

“The Tree lies where it Falls:” A Simpsons’ Eschatology—Towards a Lewisian Understanding of Eternal Life and Human Rebellion

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KEY WORDS

| *Eschaton* | *Telos* | Forgiveness | Determinism | Nihilism | Evil |
| Contradiction | Judgement | *The Fall* | Righteousness | Heaven & Hell |

ABSTRACT

This paper is an exercise in theological media studies, examining the *telos* of humanity. *Postmortem status purgatus*: the ancient Greeks and Romans held to a truism—what we do in the here-and-now echoes through eternity. What we are, what we make of our life, determines our outcome. Christ’s judgment on us then merely reflects, ontologically, what we have become (this raises questions about Determinism, Compatibilism, and an unhindered free will). This article is a serious, though humorous, examination of heaven and hell, in the form of *purgation*. We are not necessarily positing a third “place” (purgatory): “The tree lies where it falls” (Eccl 11:3). Postmortem, the person either gets used to being in hell, sinking deeper and deeper into its own evolving demonic depravity; or—as it is shriven in its repentance and regret—it becomes more and more acclimatized to facing God and being in heaven. This is all to be seen in the light of the judgment we will all be resurrected to: *de statu hominis post mortem*. Therefore this will involve—in the spirit of C.S. Lewis’s *The Great Divorce*—a light-hearted consideration of the *eschaton* in *The Simpsons* and what this can illustrate about the human condition issuing from the *Fall* into original sin, balanced by the loving purposes of God’s forgiving judgment. Popular culture may seem an academic irrelevance, but millions of people (along with national and local governments and councils) absorb the religious ideas this popular culture promotes, . . . yet how seriously should we take all of this? What value is there in facing evil with humour, hell as the *absurd* contradiction of God’s Word: a *surd*-like evil, a nihilistic *alogos*?

INTRODUCTION

*The twenty-four elders fall down before Christ who sits on the throne,
and worship him who lives for ever and ever.
They lay their crowns before the throne and say:
“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power,
for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”*

REV 4:10–11

Where are we going? The scriptural witness is that the *telos* of all creation is in its transformation, through the *eschaton*, into the eternal heavenly kingdom of Christ. From the forging of God’s chosen people, the ancient Hebrew witness, through Mary’s “yes,” through the Incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth, through the Crucifixion-Resurrection, through the triune realization and witness (the church), through into eternity, this kingdom is God’s will

for humanity, it is what we are created for. But there is human freedom. We are responsible for what we become through our exercise of free will. When we come before the judgment of God we cannot escape what we have become. It is clear from the Gospels that we cannot avoid the reality of what we have made of ourselves, or more pertinently what we no longer are: “Hell is really about and best defined by a negative, a loss, and not a positive. The damned are defined

by what they are not—or are no longer—rather than by what they are.”¹

What we no longer are is a denial of our God-given humanity, the *imago Dei* in us. We may not like it but we define our existence, we are responsible for our *status postmortem*. We hold on to that responsibility with a vice-like grip and yet throw our hands up in horror at the consequences, yelling (in consort with one Bart Simpson), “I didn’t do it!”² This then leads to humanity inventing its own religious justification. How so? For thousands of years humanity has invented “gods” and “goddesses,” pagan divines, heavens and hells, and developed religious speculation as to the ontology of eternal life, but also beliefs and ethics to justify human actions in this world. This has led to innumerable human-generated ideas on how we should behave and what we should believe, but also as to the nature of eternal life, reflecting the nature of the human and its teleology. These ideas vary widely from the Valhalla (heaven) of the Vikings (which in all honesty was a region of hell!) and the neo-gnostic beliefs of some Western liberal neo-Buddhists (desperately seeking *postmortem annihilation?*) to the salvation of all—regardless of sin or goodness—in a self-generated, self-reverential, paradisaical heaven for modern Western liberals of various religious/irreligious persuasions. Few of these religious ideas give credit to or acknowledge the universal divine right of God to judge people and to decide the fate of creation. But then do not many of these religions do away with God, or the “gods,” anyway, leaving their exponents mild-manneredly to proffer, apologetically, a vague unknowable, but friendly and accommodating, divine substance of sorts, which is usually a

projection of their sexual desire?

When speaking of the universal right of God we are acknowledging the primacy of Almighty God, the Lord—*El Shaddai, Yahweh*—revealed in His purposes and dealings over thousands of years with the ancient Hebrews, finally culminating and made manifest in *Yeshua*—Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ—which leads to the atonement and salvation wrought on the cross: open to all, but realized by few. Further, God elects to be obedient to the God-given natural law humanity is subject to (where a right is a freedom enshrined in law): thus we are all open to a forgiving judgment, if we are prepared to face such a sentence, such a ruling, such a rigour. A sentence, as a legal term, is highly appropriate. In summing-up a trial the judge accurately portrays not just what the accused has done but also, pertinently, what the accused has become. Judgment and sentence is then a pro-active command that simply reflects what the person “is,” and is guilty of. A human trial may sometimes—often?—be flawed, but God’s judgment is not.

A commonly understood assertion within Greco-Roman religion—indeed in life generally—was that what we *are*, what we have become, what we do in the here-and-now, echoes through eternity. This is not far from the intimations of eternal life given by Jesus Christ, that the righteous abide in heaven while the unrighteous languish in hell, further, that we cannot escape responsibility for our decisions and actions in this life. This philosophically-derived Greco-Roman understanding realized that we are to a very great degree responsible for our lives, our actions, and our beliefs. But the revelation from the Christ indicates that all are subject to the loving judgment of God, that God can pneumatologically change us—if we are capable and able through our own empire-

1 Weems, “Universalism Denied: C. S. Lewis’s Unpublished Letters to Alan Fairhurst,” 87–98, quote 96.

2 *The Simpsons*, “Bart Gets Famous,” 5.12.

building to face that change. Can we reconcile these two approaches to the *telos* of human life: if what we do in the here-and-now dictates what we are after death does this do away with the eschatological judgment of God in Christ, or are they both complementary? If there is an organic relationship between our self-willed, self-creation—and the judgment of God to forgive us and change us, does this give rise to a persistent concept in parts of the Christian tradition: purgatory?—or more pertinently, *purgation*, a purging, a changing

When speaking of the *eschaton* here, we are speaking of the traditional *eschaton* of death, judgment, heaven, and hell; not the modernist-liberal *eschaton* of death followed by heaven. Various modernist academics and clerics—depending on their acceptance of the supernatural and numinous . . . or not—often reduced the *eschaton* to just two concepts: death and heaven. This conformed, in a related manner, to popular religion. Many who might best be described as conforming to a contemporary Western form of faith, may subscribe to a *postmortem* nothingness (though defining nothing, or “no-thing,” or “no particular thing” is fraught with difficulties), or they may subscribe to a more conventional belief, though still flawed, whereby when the individual dies he or she automatically finds him or herself in a pleasant and warm embracing, non-threatening and inclusive, heaven, indeed a republic of heaven. However, there are two certainties in life. One is that we will die; the second is that we cannot escape God’s judgment. This latter is the one absolute point of ontic inclusivity, which mocks the Western liberal obsession with identity politics and inclusivity (which is in many ways veiled exclusive tribalism): no one can escape, or

delay, facing God, whatever their religious beliefs. We do not necessarily have control over the manner or time of our death; we cannot forestall or dictate the terms of God’s judgment on us, we cannot plea bargain, however much we may desire favour and acceptance: but God’s judgment is a forgiving judgment, if we can face it in uninhibited terms, stripped of all condition and pretence on our part. To do otherwise is to embrace hell in preference to heaven.

From the Gospels it is clear: all people are moving through this life either towards heaven or towards hell. Although the movement may not always be smooth, there will be sudden jumps! The obvious one being a deathbed conversion, but also being born again (John 3), sudden acts of untold generosity at great risk to ourselves, a faith confession that costs us dearly. And at the point of judgement each person is in heaven or hell.³ But what of resurrection? The unique revelation of the Gospel is that we are all to be resurrected. When? Do the righteous rest in paradise until the general resurrection? Or is resurrection immediate? Is it what the apostle Paul describes as a spiritual resurrection? These are some of the questions that we may explore briefly in this paper examining the concepts of *postmortem status purgatus* in relation to the loving purposes of God’s judgment. To this end, we will examine the American cartoon series *The Simpsons*.

II. OH, HELL! . . .

But first, what of hell? Is hell no more than an exclamation, an evocative provocative? Or is there something real, an actuality? Ross

³ A pertinent point that I do not intend to discuss here at any length as it bears little impact on the central thesis of this paper is this: do the dead await judgement at the end of time, all humanity resurrected together, judged together with the initiation of the *eschaton*, or is each individual judged and assigned at the point of death?

Douthat critically tackles the perennial modern belief that hell must not exist . . . must not be allowed to exist (!).⁴ Hell, he says, is an essential by-product of human freedom and judgment. Douthat notes how hell's weakening grip on the religious imagination is a consequence of pluralism, also, that this hellish scepticism issues from the delusions, we might say, of modernity:

As our lives have grown longer and more comfortable, our sense of outrage at human suffering—its scope, and its apparent randomness—has grown sharper as well. The argument that a good deity couldn't have made a world so rife with cruelty is a staple of atheist polemic, and every natural disaster inspires a round of soul-searching over how to reconcile God's omnipotence with human anguish. . . . Doing away with hell, then, is a natural way for pastors and theologians to make their God seem more humane.⁵

Douthat continues, that to believe in God, but not in hell, is to deny the reality of human choices: if there's no possibility of saying no to paradise then none of our "noes" have any real meaning. Hell makes our decisions real: "The miser can become his greed, the murderer can lose himself inside his violence, and their freedom to turn and be forgiven is inseparable from their freedom not to do so."⁶ *Postmortem* judgment, heaven or hell. It may appear dualistic to liberal sensitivities, but the either-or is the key to the *eschaton* from which no one can escape. But what *is* hell?

