

Amnesty for the Devil

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So how do we treat our evildoers?

William Munny, “out of Missouri,” killed women and children. He had settled into an impoverished life as a pig farmer raising his two motherless children when an opportunity arose for some quick cash to resuscitate his failing farm. A young prostitute in another state had mocked the small size of a john and he vengefully cut her face and scarred her for life. The women of that house put a price on the head of the aggressor and his friend. Would Will be interested?

Readers who have seen Clint Eastwood’s masterful *Unforgiven* will remember that his character moves from hapless and somewhat impotent widower — Morgan Freeman’s Ned Logan asks him if he just uses his hand nowadays — to cold-blooded assassin, then to vengeful friend of the murdered Ned, who has been whipped to death by Gene Hackman’s vicious sheriff, Little Bill Daggett. Munny then returns to the role of a loving father who moves his children to San Francisco where “he prospered in dry goods.” What are we to make of this man, once a killer, who marries and settles, reverts to evil, and then becomes a good man once again? It is not a new question. Eastwood may have explored the issue on a non-transcendent humanistic plane, but philosophers and other bearers of wisdom traditions have long wondered how it is we pay for our mistakes after we are gone. This paper will explore how one of the most brilliant minds of the early church, Origen of Alexandria, addressed the question in what scholars of early Christian thought call the first systematic theology, *On First Principles*. This essay, however, is no simple exercise in Christian antiquarianism. Origen put forward a God so loving

that his eschatology could allow only for the salvation of all, even that greatest of evildoers, Satan.

Influenced by Plato's thinking, including his idea of the reincarnation of souls, Origen proposed the redemption of the demons in *On First Principles* and implied that even Satan could be redeemed. While the somewhat inchoate Christianity of speculative and Greek Alexandria could absorb such thinking at the beginning of the third century, the more legalistic and Roman world of late fourth century Latin Christianity could not. The Origenistic Controversy was a bitter one, and its final outcome was the loss of Origen's contribution in the West. As is so often the case in religious history, however, the story did not end there. Origen's idea of eternal, total restoration by God, *apokatastasis*, was reexamined by the twentieth-century Roman Catholic theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, who asked if we could hope that all might be saved. A look back at the evils of the twentieth century and forward to the new awareness of religious diversity in the twenty-first raises two questions anew: what must one believe to be saved, and how much evil will God forgive? The answers, now as then, frame the issues that themselves shape political and legal action. This essay will examine *On First Principles* and late antique Christianity's objections to it. After a review of von Balthasar I will take up the second of the questions, the punishment for sins, and show how the insistence on a God who damns has affected U.S. ideas of crime and punishment. Is there something to be gained in reclaiming *apokatastasis* in some form?

The First Christian Systematic Theology

Origen was born in Alexandria around 185. His father, Leonidas, was a devout Christian who lost his life to martyrdom — a fate that would have been the young Origen's had his mother not hidden his clothes.¹ He supported himself and his family by teaching in the catechetical school at Alexandria and was its headmaster when only 18. His strict asceticism earned him the epithet *Adamantius*, and in his youth his desire to maintain spiritual discipline led him to misread a passage in Matthew and make of himself a "eunuch for the kingdom of heaven" (*New American Bible*, Matt. 19.12). His reputation as scholar and thinker was peerless, and Christianity owes him the debt of serious biblical textual criticism through his *Hexapla*, a six-column work in which Origen laid side-by-side two Hebrew and four Greek versions of the Old Testament in an attempt to discern the best reading. A victim of the Roman Emperor Decius's persecution, Origen died in 253, having been tortured before being released from prison and never recovering from his injuries.

Between 220 and 230, Origen wrote *On First Principles*. At the outset,

he states his intention to affirm those doctrines held by the Church, but to speculate on those not settled. The apostles taught necessary doctrines clearly and plainly, and those have been handed down in an unbroken succession. An example is the doctrine that there exists one God who created the world *ex nihilo* and is the God of both testaments. The apostles left other doctrines incomplete, however, so that the diligent may pursue wisdom. So the soul exists, has free will, and will be rewarded or punished after death, but the exact manner of its origin — and, by implication, the exact manner of its fate — is not a resolved matter. Also, the Church teaches the existence of the devil and his angels, but not the reason for their fall, and although the beginning and the end of this world are taught, the question of worlds before and after this one is not resolved (Origen 7–13; I.i.1–7). Origen's objective is to create an argument against Gnostic predestination. The first move in that argument is to insist on a single creative being who is revealed in both the Old and New Testaments since the Gnostics argued for two different gods; the second, a defense of free will. From the issues Origen puts in play, one can easily see him putting together the case that both devils and humans can choose heaven or hell, and they may get more than one chance to get it right.

