As a theory concerning the atonement nothing could be worse, either intellectually, morally, or spiritually; announced as the gospel itself, as the good news of the kingdom of heaven, the idea is monstrous as any Chinese dragon. Such a so-called gospel is no gospel ... It is evil news' (George MacDonald, *Hope of the Gospel* (London: Ward, Lock, Bowden and Co., 1892), p. 24. Lewis seemed to hold an all-inclusive view of the atonement: see his comment in *Mere Christianity* (revised and enlarged edition, New York: MacMillan, 1960), p. 8.
62. 'This [the work of translating doctrine into new words] is fine, even essential, on condition that we remain loyal to the biblical revelation. For a translation is one thing (the old message in new words); a fresh composition is something quite different' (John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 2008 ed. [Downers Grove: IVP, 2008], p. 124).