There are as many definitions of hell as there are religious perspectives, often confusing and seemingly contradictory. Hell is separation from God, with all that is implied in this

state of existence: from the corrosive feeling of regret that will overwhelm the individual through to the torment and agonies, tortures and pain, traditionally involved in this *status*, without hope. Perhaps we may assert that hell is nihilistic. Given that hell is so very nearly nothing (both as no particular thing, as well as being a contradiction of all that is good and real, holy and healthy, righteous and alive), it is of no surprise that hell is riven with legion contradictions, confusion and sheer hellishness. Like an astronomical black hole, hell perhaps can only be proved in the negative. Hell may be difficult to conceptualize or even—because of its ontology⁷—to prove, but pertinently, we should ask, what *is* purgation, and how does it relate to heaven and hell?

III. POSTMORTEM STATUS PURGATUS

A growing number of theologians and philosophers in the early twenty-first century are realizing that hell may be defined by a doctrine of *infernal voluntarism*, with the alternative being voluntary purgation: the damned opt, in accordance with the will of God, for hell, that is, God wills that they have the freedom to opt for hell, though he would prefer their salvation.⁸

7 Astronomical Black holes can only be proved by observing what happens around them: i.e. by studying a black hole's event horizon. See, http://hubblesite.org/reference_desk/faq/answer.php?id=64&cat=exotic<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/06/180618141834.htm>
Also <https://www.skyandtelescope.com/astronomy-news/black-holes/best-evidence-yet-that-black-holes-really-exist-0505201523/>

8 Coates, D. Justin; McKenna, Michael. "Compatibilism." *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. See also, Podgorski, "Free Will Twice Defined: On the Linguistic Conflict of Compatibilism and Incompatibilism." See also, Salles, "Compatibilism: Stoic and modern," 1-23. Compatibilism was a proposition endorsed by the Stoics, medieval scholastics (e.g. Thomas Aquinas), and by Enlightenment philosophers (e.g. David Hume, Thomas Hobbes)

4 Douthat, "A Case for Hell." See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/25/opinion/25douthat.html?emc=eta1> Accessed April 25, 2011

5 Douthat, "A Case for Hell."

6 Douthat, "A Case for Hell."

But does God want them to opt for hell? Is this an example of Compatibilism whereby free will and Determinism are mutually compatible? Compatibilists define free will as freedom to act according to willed motives without seemingly random hindrance from individuals or institutions or from a god/gods/idols. This takes no account of original sin. In most Western legal systems—though essentially in the UK and USA—courts of law make judgments, without reference to God or revelation, asking whether a person acted of their own free will, or were they swayed consciously or sub-consciously by circumstances. "It is assumed in a court of law that someone could have acted otherwise than in reality. Otherwise, no crime would have been committed."⁹ How will we be judged by God? And not just by the evil we opted to do, but also by the good we failed to do. What causes us to make decisions? Are free will decisions still possible, *postlapsarian*? Again, hell is defined by confusion and contradiction.

The saved by comparison are subject, in varying degrees, to *purgation*—a shriven changing, healing—as part of their journey *into* heaven. The saved who need change, a purging, are subject to a voluntary agreement (a promise, a settlement, and a covenant) that constitutes a relinquishing of their rebellion; the damned continue in their rebellion. The damned have therefore freely chosen hell before heaven. All who genuinely desire heaven, all who can genuinely *perceive* heaven and not mistake their own pagan rebellion for a projected heaven of sorts, will be invited into heaven. This thinking is rooted in the work of a mid-twentieth-century apologist, philosopher, and theologian: C. S. Lewis.¹⁰ Lewis subscribed to a doctrine of

purgatory, or more pertinently, *purgation*. This is one of his more Catholic beliefs, which most evangelical readers of his work are puzzled by, though he held to the doctrine for sound reasons.

So what is purgatory? Purgatory is not hell; though for many being in a state of *purgation* will be hellish. According to traditional doctrine, people in hell are not saved: "abandon hope all you who enter here," is the sign Dante placed over the entrance to hell.¹¹ By contrast the people in purgatory are saved, redeemed by Christ, more pertinently they have accepted Christ's forgiveness, wrought on the cross on their behalf, and in accepting they take the consequences of their actions and beliefs, and the consequence is a cleansing, an emptying: in a word, purgation: they are defined by hope. Traditionally this is seen as an image of the spiritual cleansing of a soul in purgatory. In Roman Catholic doctrine, purgatory is a *place* or *state of suffering* inhabited by the souls of sinners who are "expiating their sins before going to heaven" (OED), whereas hell is a place regarded in various religions as a spiritual realm of evil and suffering, often depicted as a place of perpetual fire beneath the earth to which the wicked are consigned after death. Both hell and purgatory may traditionally be regarded as places: physical, geographic (in the sense of relating to the arrangement of places and physical features), to a greater or lesser degree, with widely differing concepts throughout the world's religions, and even within the Christian tradition. Or hell generally, purgatory specifically, may be seen as a *state* of mental anguish, a condition of apparent physical suffering, indeed of great torment reflecting the justice and goodness of God. The

9 See, *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, "Theories of Criminal Law"
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/criminal-law/>

10 See Buenting, *The Problem of Hell...*

11 Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. 1 *Inferno*. Canto 3.9, 89.

differences are the degree of mental anguish and suffering experienced by individuals, and that those in purgatory will eventually find their suffering eases as they are translated to heaven. The assumption is that even the redeemed can sin (i.e., wilfully make bad, wrong, decisions in relation to natural law and the will of God) and will still need a degree of change, of purging, after death: having resisted being truly washed in the blood of the Lamb during life.

So, is purgatory a place, or is it a state, a condition, or is it a form of noetic torture? A working definition we may postulate for this paper is *postmortem status purgatus*,¹² that is, after death some may find themselves in a state of purging, cleansing, a state of purgation characterized by regret and doubt, of having to face the responsibility they held for their decisions, what they made of their life, wrestling to come to terms with what their life had been. This condition is imposed by the will of God, a state not unlike, yet different from, what they had become in this life, which should lead to repentance and cleansing. This state, condition, position may be characterized by some as an intensely burning (remorse, repentance) for life's mistakes. But is this state real? And what do we mean by "real"? Does purgatory geographically exist? Probably not, though such geography is ultimately about perception and generating mental spatial concepts. Perhaps these are the wrong questions. The correct question, we will see, is, "How long is a moment?"

12 That is, a state or condition of *purgation*, *purification*, after death: from the Latin, *status*: a position, condition, appointed, to stand, remain, to set-up; and, *purgo*, *purgare*, *purgavi*: purge/excuse; or *purgatus*: cleansed/purified/excused; *postmortem*, after death. *Postmortem status purgatus*: literally—"After the death the position purged."

IV. PURGATION: "THE TREE LIES WHERE IT FALLS"¹³

The consistent characteristic of *postmortem* existence for the human is twofold: first, the need to be perfect ("Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" Matt 5:48), therefore Christ will perfect the human whatever the cost, unless s/he rebels.¹⁴ Second, the primacy of the human will, that is, the wilful decision by the human dictates the human condition after death. The Catholic side of Lewis believed in and asserted not so much purgatory but the need for *purgation*: none of us will be good enough to face Christ in eternity, we will need to be sanctified and purified—at the very least changed. Many theologians and philosophers (including C. S. Lewis) can appreciate this position but draw the line at postulating a physical-geographic reality named purgatory, separate from heaven and hell. However, Lewis and others are prepared to postulate a state or condition of purgation. The very nature of heaven and hell is that the two are diametrically different; the hellish humans subsist in a near-to-nothingness state that makes them unfit for heaven, where heaven is too strong and painful for the self-centred near-to-nothingness of the damned to enter.¹⁵ If purgation is a purification, the spiritual cleansing and strengthening of the human,¹⁶ the washing away of the effects of sin in the human, "washed by the blood of the Lamb,"¹⁷ does this imply that salvation is fluid

13 Eccl 11:3

14 Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 202.

15 From the Middle English, derived from Old French *purgacion*, from Latin *purgatio*(n-), from *purgare*, to *purge*.

16 A basic ontic principle established and illustrated by Lewis in *The Great Divorce*.

17 In terms of the blood of the Lamb: 1 Cor 10:16; 1 Cor 11:27; 1 John 1:6-9; 5:6; 1 Pet 1:1-2; Acts 5:28; 20:28; Col 1:19-20, 22; Eph 1:7; 2:13; Heb 9:11-15 (specifically

after death? Yes, but this is one-way, those who are translated, after purging, to heaven cannot back-track (1 Cor 15:50–53; Rev 4:10–11). Does this imply that certain theologians may be marginalizing and relativizing the judgment of God? To this extent C. S. Lewis, for example, is strictly Protestant: "The tree lies where it falls" (Eccl 11:3), its place is assured—there is no purgatory, only heaven and hell. Yet the human can be changed. For Lewis, those who submit to a purifying purgation and are translated to heaven, have in fact been in the "fringes" of heaven all the time: those who do accept the change and move into deep heaven were in heaven all along, though the pains of purgation felt like hell to them, for a *period of time*. Those who refuse to let go of their wilful possessiveness, who cannot stand the pain of change, are in hell all along, and stay there: "I think earth, if chosen instead of heaven, will turn out to have been, all along, only a region in hell: and earth, if put second to heaven, to have been from the beginning a part of heaven itself."¹⁸

V. PURGATION: HOLD ON, A MOMENT . . . WE WILL ALL BE CHANGED

Is there a biblical precedent for this, and for *purgation*? The apostle Paul, speaking of the righteous, asserts that we shall be changed:

What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable

12–14); 10:3–14, 19–22, 28–31; 12:24; 13:11–12, 20; John 6:53–57; 19:33–34; Luke 22:20; 22:44; Mark 14:23–24; Matt 26:27–28; Rev 1:5–6; 5:9–10; 7:14–17; 12:10–11; Rom 3:25–26; 5:9. In terms of a cleansing: 1 Cor 6:11; 1 John 1:7, 9; 1 Pet 1:22; 2 Pet 1:9; Eph 5:26; Ezek 20:38; 22:15; 36:25, 29, 33; 37:23; Heb 1:3; 9:14; 10:22; Isa 4:4; Jer 33:8; John 15:3; Lev 16:30; Num 8:21; 19:9; Ps 51:2, 10; Titus 2:14; 3:5; Zech 13:1.