Origen has apostolic tradition in defense of the first proposition and so offers no extended argument. The free will argument is intricate and is developed in four steps in Books I and II of *On First Principles*. He begins with a claim for the free will of all rational beings, spiritual and human. He then suggests the salvation of all at the final consummation. Next he addresses specifically the fall of the angels and finishes with a final defense of free will.

To prove his first claim, Origen insists on the freedom of the will in counterpoint to unnamed opponents (read: the Gnostics) who hold that some rational creatures are either good or evil in essence and not by the faculty of free choice. He demonstrates his point both logically and scripturally. In a clever rhetorical twist, the premise of the case is stated at the conclusion and then used to demonstrate a prior question. The logical argument is as follows. Origen asks whether the various evil angels and demons fell from grace because of their essence or by their own free will. By choice, it must be maintained, since to ascribe their fall to their essence would be to find God, who is goodness itself, the cause of evil. Origen had demonstrated that the Trinity, God, Christ, and Spirit, were good in essence earlier (27–28; I.ii.13). Consequently, the demons must have fallen by their own free will: a departure as rational creatures from the advice and purposes of reason. If so, then those beings in positions of authority over other beings, the angels, with whom Origen had begun this line of reasoning (the prior question), hold their places “not by some privilege of creation but as the reward of merit.” Origen then suggests the potential amnesty of Satan: “We must believe this to be true even

of the devil himself" (44–45; I.v.2). Origen's scriptural argument is no less intriguing (47–49; I.v.4). He interprets two passages, the first from Ezekiel and the other from Isaiah, to make his case. Ezekiel's second prophecy concerning the Prince of Tyre (Ezek. 28.11–19) speaks not only of the Prince's fallen state, but uses language, such as the reference to his being placed among the Cherubim (Ezek. 28.14), that to Origen can refer only to a spiritual being and not a human being. Origen then goes to Isaiah's famous prophecy of the fall of the morning star, a reference to the king of Babylon in the eighth century B.C.E., but to Origen clearly the devil, an insight confirmed by Christ himself (Luke 10.18). Thus the argument from scripture affirms the conclusion drawn by reason:

All this shows that no one is stainless by essence or by nature, nor is anyone polluted essentially. Consequently it lies with us and with our own actions whether we are to be blessed and holy, or whether through sloth and negligence we are to turn away from blessedness into wickedness and loss; the final result of which is, that when too much progress, if I may use the word, has been made in wickedness, a man may descend to such a state (if any shall come to so great a pitch of negligence) as to be changed into what is called an opposing power [50–51; I.v.5].

The next step is to discuss the final consummation. Origen is clear that there will be punishment for sins, but he reads Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians as a biblical promise for the salvation of all. Paul made an extensive argument about the resurrection of the body and the final consummation in I Corinthians 15. He argued that all will be made subject to Christ and all Christ's enemies will be put under his feet, including death. For Origen subjection means salvation in reference to the saved, and so it must mean that for the wicked also, since the end is like the beginning, and in the beginning before rational beings made choices that resulted in their descent into lower forms, they were with God (52–56; I.vi.1–2). He goes on to assert the corrective effect of divine punishment and the consequence that souls rise or descend from one type of created being to another depending on what they have done. Paul's language concerning the transformation of creation means not its destruction but the final state of blessedness for all.

Origen then takes up the question of angels. The well-known archangels, Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael, were given their tasks of healing, supervising wars, and listening to humanity's prayers, respectively, because of the merit they earned before this world's creation (66–68; I.viii.1). Again Origen drives home the point that all rational creatures, whether spirits or not, are not only in their current state because of free will but move from one condition to another by the same faculty. And again his unnamed opponents seem to be Gnostics when he condemns as "silly and impious fables" the theory that two

