

## Book Review

*Four Views on Hell*, ed. William Crockett, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992. (190 p., \$9.95, pb.)

The four views presented are the “literal” (physical pain in literal flames throughout eternity) by John Walvoord of Dallas Theological Seminary; the “metaphorical” (mental torment inflicted eternally) by William Crockett of Alliance Seminary; the “purgatorial” by Zachary Hayes of Catholic Theological Union; and the “conditional” (ultimate extinction of being) by Clark Pinnock of McMaster Divinity College.

This treatment of a live issue in contemporary theology might have made a major contribution to the discussion. It does not. It is of some use, and it is worth the price and the time required to read it. It is in the end not a substantive advance in the dialogue about eternal destiny and is therefore disappointing. Walvoord’s defense of the traditional view of eternal torment is superficial, and, as elsewhere, whatever the merits of his views, he is not particularly logical or clear. Crockett’s major effort is to argue for a figurative understanding of what Walvoord takes literally. In the end he admits that mental torments may be as severe as physical ones. His position then is not substantially different from Walvoord’s.

Hayes presents Catholic views clearly, and his work is therefore informative and helpful. But he is dealing with the subject of purgatory, not hell, and his position will hardly be persuasive to evangelicals who want to base their theology on a careful exegesis of Scripture. Pinnock summarizes the case for conditional immortality well, but he keeps jumping on his anti-predestinarian hobby horse and riding off, writing as though Calvinists are eternal tormenters and Arminians are not. Also he might better have delayed his expression of moral outrage against eternal torment until he had established the exegetical basis for it.

Walvoord in effect simply dismisses Pinnock’s position on the basis of the latter’s views of inspiration expressed elsewhere. He states in italics, “Conditional Immortality Challenges the Doctrine of Scriptural Inerrancy.” He does not address the exegetical issues at all. Hayes is open to

an extent to the conditionalist position, but he is no help since he is not much concerned to base doctrine on strict exegesis.

One might have expected Crockett to provide a fruitful interchange. He does maintain that “Pinnock ignores the contexts and historical settings of the New Testament” (172). The Pharisees believed in eternal torment, they were the dominant theological party, therefore Jesus’ hearers would have understood him to be speaking of eternal torment, “unless he specified that the punishment was annihilation (which of course he never did)” (172). But is that not exactly the point in question? In the end, like Walvoord, he settles the issue by declaration without examining the Scriptures in which, Pinnock alleges, Jesus does teach annihilation. Neither in his response to Pinnock nor in his own chapter does Crockett do so.

Most theological debate involves a primary argument (the positive case for one’s position) and a secondary argument (an examination of the case for the alternative view). Crockett spends a little time on Pinnock’s secondary argument, concluding that it is based on possibilities, not probabilities. He nowhere mentions the primary argument. How does he explain, for example, Jesus’ comment on the people killed by a falling tower? “But unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13:5). The format of this book provides for a fruitful examination of the specifically exegetical issues. Unfortunately it does not take advantage of the opportunity.

It is fairly safe to say that the issue of eternal destiny will not soon go away. Meantime it is striking that conditionalism is dignified to the extent of being included as one of four options in a book by a major evangelical publisher.

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