18 Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, chp. 13.

inherit the imperishable. Listen, I will tell you a mystery! *We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

1 Cor 15:50–53 (My emphasis.)

So, how long is "a moment," what duration is "the twinkling of an eye?" Has a period of time elapsed? It cannot be no time at all, for if there is no time at all then, logically, there would appear to be no change. For there is time and space in heaven but such eternal temporality must be seen as different to our perception of earthly time and space. But is our perception of time changed by our circumstances? For a prisoner waiting for sentence to be pronounced, as the fear wells up in his throat, how long are the moments it takes for the judge to be ready? A child in the dentist's chair sees the hypodermic needle move ever closer, slowly towards its mouth, unhurriedly in the hand of the dentist, the dentist pulls at the lips, a single drop of the anaesthetic liquid hangs from the point of the needle, the dentist pulls at the gums to select the best spot to inject: all this seems hours of agony to the child who has a deep-seated phobia about the dentist and particularly the anaesthetic injection. This moment, of no more than a few seconds, may seem an eternity of anguish. To the unrighteous who still hold back, the impure holding onto their precious sins, still mired in their little empires, their being changed in the twinkling of an eye may seem an eternity of "time," in varying degrees! However, to the righteous whatever change Christ demands will seem but a moment's discomfort, so brief as to be almost imperceptible, like "the twinkling of an eye." The Greek used by the apostle Paul

for “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor 15:52) is *atomos* (usually translated as an instant, a moment, indivisible, uncut, an “atom” of time); and, *rhipe* (*hree-pay*: a jerk of the eye, in an instant, sudden almost imperceptible, but noticeable). Something happens, there is change, but for the righteous in Christ this will seem but momentary, perhaps like the instantaneous, momentary, mild electric shock from static on a sweater. For the less righteous, this change may appear to drag out—painfully—for a long “time,” a very long “time.” Whatever it takes, if we are prepared to submit to God *He* will change us, purify us:

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the LORD whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow, and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished. Ever since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.

(Mal 3:1–7a)

The day of God’s appearing brings judgment

and hope, cleansing and salvation. This may happen while we are alive—a form of realized eschatology—some will even be acceptable from the point of death without the need for *postmortem* change (or at the very least, little). But if we refuse—as we have the will to do so—then we condemn ourselves before the judgment seat of Christ.

VI. AN INFERNAL ANALOGY?

C. S. Lewis excelled at presenting complex doctrinal issues in story form—analogical and symbolic narratives—parable-like accounts which narrate an event in real time rather than trying to freeze reality into a doctrinal proposition. Using the genre of analogical narrative Lewis presented complex theological propositions about heaven and hell, faith and grace, predestination and Determinism in the form of stories: *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Great Divorce*, *The Four Loves*, and to a degree, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. To an older generation (whose grandparents were born—along with C. S. Lewis—in the late nineteenth century) many of these hell-bent characters are so readily identifiable; but not necessarily so with a younger generation or in contemporary society, which is so diametrically different to the Western mid-twentieth-century society, the time when C. S. Lewis wrote. Perhaps there is a popular television series that inadvertently illustrates humanity’s blind ignorance of its fate as it generates its own little socio-political-religious empires, preparing themselves for an eternity in hell?

Hell is not a problem for the redeemed,¹⁹ indeed, in the Parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) the saved exhibit no concern for the damned. Hell is not a problem for Satan, or for demons: they have got what they wanted.

19 See Rev 14:9–12; also Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, chp. 13.

Hell is a problem for philosophers, and for those—following Lewis's supposal—who subsist in hell, but are often unaware either of their death or their damnation. If most of the humans presented by Lewis in "hell" do not realize or acknowledge their state then perhaps a latter-day representation, subconsciously in the spirit of Lewis's *The Great Divorce*, is the American cartoon series *The Simpsons*. At variance to the aims and expectations of the writers and producers, *The Simpsons* is, hypothetically, a vision of hell . . . or is it *postmortem status purgatus*? None of the characters in *The Simpsons* know that they are dead, but they appear fixed for eternity never to grow up or grow old, never to change, never to leave where they live: they subsist in a shallow, meaningless, nihilistic existence where nothing alters, subject to the vicissitudes and vagaries of the life and the person they created (though some characters—a very small number—do appear to move away, leave, die, cease: i.e., translated to heaven . . . or sink in their depravity into a deeper level of the hell they so love and cherish).

Homer Simpson often gets a new job (from a variety of different occupations) but he always ends up back in his fixed *status* working at the nuclear power plant. At the end of an early episode, when Homer returns to his job at the power plant, Mr. Burns has a notice placed on the wall above Homer's work station, which defines the ontology of hell: "Don't forget you're here forever!"²⁰ No matter what happens to people they cannot escape their condition; yet they all try to move on (they try to develop through their own *willpower*, they have ambitions, but they are in a fixed state). It is easy to see how characters such as Homer, Marge, Mr. Burns, Smithers, and the Police Chief are condemned to this purgation: held, as they are, between heaven

and hell, locked into a hellish existence caused through the fragmented dysfunctional beliefs that have generated their self-determinism.

Many characters suffer terrible life-threatening injuries and seeming death but they are simply restored to how they were, they cannot escape their self-willed damnation, and are too religiously corrupted to see the way out, through Christ, of this hellish purgation.

So, perhaps theologians and philosophers—such as Lewis—are quite correct: many will simply create the reality, *postmortem*, that they are condemned by the judgment of God to exist in for eternity, not realizing they are in hell, perhaps not even perceiving that they are dead: "All get what they want, they do not always like it."²¹ Yes, Lewis did assert the traditional, biblical model of hell defined by fire and pain and eternal punishment, but this is at a deeper level than the nihilistic, unchanging, diminished existence represented by the humans in *The Great Divorce* (and, we may speculate, *The Simpsons*). The condemned in the upper level of hell are held above the deeper violent, painful fires of hell (for example the lake of fire²²), by the grace of God. Does this absolve God of the responsibility? The jury is still out—but not forever! Whatever decisions we make, we will be in heaven, or in hell, eternally: what we do in the here-and-now echoes through eternity.

VII. THE SIMPSONS: INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY: AN ALLEGORY OF PURGATION

Let us consider *The Simpsons* further.

If the traditional understanding of purgatory/purgation is characterized by change leading to the completion of redemption (as

20 *The Simpsons*, "And Maggie Makes Three," 6.13.

21 Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 162.

22 Rev 19:20, 20:10, 20:14-15, 21:8

distinct to the utter damnation of those in hell), is this so for all? Perhaps for some this might seem, in our temporal reality, to be the experience of a million years of confusion and suffering? And will there be regression and relapsing? And what of frustration, inertia, and rebellion that may lead to some never being redeemed, that is being *moved* (a temporal concept?) or *translated*, heavenward? Some may simply stay as they are and refuse to change, to be redeemed, drawn out of themselves by the graceful love of God?

Are the episodic tales in the (in)famous cartoon series *The Simpsons*, seen by millions on a daily basis, an analogy of this sort of purgation being undertaken by people held by the grace of God above hell's jaws. Do these lost souls find it impossible to understand the need for repentance. And if they do begin to repent, do they understand what to repent of? And, pertinently, would this regret lead to change in the right direction—that is, change in their beliefs about God (doctrine) and about their behaviour (ethics) and themselves (theological anthropology). If they try to escape the existential crisis they are locked into, they are constantly reset (like rebooting a computer) to be as they were: this we may consider to be the condition, divinely imposed, of absolute *apokatastasis* (!).²³

Do the characters illustrate something of the power of sin to entrap and lock people into themselves?—*homo incurvatus in se*? Perhaps some of the characters are a reversal of their lives in this reality; perhaps others are as they were in this life but worse, diabolically worse,

23 *Apokatastasis* (from the Greek: ἀποκατάστασις) refers to the return, perfectly, to the original state, that is, reconstitution, restitution, or restoration to the original or primordial condition. In this instance, I am referring to, postulating, *eschatological apokatastasis*, that is return to the status at the point of death immediately after death from which the individual cannot, through his or her own efforts, escape.

as they refuse to move in their mind and heart towards Christ (a move still possible even if their religious and cultural heritage excluded any knowledge of Christian revelation), for this is the only valid change possible; other characters are a thin grey shadow of what they were when alive because they failed to commit in this life or to truly love, or take seriously the *nature* of choices, and the *responsibility* that went with decisions?

VIII. THE SIMPSONS: INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY: CHILDREN/CHILDISH

So, humanity's self-willed beliefs and actions dictate the nature of the experience of this hellish purgation, but what of the ontic nature of the human, imprisoned, as it is, by an open-ended sentence, in an open prison, with no divinely imposed fences, walls, watchtowers, or guards? (C. S. Lewis postulated that the gates of hell are locked and triple-bolted from the inside by the inmates, whereas the gates of heaven are wide open.)²⁴ What of children? The cloying sentimentality of a Western definition of childhood as perfect innocence will lead modern liberals to exclude the possibility of children falling foul of the righteous judgment of God. (Does not childhood in many Western societies now appear to be a period of absolute self-centred indulgence where every child is to be feted as a prince or princess?) But in reality children are small adults, with all the strengths and flaws of adults. Well, there are three possibilities for the appearance of children in *The Simpsons*: First, "children as children": some children in this life on earth appear in this *postmortem status purgatus* as children; this constitutes a contradiction of a Pelagianist

24 See Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 20–21.

position regarding childhood. These are they who were corrupted in their immaturity by the adults who were supposed to care for them (these corrupting adults, family members, or simply friends, or strangers, are most likely in a much deeper level of actual hell: note, Mark 9:42; Matt 8:16; Luke 17:2). Second, "children as adults": some of the children from this life may appear in this Simpsonian *status purgatus* as childish and immature adults, these are those who, as children in the here-and-now, may have taken to themselves an adult-like superiority and power/authority over others, so here they are presented as incompetent and foolish, but domineering, adults, and can see no way out of their *status purgatus*. Third, "adults as children": some adults from our life appear as children in this *status purgatus*, because they suffered from a self-inflicted psychological condition we may call, can't-grow-up-won't-grow-up-syndrome (!), they refused to take responsibility for their life and their actions and their decisions when alive.

IX. THE SIMPSONS: DEATH—HELL-BOUND

But some appear to escape: there are those who seem to die, an appearance decided upon by those around them because these individuals disappear from sight. Some characters do die, or given that they are all already dead and languishing in this *postmortem status purgatus*, they *appear* to die a second time, and move away in an instant. For example—

Maud Flanders

Maud Flanders, the wife of Ned "diddly" Flanders, the evangelical(ish) neighbour to the Simpsons, is killed at a race track, but perhaps in this *postmortem status purgatus* reality she

simply slides further and deeper into hell. In life she was a judgmental gossip, someone who saw and decried fault in everyone—except herself; this is the sin of self-righteous judgementalism writ large, when we are warned by Jesus, "Judge not, lest you be judged" (Matt 7:1–3). Far from repenting and turning (because of her religion she believes she does not need to change, she has done the repenting already) she becomes worse and worse, showing no true love of her neighbour or humility before the Lord. On one occasion she states, "That's right, I was at Bible Camp, I was learning how to be more judgmental."²⁵ Her religion shields her from God's loving forgiveness. The idea that she has simply descended deeper into hell is perhaps confirmed by the writer of a later episode where she makes an appearance, after this apparent death, as Satan's lover.²⁶

Frank Grimes

Frank's story—in this *postmortem status purgatus*—is that he had it tough as a boy, really tough; crippled by illness, he achieves a moderate High School Certificate and a degree in nuclear physics by correspondence from his sick-bed. In our reality before his death Frank had probably been a healthy ambitious child of successful parents; as an adult, a high-flier, a great achiever, wealthy, but selfish: a Gordon Gekko!²⁷ In the Simpson purgatory, through struggle, sweat, and tears, he achieves a lowly job at the same nuclear power plant that Homer works at, and is therefore driven and possessed by irrational anger and rage, envy and jealousy. He hates

25 *The Simpsons*, "Bart of Darkness," 6.1.

26 *The Simpsons*, "Treehouse of Horror XXII," 23.3.

27 Gordon Gekko, a fictional character in the 1987 film *Wall Street* and its 2010 sequel *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps*, became a symbol in popular culture for unrestrained greed, characterized by a line he repeated, "Greed, for lack of a better word, is good." See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon_Gekko.

Homer because Homer seems to have everything easy when he has struggled for so little. In a rage of mimicry and hatred of Homer he accidentally kills himself, electrocuted, or so we are led to believe; in reality he has simply disappeared from sight and has been translated deeper into hell. We may postulate that Frank Grimes when alive in our world had been a wealthy businessman, politician, opinion-former, even with a touch of celebrity status, if then such a person had been a wealthy, successful, high-flier in our world, then what happens to “old Grimey” is reminiscent of a Gospel inversion, evident from the parables: “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony” (Luke 16:25). This should have taught him what was wrong with his life, and opened the way for such a person to turn and glimpse salvation, this should have opened his heart to Christ . . . but it did not, because he held out.

Dr Marvin Monroe

Marvin Monroe is the resident psychiatrist and therapist, an eccentric yet atypical character who died: we see his grave stone . . . but then he reappears in later episodes. Why?—what happened? Perhaps he sank deeper into hell, but began to repent? In later episodes it is stated he had been ill, very ill, thus he had disappeared from their sight. (But then all in this hellish state are ill at ease, dis-eased.)

X. THE SIMPSONS: THE SAVED—HEAVENWARD

Bleeding Gums Murphy

The character Bleeding Gums Murphy is perhaps an example of purgation and translation into heaven. A musician, a saxophonist, he is a loner—to his benefit—he is not corrupted further by those around him.

As a young man he would have been gregarious, influencing others, and being influenced to their bad effect. But no longer. Perhaps he has been in this purgatory for what seems to be an inordinately long “time,” but he has now come to the point of exhaustion where he can see his own unworthiness, he now knows and understands his own un-righteousness, as he lays down his crown (Rev 4:10–11). There is no hint of judgementalism left in him; or the moral corruption that characterized him, and his music, as a young man. At this point he appears to “die,” ill in hospital; but is in reality, perhaps, translated to heaven: the movement as such is that they, the other residents of this purgatorial state, no longer see him. Lisa can see the light of Christ in him, but mistakes this for fashionable liberalism. So, out of the hundreds of characters in *The Simpsons*, is only one saved and translated to heaven? Does this compare to humanity in the here-and-now—only one in potentially thousands?

XI. THE SIMPSONS: THOSE WHO SUBSIST— PURGATORIAL

Ned Flanders

Ned Flanders was, perhaps, a Richard Dawkins type sceptic and atheist in this life, and in purgatory is reversed. But still, like his wife Maud, cannot get beyond human-centred religion: when alive he was an evangelical atheist; dead, an evangelical religionist? He represents all he mocked in this life, but fails to enact the Christian life in humility and repentance, while casually appearing to help others. Superficially he seems the archetypal nice American Evangelical Christian? The answer came in an episode where Bart and

Milhouse break into the basement of Ned's house and find a shrine—a religious temple—to the 1960s pop group, The Beatles.²⁸ The room is full of icons and memorabilia, pseudo-religious artefacts, all in praise of The Beatles: Ned's Christian faith is shallow and is subservient to this pagan cult. When Homer asks Ned, "I never knew you were such a Beatles' fan?" Ned shouts back at him, "Of course I am. They were bigger than Jesus!"²⁹ The door to this pagan shrine has a poster on the door—Beware of God. But which "god" is represented and worshiped by Ned's Beatles memorabilia? This demonstrates how our religious egotism may be at odds with the will of God, even if we claim to be Christian (Matt 7:21–23). Ned Flanders is an example, a warning, of the dangers of religion, self-generated, self-centred religion.

Ned is actually unmasked early on. When Homer trades (a Faustian pact?) his soul for a doughnut, the devil appears to conduct the transaction, appearing as Ned Flanders, with goat's legs, saying "It's always the one you least suspect."³⁰ So Ned is Satan pretending to be a Christian so as to lull the damned into believing they are right with God and give them false hope that they may one day be saved, though none of them realize they are in fact dead (!), and are lost souls. Ned is for some viewers an archetypal Christian, however, he has clearly been seduced

by Satan. But his character has as many dis-analogies with Satan as analogies.³¹ Ned is characterized by confusion and contradiction and is we may postulate one simple realization and repentance away from moving towards heaven? But Ned fails.

Maggie Simpson

The Simpson baby, Maggie, was a young woman in this life who exercised enormous power over people, for little good. She suffered from can't-grow-up-won't-grow-up-syndrome, corrupting other young women through an advice column, and so now is mute, and an infant, having acted as an irresponsible infant-like young woman in this life. As a baby she retains her IQ of 167 (shown on several occasions), likewise, as this one-year-old infant she shoots Mr. Burns—a reflection of how she destroyed people with words in this life. Perhaps this powerful twenty-something intellect trapped in a one-year-old infant is the one person in this *postmortem status purgatus* that understands what is going on, that this divinely imposed condition of absolute *apokatastasis* leads to a running sequence they cannot through their own strength escape from: at the end of *The Simpsons Movie* Maggie speaks for the first time: one word spoken at the end of the film, which also defines the ontology of hell: "sequel"—that is, hell as an endless sequel, a sequence of living out their own religious empire, *ad infinitum*.

Lisa Simpson

Lisa Simpson (IQ of only 159; less than baby Maggie) would have been a forty-year-old fashionably liberal academic with an equally indulgent myopic liberal lifestyle grounded in sexual freedom and abortion, power, status, and

31 Satan is real and a singular and personified, but is also legion; hence Ned is Satan, but equally is not. This reflects the confused nihilism of hell.

28 *The Simpsons*, "The Bart of War," 14.21.

29 The writers here are invoking a statement by John Lennon made to the media that they (The Beatles) were more famous than Jesus. (Lennon had originally made the remark in March 1966, published, in the *London Evening Standard* newspaper.) Ironically, Ringo Star (one of the surviving members of the group) commented recently on *BBC News 24* that now, as an old man, when he walks along a pavement in London people sort of recognize him, but cannot name him, or sometimes attribute him to The Beatles—or they identify him as one of the other Beatles (*BBC News Channel*, Wednesday June 12, 2013). John Lennon was murdered in 1980 by one of his fans: he inadvertently created the conditions of his own demise. The Beatles are clearly no longer more famous than Jesus.

30 *The Simpsons*, "Treehouse of Horror IV," 5.5.

authority. Lisa, the precocious politically correct eight-year-old, exhibits all the arrogance she did as a middle-aged professor-turned-politician in our reality; she tries but fails to control people for her own interest in the way she did with such Machiavellian skill as a senator before she died, shot by a fanatic, obsessed—dead or alive—by her own self-righteousness. In this state of hellish purgation she still fantasizes about being President of the United States,³² of flirting with alternative religions: as a Buddhist (which she refers to as a godless religion: “no creator God, just the pursuit of enlightenment”³³), flirting with pagan ideas (inventing earth deities and the like), and then becoming a Wicca (the religious cult of modern witchcraft), joining a coven of three Wiccans, learning to cast spells.³⁴ Throughout all of her neo-gnostic ramblings and noetic wanderings she is insufferably precocious and judgmental, while convincing herself that she is nice, kind, and considerate, the perfect liberal.

Apu Nahasapeemapetilon

Lisa is in this *postmortem status purgatus* not for being a Buddhist but because her being a Buddhist is motivated by a desire to reject Christ (in addition to her many sins as an influential academic and politician). Apu Nahasapeemapetilon is Indian/Hindu; he is the workaholic proprietor of the Kwik-E-Mart, a popular convenience store in Springfield, but contrary to the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats he offers no charity—where charity would be a cost to himself—nor love of his neighbour. His store-keeping is corrupt, changing the sell-by dates on expired goods, profiteering to unacceptable limits, exploiting his customers

32 *The Simpsons*, “Bart to the Future,” 11.17.

33 *The Simpsons*, “She of Little Faith,” 13.6.

34 *The Simpsons*, “Rednecks and Broomsticks,” 21.7.

to their detriment: all this places him fairly and squarely in this *postmortem status purgatus*, not primarily or necessarily because he is a Hindu, but because he is a bad, self-centred, adulterous, exploitative person! If he changed his behaviour and attitude to his neighbours and customers, loving them at considerable cost to himself, then he might find himself drawn heavenward, being deemed acceptable to the resurrected and ascended Christ (Matt 25:31–46).

Marge Simpson

Marge Simpson failed to commit in this life or to truly love, or take seriously the nature of choice, or see moral realities: she constantly says, “Ah, my little boy,” to her son Bart, regarding him as a misunderstood angel, and is blind or dismissive—consistently—to Homer’s many faults and his abuse of other people, outside the home. She made fundamental mistakes in her youth, particularly in marrying Homer, but she can’t face that single truth and thus hides from the truth that is Jesus Christ: the Way, the Truth, and the Life. This hiding from the truth reflects the person she was in our reality, before she died, and thus she continues to live the lie in this hellish state.

Bart Simpson

Bart died as a fifty-six-year-old in our reality from decades of substance abuse, shielded behind childish irresponsibility, he had drifted from relationship to relationship, from job to job, never becoming anything in particular, never committing to anything or anyone and hence he is represented by a ten-year-old child suffering from chronic-attention-seeking behavioural deficit syndrome, trying to be different all the time, taunting others, revelling in trying to escape the reality he is in. Bart as a drifter and wastrel acted out his years on earth with *childish* (not childlike) irresponsibility and thus is living

in such a state of childish powerlessness in hell simply because he rejected the love of God in Christ, and thus is responsible for his beliefs and actions. So some "children" in *The Simpsons* were actually adults in our reality, our life. In attempting to regain their adult status we see Bart and Lisa in some episodes where they have grown up: but they are both as bad as when they were alive, as adults, in the here-and-now, our reality.³⁵

Ralph Wiggum

Ralph Wiggum is a strange little boy characterized by nonsensical sentences and bizarre behaviour, yet he can come out with profound statements, he is simple-minded and apparently good natured, however, he claims to see little leprechauns who tell him to burn things. When the Simpson family are nice to him and praise him, a leprechaun appears on his shoulder and orders, "Now you know what you have to do, burn the house down, burn them all": thus speaks one of the few explicit appearance of a demon of hell who Ralph courts as his friend. Ralph nods in agreement.³⁶ So, was Ralph—when alive in our world—a twenty-five-year-old arsonist who committed suicide rather than be caught by the police? A young man who flunked school, was in and out of care, who could not commit to any job or relationship, developed from petty crime to arson as a way of getting back at society, once he developed the habit of burning he could not stop, he was addicted, indeed, possessed demonically.

Waylon Smithers

Waylon is Montgomery Burns' personal assistant—factotum—who through his

infatuation (disordered love) for the old man is simply looking in the wrong direction: hell ward rather than heavenward, therefore he simply does not want to be saved, does not want the glory offered by Christ for eternity. An extreme example of this turning away from heaven and salvation was seen in serial fornicators through the ages: perhaps the most recent being the case of the British TV/radio and pop-culture celebrity Jimmy Saville, who was obsessively possessed with fornicating with any kind of person of whatever age or identity (though specializing in children), numbering hundreds if not thousands? Waylon Smithers seems mild by comparison, but is not his focusing on inordinate attraction sufficient for his self-generated placement in this *postmortem status purgatus*? Yet does he not have the chance to turn and repent, and accept a purging that will draw him into heaven?

Sex and Love in the Simpsonian *Postmortem Status Purgatus*?

Waylon Smithers—as with virtually all the characters—is an example of the demonic corruption of sexual attraction (*eros*); but also the virtual non-existence of true love, real love, that is, God-given *agape* in its various guises from pure charity to genuine selflessness, to actual self-sacrifice (John 15:13) amongst the inhabitants of this hell bound Springfield. (Likewise *agape* is extremely rare in human society here on earth.) Waylon is clearly presented as a closeted homosexual, which leads him to focus on the debasement of love: yes, in terms of general human sin, a debasement of love regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity—that is a debasement to the exclusion of heaven and his salvation (as is the case amongst almost all of the inhabitants of this Simpsonian *postmortem status purgatus*). The best they can manage is a cloying sentimental attachment

35 *The Simpsons*, "Holidays of Future Passed," 23.9; *The Simpsons*, "Bart to the Future," 11.17; *The Simpsons*, "Lisa's Wedding," 6.19.

36 *The Simpsons*, "This Little Wiggy," 9.18.

(essentially related to *storgē* and *philia*), which leads to argument, fractiousness, and ultimately domestic violence within families, or gossiping, back-stabbing, and hate-filled self-justifying vanity-driven jealousy in the work place and in social interactions generally. All this issues from debased sexual relations, and an abuse of their reproductive plumbing (!). How was it Shakespeare put it: “knotting and gendering like toads in a barrel?”³⁷ Or when separated from the love of God, that is love, the only true love, what, we may ask, is the end game in this exercise of *philia* and *storgē*, issuing as it does from *eros*?—

. . . wooing, wedding, and repenting, is as
a Scotch jig,
a measure, and a cinque pace: the first suit
is hot
and hasty, like a Scotch jig, and full as
fantastical; the wedding, mannerly-
modest, as a
measure, full of state and ancientry; and
then comes
repentance and, with his bad legs, falls
into the
cinque pace faster and faster, till he sink
into his grave.³⁸

Without the graceful heavenward turn in life keeping sex in its place (that is, *not* at the heart of a relationship), then there is only the grave and hell to beckon. What is missing is selfless gift-love, giving even when it costs everything: the New Testament Greek word *agape*, and in the Hebrew for love, *ahava*, and in the Latin, *charitas*, the love of God.

37 “. . . as a cistern for foul toads to knot and gender in! . . .” (Shakespeare, *Othello*, 4/2)

38 Shakespeare, *Much Ado about Nothing*, 2/1.

XII. THE SIMPSONS: THE TAUNTS OF DEMONS

There are many faces of Satan in *The Simpsons*—not just old Ned (Flanders): evil is legion. Montgomery Burns, along with many other characters might just be demonic (he alludes, on several occasions, to being Satan, though this might just be hopeful longings on his part). That is, are there, we may ask, really demons from hell masquerading as humans to taunt those in purgatory, with jibes and comments and temptations, but they cannot immediately and intimately harm without the individual’s willed permission? The local minister, The Revd Lovejoy, is really a demon masquerading as a Christian minister. Superficially he appears to be a cynical religious professional who has lost all sense of vocation and love for God and lives out eternity in the hell of nihilistic pseudo-religion, but on a deeper level he is a demon of hell who through mimicking a Christian minister should alert those around him to where they have gone wrong—but these assorted humans fail to realize the truth about themselves and their situation. His wife likewise is a demon who persuades Maud Flanders to become like her, to join with her gossiping, back-stabbing, back-biting mission, which ensures Maud’s ultimate damnation (her further translation into deeper hell). Lovejoy though his corrupted ministry mocks the very Gospel he claims to represent and thus ensures his congregation fails simply to turn to the Light of the World and accept the change in them facilitated by the blood of the Lamb, which would seal their redemption.

XIII. THE SIMPSONS: WHERE IS IT?

From what we have established, the question, “Where is the place of existence for these characters?” might seem spurious? Existence

may seem actual and genuine, physical and tangible, material, even factual, painful, frustrating, destructive, inescapable, in a word "real" (a word fraught with grammatical and etymological difficulty and ontic paradox). We are duty-bound to ask the question, "Does hell, or this state of purgation, actually exist, in the same sense that we take the reality we inhabit, while alive, to be real, corporeal, geographic? Is *The Simpsons'* Springfield, as a place of residence, "hell" or "purgatory"? Well, it is certainly not heaven, though it is important to remember that for many what they desire to be heaven is in fact hell: to 1970s liberal Anglicans and the Vikings³⁹ hell will seem like heaven to their confused way of thinking, hell is their deepest desire, although they see this hell as a fulfilment of the desire for heaven! The problem with a traditional concept of purgatory is that it seems to be a real place, geographically located. C. S. Lewis's solution was to posit that purgatory does not exist, as such, but if our ultimate goal is heaven, "time" spent in purgation, would be in heaven all along; however, by contrast, if we refuse the blood of the Lamb, the "bleeding charity,"⁴⁰ then any experience of purgation was hell all along.⁴¹ However, there is another salient point to consider, the physicality of this purgatory-hell is important to acknowledge because it indicates, it contrasts, *a real resurrection*, it posits a real spiritual-physical resurrection (1 Cor 15:35–58,

39 For example, the Viking hall of the dead that the Danes, the Norsemen, took to be heaven, where they were to spend all their time feasting and whoring, drunken revelries and fighting, raping and killing, is in point of actuality a region in hell! But there were those amongst the Vikings who will love it because feasting, whoring, drunken, sadistic paraphilia, slaughtering, defined them utterly by the point of their death, at the utter loss of the *imago Dei* in them.

40 In a speculative conversation, with a hell-bound unrepentant sinner, Lewis posits that the Crucifixion constitutes, quite literally, "bleeding charity." See Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, chp. 4, 19–23, specifically 21.

41 Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, chp. 9, 51–57, see specifically, 55. Also, see Sauter, *What Dare We Hope?*

in particular v. 44). If we marginalize, if we downplay, the physicality of purgation, this form of spiritual cleansing, looking back from a position of modern, enlightened superiority, dismissing it as a mediaeval myth, are we also marginalizing the actual and real resurrection? By contrast many religions posit a postmortem disembodied existence, of romantic souls immune from harm drifting in their own self-generated God-less fantasy world? Most of the inhabitants of *The Simpsons* appear to subscribe to this belief, this false hope.

XIV. RELIGION IN THE SIMPSONS

When C. S. Lewis wrote *The Great Divorce*, a speculative account of damned souls from hell visiting the fringes of heaven with the opportunity to change and progress further into salvation and deep heaven,⁴² he was working in the context of a nation that still, for better or for worse, rightly or wrongly, saw itself as Christian. However, *The Simpsons* is written against the backdrop of decades of religious syncretism in the West where officially there must be nothing contradictory or threatening to other religious tribes in any individual's religious practices and beliefs. All religions must get on with each other, and there must be no threatening truth, especially from Christianity! *The Simpsons* is obligingly obedient to this syncretistic apologetic mish-mash of religious sensibilities, though it singles out Christianity for especial veiled criticism.

Religion issues from the *Fall*. Before humanity gorged its way into original sin it had a right relationship with God. Eating, metaphorically, of the fruit of the tree of

42 All but one of the visitors refuse the chance of heavenward salvation, and return to the hell they know and are so fond of.

the knowledge of good and evil meant that afterwards humanity invented this relationship in its own image, its own terms, its own interests: which is why most religion falls short of divine revelation, humanity constantly reinvented religion in its own image. This is an insight that we can also read from *The Simpsons*!

The main religion in *The Simpsons* is named as The Western Branch of American Reform Presbyteranism;⁴³ as such it is Protestant, though all the world's main faiths make an appearance in one form or another. (Though any reference to Islam is veiled, probably for fear of jihadist death threats.) Religion in *The Simpsons* is almost comical: the nation of Israel has turned Judaism into a theme-park,⁴⁴ Bart claims that the tooth fairy is God's daughter,⁴⁵ Ned continues to debunk religion by inventing a religious theme park named "Praiseland"⁴⁶ (perhaps pointing out how much pop culture is inherently religious, or is it that much religion is no more than trivial popular culture?). Homer and Bart nearly become Roman Catholics,⁴⁷ but are pulled back by demonic *apokatastasis* (!); Bart sells his soul and then mystically regrets it: he cannot identify a soul in himself, but is lost without it.⁴⁸ It is not so much religion *per se* that is criticized but Western/American attitudes towards religion. So does this reflect the approach to religion of lost souls in purgatory/hell? After his failed attempt to become a Roman Catholic, Bart demands love and peace

43 See, http://simpsons.wikia.com/wiki/Western_Branch_of_American_Reform_Presbyteranism; also, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_The_Simpsons

44 *The Simpsons*, "The Greatest Story Ever D'ohed," 21.16.

45 *The Simpsons*, "Fat Man and Little Boy," 16.5.

46 *The Simpsons*, "I'm Goin' to Praiseland," 12.19.

47 *The Simpsons*, "The Father, the Son, and the Holy Guest Star," 16.21.

48 *The Simpsons*, "Bart Sells His Soul," Series 7, Episode 4, first broadcast October 8, 1995.

from everyone, claiming he is founding a new religion; however, his followers then go on—generations later—to wage religious wars over exactly what Bart's teaching was: "love and tolerance," or "understanding and peace!"⁴⁹

Marge Simpson is the one who cajoles her family into going to church, and behaving according to what she considers to be good Christian morality, but this is superficial. When it came to singing carols in a communal setting she comments, "Christmas carols only have one verse. I know there are more, but the second verse is where they get all weird and religious."⁵⁰

Bart gets Principal Skinner sacked; Ned Flanders takes over as temporary head teacher, Inspector Chalmers visits: Ned utters a brief mention of God over the intercom to all classrooms, Chalmers immediately fires Ned for reciting a school prayer—

Flanders: "...Let's thank the Lord for another beautiful school day."

Chalmers: "Thank the Lord ... that sounded like a prayer ... a prayer in a public school?! God has no place within these walls!"⁵¹

However, when God could be of use to advance his career Superintendent Chalmers demands the children intercede for success in a national test fearful of poor results affecting him personally. He comments, "Get down on your knees, pray to your god, and ask him—no demand—he tell you the answer, and if he won't, he is no 'god' of yours"⁵² So a "god-in-the-pocket" is acceptable in these purgatorial schools, a "god" firmly tethered on a leash?

Lisa, sceptic, Buddhist, Pagan, Witan,

49 *The Simpsons*, "The Father, the Son, and the Holy Guest Star," 16.21.

50 *The Simpsons*, "White Christmas Blues," 25.8.

51 *The Simpsons*, "Sweet Seymour Skinner's Baadasssss Song," 5.19. [SiC]

52 *The Simpsons*, "How the Test Was Won," 20.11.

intellectual atheist, suddenly decides to believe in God when demons whisper into her mind, ideas that flatter and compliment her vanity and ego. She comments: "It all adds up. I am the gem that will bring world peace. How brilliant of God to remove my scepticism by making me the Chosen One!"⁵³ So, Lisa is held in hell-purgatory, we may say, by her messianic pretensions.

Homer Simpson's misunderstanding of atonement is partly why he is in hell-purgatory. He believed that if Jesus had fought back all would have been well: "If Jesus had had a gun he'd be alive today!" So, Jesus should have defended himself, gun's/weapons blazing to defeat those who sought his death!⁵⁴

The Simpsons mirrors the meaningless serendipity that in some quarters is seen to characterize Western popular religion since the 1960s: this is, in effect, what we may in humour call "A Beatles' Doctrine of Religion," and is found in *The Simpsons*. A Beatles' Doctrine of Religion (BDR) was implicitly founded by the popular music group The Beatles in 1967. Through their actions and witness, though their holidaying, they proposed and founded—directly in contradiction to the prevailing Christian religion and culture in Britain at the time—a lifestyle fantasy religion where each individual, could invent its own religious mindscape and lifestyle to suit each heart's desire. The four members of The Beatles went on an open-ended, extended holiday (a latter day version of the Grand Tour for wealthy aristocrats?) to India where they stayed in an Ashram. This was at the height of their global fame, adoration, and worship (so-called "Beatlemania"). They spent the time taking mind-bending drugs and claiming they were meditating (though does not

meditation involve a heightened consciousness, a clarity of mind, and a passivity not induced through chemical contamination?). Developing from the enormously successful pop-culture that The Beatles had championed, characterized by superficial trite little songs extoling romantic delusions, this so-called Beatles' doctrine of religion developed so that everyone could be as religious as they wanted to be (or not, as was each heart's desire!). But this had to be an inward, self-reverential religion that contradicted no one else, or—pertinently—did not threaten or contradict the nation state and the beliefs, practices, and legislation of the government. Travelling abroad was an essential component of a Beatles' doctrine of religion. For example, the Bacchanalian annual (then twice-annual, etc.) "religious" holiday to the Mediterranean for sun worship, fornication with multiple partners, and drunken revelries, then as the "gods" blessed them with wealth (in the form of credit: debt) to Florida. However, this was for the labouring classes, the bourgeois, liberal, educated middle-classes gently meandering in their travelling's to various Middle Eastern destinations, then to Thailand *et al.* Furthermore, according to a BDR, all religions are equal and must be regarded as of equal value, yet simultaneously they are equally of no value to the extent that any contradicting elements in world religions must be elided while simultaneously asserting no truth—that is the absolute truth of no absolute truth—so as to justify the tyranny of absolute relativism (!?). Ironically adherents, often twenty-something graduates suffering from "can't-grow-up-won't-grow-up syndrome" or thirty-somethings of independent financial means, would travel, say, to the Far East and expect the local populace to fully accommodate their (pseudo-)religious whims and practices, and not object, even if the BDR threatened and

53 *The Simpsons*, "Gone, Maggie, Gone," 20.13.

54 *The Simpsons*, "Home goes to Prep School," 20.13.

contradicted or insulted their centuries-old local religious practices.⁵⁵ We can see all of this in modern Western liberalism; we can also see it in *The Simpsons*.

When Homer's life appears threatened, he screams out to this panoply of BDR-constrained gods and goddesses, "Who's out there? Oh, I'm gonna die! Jesus, Allah, Buddha, I love you all!"⁵⁶ Various assorted, imagined divines (did Homer really understand to whom he was appealing to when he invoked the name of Jesus?), the non-existent gods and goddesses of *The Simpsons*, are all defined by the Uncle Albert Model of the Divine: that is, Uncle Albert, from the worldwide popular BBC television comedy *Only Fools and Horses*. Del Boy and Rodney can do whatever they like, Uncle Albert holds no restraints and constraints on his nephews' beliefs and behaviour provided they listen to his interminable stories about his time as a merchant seaman during the World War Two. So, pay attention to the god/goddess of your own invention, listen to its stories, be religious in varying degrees, giving due attention to this divine Feuerbachian projection, and you can do what you like. This is the Uncle Albert Model of the Divine (UAMD), which underpins The Beatles' Doctrine of Religion. To demonstrate, the (surviving) Beatles dropped in occasionally on *The Simpsons*, just to make sure all was conforming to this BDR-UAMD?⁵⁷

55 In 2015, in the spirit of Western pseudo-religious neo-colonialism, four graduates, from Canada and Britain, stripped naked atop of Mount Kinabalu in Malaysia, much to the disgust of the locals who regarded the mountain as sacred.

56 *The Simpsons*, "Screaming Yellow Honkers," 10.15.

57 There are mentions of The Beatles in various episodes, however in terms of visitations, see: appearance by Ringo Star in, "Brush with Greatness," 2.18; appearance by George Harrison in, "Homer's Barbershop Quartet," 5.1 (a visitation reprised in "All Singing, All Dancing" 9.11); appearance by Paul and Linda McCartney in, "Lisa the Vegetarian," 7.5; appearance by John Lennon (who appears and comments from a fantasy pseudo-"heaven," in, "Treehouse of Horror XIX," 20.4.

Although there is, superficially, a concept of equality/equal opportunities and accommodation of all in this Beatles-founded religion, Christianity must implicitly be regarded as less than equal by the proponents of a BDR because of its claim to superior revelation and to provide a systematic roadmap of life and death. Furthermore, a BDR has provided an official religious position for many Western nation states and governments: a politicized Beatles Doctrine of Religion, underpins the British government, and is in effect to be labelled *neo-pagan secular-liberal humanism*. If the "gods" are to be an optional add-on: invent one or claim to have discovered one, if you so desire; however, the one God of the Judeo-Christian tradition must go to be replaced by "gods" where each divinity is self-defined and of no threat to other people's "gods." The founding of a Beatles' Doctrine of Religion occurred in 1967, the same year as the 1967 abortion act in Britain (and the liberalization/legitimization of homosexuality): sexual freedom raised to something of an intense emotional religious high was an essential component. And love?—love was a warm cosy feeling, essentially a cloying sentimental attachment issuing from the sexual freedoms: this form of love (reminiscent of the ancient Greek loves of *philia* and *storgē*, issuing from *eros*?), if generated, in turn legitimized the ever more bizarre forms of copulation and fornication that had generated this cloying sentimental attachment in the first place.

After their drug-fuelled religious "grand tour" of an Indian Ashram, most of The Beatles abandoned what they took to be Hindu meditation, but continued with a tacit promotion of a Beatles Doctrine of Religion, which was intimately intertwined with lifestyle pop culture. George Harrison, The Beatles' lead

guitarist, continued as a Hindu, patronizing the development of Hindu temples in Britain, but—in contradiction to the multi-faith neutrality that appeared to underpin a BDR—financed the Monty Python film, *The Life of Brian* centred on the song "Always look on the bright side of life," which trivialized and dismissed the cross and echoed a central tenet of a neo-pagan secular-liberal humanist dismissal of Christianity generally, the Gospel specifically: just sit back and enjoy life while it lasts, hide in a pseudo-religious fantasy world. No wonder these people are hell bound. So why do people not perceive the warning in and of *The Simpsons* ?

XV. DIFFICULTIES & PROBLEMS WITH A DOCTRINE OF PURGATORY

Though intentionally humorous (a cutting and critical satire?), and drawing on the trivia of popular culture, this essay suggests that it is somewhat ironical that *The Simpsons* offers a similar analogous insight into humanity's teleology—the human's ultimate end, and the dangers of eschatology that people seek to hide from in self-generated fantasy worlds—that C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien warned of in the mid-years of the twentieth century through their analogical narratives. This is a form of sub-creation (a term coined by Tolkien). Rhetorically we may ask, how does God use us as sub-creators to give intimations of what is to come?—and to *interpret* from others something of the nature of what is to come, that is, the pictures placed in the mind, given to a baptized imagination, of how our lives and actions will echo through eternity.⁵⁸

58 It is these pictures that formed the basis of much of the work of the Inklings, for example, the picture of evil in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954 & 1955) and Charles Williams, *All Hallows' Eve* (1945) and *Descent into*

Despite liberal sensitivities over judgment and eternal damnation, hell is an acceptable concept from an orthodox Christian perspective. However, asserting the need, soteriologically, of purgatory, or at least purgation, is considered for many a step beyond orthodoxy. James Sauer (writing from a Reformed perspective) notes: "I think the answers lie in the fact that the purgatorial idea, though doctrinally a heresy, contains a spiritual truth when applied to the human situation. There is something in this false doctrine which reminds us of life. And there's the key."⁵⁹ Concerns are generally seen in four areas: ontological, biblical, theological and that of grace.

First, ontological: is it real? And what do we mean by real? The problem with the traditional concept of purgatory is that it seems to be a real place, geographically located. This raises questions of location and geography. Purgation does not: we can assert a biblical precedent and justification for *postmortem* change (1 Cor 15:50–53), though purgation still raises paradoxical questions of time, of temporality.

Second, biblical: put simply, however much we can assert purgation, a place called purgatory is not biblical in the strict sense of the word, according to a traditional Protestant reading of the Bible, but, what about the witness of Maccabees?

On the next day, as had now become necessary, Judas and his men went to take up the bodies of the fallen and to bring them back to lie with their kindred in the

Hell (1937), but especially C. S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce* (1945) and the dangers of damnation in *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), and the consequences of our decisions before God in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950–56).

59 Sauer, "Purging a Problem," published online, Centre for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, <http://www.reformed.org/index.html>. See, http://www.reformed.org/webfiles/antithesis/index.html?mainframe=/webfiles/antithesis/v2n1/ant_v2n1_purging.html. Accessed May 29 2011.

sepulchres of their ancestors. Then under the tunic of each one of the dead they found sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. And it became clear to all that this was the reason these men had fallen. So they all blessed the ways of the Lord, the righteous judge, who reveals the things that are hidden; and they turned to supplication, praying that the sin that had been committed might be wholly blotted out. The noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened as the result of the sin of those who had fallen. He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin-offering. In doing this he acted very well and honourably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin.

(2 Macc 2:39–46)

Third, theological: what is the ontic nature of *postmortem* life? We scarce know little, save the threat of judgment, juxtaposed with the promise of Jesus' forgiveness: but what does the promise entail—salvation or damnation (we can glean clues from scripture, thankfully). The Resurrection appearances make the question tantalizingly unanswerable, the precise nature of resurrection is unknowable, unquantifiable, but clues and hints are spread widely through scripture. We cannot know, we can only begin to glean intimations and understanding of the eschatological reality that we will inevitably face, by analogy, by word pictures, from the parables and sayings of Jesus: "The kingdom of heaven is like . . ." Also, there is the: does not death leads to resurrection?—not disembodied souls

wafting around in some pagan Elysium? Or is there a delay before the general resurrection?

Fourth, grace: the relationship between grace, the cross, sin, and salvation is focused onto one episode in the Gospel, one moment of recognition: the good thief. We know not what this man's life has been; we know not of his relationship with God prior to his execution as a criminal, though he admits that his punishment is just, he has broken human law; yet, in a moment of recognition he is saved. In his rebellion, the thief on the other side—the so-called, bad thief—is damned. Grace does not need time (or does not *appear* to take time?). How do we regard the so-called good thief executed next to Jesus, and for that matter, the so-called bad thief? What soteriology is represented by deathbed conversions? What do these accounts tell us of the relationship between grace and the process of salvation? Is there a need for growth, sanctification, when even hardline Reformed Puritans, who regard purgatory as heretical, do not deny the need for sanctification. But does not the "either-or" problem remain?⁶⁰

XVI. A PERSONIFICATION?

Professor Frink, the eccentric and bizarre scientist in *The Simpsons*, declared that he had discovered and could prove the existence of hell, further that everyone went there.⁶¹ Well, all he did was hold a mirror up to himself and realize

60 What we have not considered within this paper, as it is two doctrines that are considered somewhat outside of the Christian mainstream, though they would warrant consideration if this subject was taken further, is a *doctrine of annihilationism* and a *doctrine of universalism*. Annihilationists (or supporters of extinctionism/destructionism), will argue that after the final judgment some human beings and all the damned will be destroyed, they will cease to exist; universalists will argue that everyone will be saved, reconciled.

61 *The Simpsons*, "How I Wet Your Mother," 23.16.

what had happened to him, and everyone in "Springfield": but he had totally lost sight of the beauty and wonder, the possibility and existence of heaven! More, that there are people in heaven.

There is one character from *The Simpsons* that perhaps is the personification and embodiment of postmodern Western humanity—the so-called "Crazy Cat Lady." Eleanor Abernathy is presented as a deranged middle-aged woman surrounded by a large number of cats, her home is jam-packed full of hoarded junk, items she simply cannot throw away. Isolated from normal social interaction and intercourse, she appears to have lost the power of reason, and of coherent speech seen in her inability to communicate, except by throwing cats at other people: she simply mutters and screams gibberish, more pertinently, and in the biblical context, babble: "So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel, because there *the Lord confused the language* of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth" (Gen 11:8–9; *my emphasis*).

When eight-years-of-age Eleanor Abernathy was clever and ambitious, the precocious, perfectly behaved school pupil who expressed the desire and ambition to be a lawyer and a doctor when she grew up, because, according to the feminist dictum, "a woman can do anything."⁶² At sixteen she was studying for law school; at twenty-four years, an M.D. from Harvard Medical School and a J.D. from Yale Law School. However, by thirty-two years of age she is shown suffering from stress and tension, exhaustion, despite her successful career and her multi-million-dollar apartment: she is presented suffering from classic burnout. She turned to alcohol and became obsessed with her pet cat (presumably having exhausted several relationships that had been subordinate to her

ambitions). By the time she turned forty, she had assumed her present state as a psychologically disturbed alcoholic, with what appears to be an unlimited supply of cats. There do appear to be moments of lucidity and intelligence, of "reason," in Abernathy—if she can get beyond herself and her sins.

When Mayor Quimby is recalled, she runs for the mayor's office. During a candidate debate, she is asked what public-policy issues are important to her. Unlike the other candidates (who act as stereotypical dishonest politicians), Abernathy discusses issues such as healthcare, economy, and public education in between her screams and gibberish (and a call for cats "in everyone's pants").⁶³

After taking psychoactive medication there appears to be an improvement in her sanity and her ability to relate to other people. However, all is lost when Marge Simpson informs her that the medication is just sweets: Reese's Pieces (Peanut Butter Candy). Her medication helps her speak intelligibly, and is in effect a placebo, but once the ruse is exposed she reverts to her usual gibberish—so her problems are wilful and psychological (?). Eleanor Abernathy is a lost soul, beyond redemption, beyond reason, and has placed herself outside of the love of God in Christ; as such she epitomizes many in this life in the West who hang by a thread above hell, who refuse to change, losing themselves in identity politics, that is, the identity they have made for themselves (defined by multiple "demons": work and ambition, sex and drugs, consumerism, music, relationships and homes . . . and social media) to bolster their delusions. Yet at the last moment they may turn to Christ and be forgiven (a deathbed conversion?), but this will require

62 *The Simpsons*, "Springfield Up," 18.13

63 See, https://simpsonswiki.com/wiki/Crazy_Cat_Lady#cite_note-Springfield_Up-1

a clarity in their minds that will require them to relinquish the consumer-led lifestyle and delusions. Eleanor Abernathy is defined by a loss of reason, the loss of the ability to reflect on and stand outside herself.⁶⁴ That is the God-given ability to reason where reason, as C. S. Lewis noted, predates creation: “Reason is given before nature and on reason our concept of nature depends”;⁶⁵ also, “Neither will nor Reason is the product of nature, . . . such Reason and Goodness as we can attain must be derived from a self-evident Reason and Goodness outside ourselves, in fact, a Supernatural.”⁶⁶ Therefore, for Lewis, religion is rational; reason is religious. Reason is of Christ, the Logos (John 1:1f.), the Word is reason: reasoning, reasoned. Eleanor Abernathy has wilfully misused and then abandoned this reason and thus she has rejected Christ, her forgiving judge and her salvation. She appears to be truly a lost soul: lost of her own making.

XVII. UNIVERSAL SALVATION?

Perhaps the only doctrine to reconcile what we have described and asserted is a form of universalism. That is, not a liberal doctrine of universalism whereby all go to heaven, but post-resurrection all get to be in eternity where they wish to be, where each life has lead: for example, the Vikings in Valhalla, which they

called heaven—the Viking hall of the dead that the Danes, the Norsemen, took to be heaven—where they were to spend all their time, postmortem, in feasting and whoring, drunken revelries and fighting, mutilating, raping, and killing. But is this in point of actuality a region in hell? But there were those amongst the Vikings who will love it because feasting, whoring, drinking, sadistic paraphilia, mutilation, and slaughter defined them utterly by the point of their death, to the severe degradation of the *imago Dei* in them. This is about the individual defining God’s righteousness in its own image and desiring the consequences, but not fully appreciating precisely what those consequences are to be.

If this seems a little bizarre and beyond rational and civilized thought, then consider: recently a senior Anglican cleric (with an impressive record of widely reported “good works”), one who could fairly be described as a religious celebrity, who stated publicly on a radio chat show that if he arrived at heaven and found God was “homophobic,”⁶⁷ he would prefer to go to the other place: hell. And he repeated and stressed this desire. Is this not the sin of Lucifer?⁶⁸—claiming to know better than God? This person yearned for heaven yet refused to lay down her/his crown of religious pride. If someone is so confused, even deluded

64 For key episodic appearances of Eleanor Abernathy see: *The Simpsons*, “Girly Edition” 9.21; *The Simpsons*, “I, (Annoyed Grunt)-bot’ or, ‘I, D’oh-bot” 15.9; *The Simpsons*, “Treehouse of Horror XV” 16.1; *The Simpsons*, “Homer and Ned’s Hail Mary Pass,” 16.8; *The Simpsons*, “Springfield Up,” 18.13; *The Simpsons*, “Home Away from Homer,” 16.20; *The Simpsons*, “See Homer Run” is the 17.6; *The Simpsons*, “The Last of the Red Hat Mamas,” 17.7. See also: *The Simpsons*, “Eeny Teeny Maya, Moe” 2.16; and, *The Simpsons*, “The Blue and the Gray,” 22.13. For a compilation of the cat lady, showing her teleological descent into hellish madness, see: YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXlmeE2jrl>.

65 Lewis, *Miracles* (2nd ed. 1960), 23.

66 Lewis, “Bulverism,” 227. Note Lewis capitalizes “Reason,” “Goodness,” and a “Supernatural.”

67 Archbishop Desmond Tutu stated this on several occasions in defence of his daughter’s identity politics. The daughter is ordained a priestess (in the Anglican communion), is a lesbian, who claims to be married to another woman. What was said as a public declaration, openly before YHWH the Lord, was heard—witnessed—by thousands. The exact broadcast words from the radio program and from the very public address to thousands were: “I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven. No, I would say sorry, I mean I would much rather go to the other place. I would not worship a God who is homophobic.” Quote from a radio interview with the BBC (British Broadcasting Company) 26 July 2013. See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-23464694>.

68 See Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14; Sin originated in the free will of Lucifer in which—with full understanding of the issues involved—he chose to rebel against the Creator.

(one might even consider, deranged), in his/her use of language and simply neither believes or refutes anything, then despite people not necessarily being psychologically responsible for their sayings and beliefs, we may ask just how fit for heaven they are? This cleric actually used the word “homophobic,” but whatever we think about the merits and demerits of that word, it seems absurd to speak of God having an irrational fear of anything.⁶⁹ Despite a lifetime of theological study and discourse at a senior level does this person believe that irrational fears are part of the attributes of God?!—Or was the meaning, that if God regarded homosexual activity as a sin... ? What this person said was questionable, ambiguous and confusing—inaccurate—ultimately meaningless, but it was characterized by spiritual pride, which led him to declare for *infernal voluntarism* ... even if on reflection he claims he didn’t mean it. How far does this linguistic irresponsibility go, how far does the “well, I didn’t really mean it,” excuse go, before God must take us seriously in what we say, we believe, we do?

So, how do we define heaven? Simple: we don’t. God created heaven and the conditions for being there. Most people have a twisted and distorted concept of heaven whereby they simply get to be and do whatever they feel most comfortable and satisfied doing: but is this not

69 This use of the word homophobic betrays this contemporary debased use of language in Western liberal democracies to express politicized beliefs/disbeliefs. The word homo is from the Greek for “same” (ὁμός); a phobia (from the Greek Phobos (Φόβος), the personification of fear) is a psychological reaction to a given situation: an extreme irrational fear of something, accompanied by physical symptoms (sweating and revulsion, even sickness, blushing, changes in heart-lung rate, dilation-dilution of eye pupils, skin rashes, and so forth). So is homophobia a specific psychological reaction (e.g., blushing) to sameness? Wiktionary notes, “In the 1990s, behavioural scientists William O’Donohue and Christine Caselles argued that the term homophobia was pejorative. In 2012, *The Associated Press Stylebook* was revised to advise against using -phobia words in non-clinical ways.” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/homophobia#English>

the precise nature of original sin repeated over and over again, ad infinitum?

Prior to the Crucifixion-Resurrection the default position was that all were lost (with rare exceptions such as Elijah); now all are saved, all get what they want: hence the Simpsons languishing in purgation in the fringes of hell. All are saved—but to what existence? Perhaps all can claim to be saved—but some to heaven and some to hell. Such *postmortem status*, will seem to be hellish to many.

Perhaps the final word on salvation, universalism, and responsibility, lies with C. S. Lewis:

Some will not be redeemed. There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power. But it has the full support of Scripture and, specially, of Our Lord’s own words; it has always been held by Christendom; and it has the support of reason. If a game is played, it must be possible to lose it. If the happiness of a creature lies in self-surrender, no one can make that surrender but himself (though many can help him to make it) and he may refuse. I would pay any price to be able to say truthfully “All will be saved.” But my reason retorts “Without their will, or with it?” If I say “Without their will” I at once perceive a contradiction; how can the supreme voluntary act of self-surrender be involuntary? If I say “With their will,” my reason replies “How if they will not give in?”⁷⁰

XVIII. CONCLUSION

This article illustrates characteristics of humanity’s condition after death (*de statu hominis post mortem*), in many cases a disorder that may appear painful, agonizing, bewildering, lost, even though it is scripturally

70 Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 96–7.

endorsed “change;” however, salvation may beckon (*Si purgatio fit, post mortem*): hence, *postmortem status purgatus*, that is the state, fixed within the context of purgation following issuing from the *eschaton*—death, judgement, heaven, hell. As such this conforms to the soteriology and eschatology of C.S. Lewis. Though by visiting the Simpsons we have an early twenty-first perspective! Some viewers regard *The Simpsons* almost like a soap opera—the program reflects humanity’s public and private concerns, lifestyle issues. *The Simpsons* presents—for some—how people should live. In this, the comic element is played down and regarded as innocent. However, the comic element is important, indeed the absurd is very important. A general theme running through Dante’s hell in *The Divine Comedy*, is that demons, and the evil that governs them, are absurd and comical, and should be laughed at rather than feared . . . or followed! To be absurd is to be illogical and irrational, bizarre, silly, strange, a contradiction in many ways of the reasoned and sound nature of creation, which God declared was good (Gen 1): evil is *absurd*, a contradiction—*alogos*. This is the path Lucifer set himself upon, rebelling against *El Shaddai, Yahweh*, descending out of heaven into a hell, forming hell around him, welcoming those like “him” who rebel against the Lord and do not repent.

It may seem an exaggeration to label the inhabitants of Springfield and their ilk here on earth as evil, but they are a contradiction of God’s will for their lives; they persist in their rebellion—however respectful and fashionable this mutiny may seem to some—and if evil is the surd-like contradiction of God then they are evil and reside *postmortem* where they are most suited. The *surd* in creation is the irrational element in the created order, the negative and

destructive; essentially, today and historically (e.g., for the Greeks), a mathematical concept. But *surd* was invoked by theologians and philosophers in the patristic and mediaeval church for the irrational and contradictory, that which is destructive in the created order and in humanity—a use to complement its mathematical meaning. The *surd* issues not directly at the command of God but exists as a possibility, as a consequence of creation: creation has the freedom to go its own way, to develop in ways contrary to the will of God. Yet, there is freedom to return, to haul down one’s flag of tribal rebellion, to lay down one’s crown before the throne (Rev 4:10f), to honour and acknowledge the Lord of creation, to recognize and admit then repent of one’s own silly little empire.

An irreconcilable dialectic stands between heaven and hell. Perhaps the occasional saved soul needs some change (1 Cor 15:50–53) to fully “move” into heaven, but it was already, from the point of death-judgment, in heaven, and perhaps our prayers will help its full translation. The lost souls in hell might look longingly at heaven, and wonder if they might change, even attempt through their own strength to “move” heavenward (Luke 16:19–31), but they are all along in hell from the point of death-judgment . . . and they will soon lose the ability to perceive and desire heaven as they sink deeper into their own depravity in their own hell. Any attempt to force a heavenward change will, as a *self-willed* thrust, not conform to the will of God. And like looking in a mirror, any move that appears, forwards, is contradicted because you are looking at a reflection and really moving backwards, and deeper into the self-generated hell of your own de-humanized corruption. Those who get it right are already in heaven; those who get it wrong are already

in hell. Hell is, by definition, inconsistent and unintelligible.

Let go and let God.

This is the simplest thing to do; yet in reality the hardest and most seemingly impossible to do. *The Simpsons* adequately illustrates this—as Lewis did in *The Great Divorce*—and the very real danger, *postmortem*, that humanity faces.

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”

GAL 6:7-9 (KJV)

“All get what they want,
they do not always like it.”

C.S. LEWIS, *THE MAGICIAN’S NEPHEW*

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