separate creators made beings of different spiritual natures (68–69; I.viii.2). Some background will clarify this dispute. In the late second century, Irenaeus in his writings against the Gnostics claimed their anthropology postulated three human natures. The pneumatics (spiritual) would achieve salvation in the true heaven with the true hidden God revealed by the Christ of the New Testament. The psychics (mid-level) could have a type of salvation. The choices (fleshly) would be damned (Irenaeus 326; I. vii.v). The argument was predestinarian, as Origen complains. Even if there is only one human nature, a logical dilemma remains. How is it that all rational creatures can have unfettered free will and also not remain forever in rebellion against God? Does God's promise that all will be subjected to Christ—who will then deliver everything to God, "so that God may be all in all" (1Cor. 15.28)—not compromise the argument for free will in a way different from the argument for fixed essences? The story of the Exodus repeatedly says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. In other words, even if one grants the premise that there are no fixed good and evil natures among angels, demons, and human beings, the story of the Exodus repeatedly states that Pharaoh relented in his enslavement of the Hebrews, only to have God harden his heart and cause a change of mind back to the original state of affairs. What genuine choice can there be if God is manipulating the allegedly free will?² Having demonstrated that rational beings have free will, Origen's defense of humanity's freedom must now advance from refuting the assertion of multiple human natures to claiming that God's will does not override the free will of rational creatures.

Origen begins this discussion by noticing the great diversity among all living creatures (76–78; II.i.1–2). This variety in itself speaks to his theory of souls. Further, this multiplicity produces a harmony, a concord that leads some souls to help those in need and even some to put obstacles before those who are making progress. All this occurs because "God ... in providing for the salvation of his entire creation ... has so ordered everything so that each spirit or soul ... should not be compelled by force against its free choice to any action except that to which the motions of its own mind lead it" (77; II.i.2). Note here the driving force behind Origen's theology. The one and only God, maker of the world from nothing and revealed in both the Old and New Testaments, possesses a providence so loving that the very multiplicity of beings seen and unseen is carefully orchestrated to ensure total redemption of God's creation without compromising the absolute freedom of any. But what of Pharaoh? Does Scripture contravene Origen's argument? He reports the heretics' use of this text: "Pharaoh, they say, having a lost nature, is in consequence hardened by God, who has mercy on the spiritual men but hardens the earthly" (169; III.i.8). Origen has refuted this Gnostic anthropology of fixed human natures. He anticipates, however, the second predestinarian

objection, that God's will supersedes human freedom, and counters by writing that God's action is like the rain, and as rain brings forth fruit or weeds, so God's work brings forth good or evil according to the will and disposition of the recipient. Whether fruit or thorns, one can indeed say that the rain brought them forth (172–174; III.i.10). Free will is not compromised, but God will also keep the promise of total restoration. When Origen returns to the eschaton (final consummation) later in Book III, he closes with “For to the Almighty nothing is impossible, nor is anything beyond the reach of cure by its maker” (251; III.vi.5). This is Origen's God, the physician who will not let the disease of sin win and who, consequently, will heal even Beelzebub.

Origen was driven by a passion to see all creation returned to its blessed state and united once again with God. He believed these matters not yet settled by Church teaching and so put forward his suggestions as to what might be the case. His other concerns, consequent to his belief in a God whose plan was to be “all in all” at the end time, were to demonstrate the certainty of free will and the lack of contradiction between it and the sure plan of an almighty God. In addition, this God was the only God. There were not two, one of whom made lesser creatures doomed in their very essence. His thesis of complete restoration, *apokatastasis*, was controversial in Origen's time, again around 300, and most bitterly around 400, and it is to this controversy we now turn.

The Origenistic Controversy and Its Aftermath

Rufinus and Jerome were known for their great friendship and for their mutual admiration of Origen. Much of Jerome's work was the translation of Origen's commentaries on scripture. Origen's allegorical method and attention to the text greatly impressed both men. Yet toward the end of the fourth century, a fanatical heresy-hunter would stir up controversy over the theology of *apokatastasis* so virulently and so completely throughout the ancient Church that these two great friends would become bitter enemies, undermining each other before bishops and insulting each other in polemical *ad hominem* apologia.³

Epiphanius of Salamis was no manifestation of the generosity of God. Born around 315, he founded a monastery at age 20 after a visit with the monks of Egypt. He shortly was made bishop of Cyprus (Quasten 3: 384). He disdained metaphysical speculation and saw the defense of orthodox teachings as his mission. His two greatest works, the *Ancoratus* and the *Panarion*, are actually heresiologies (catalogues of false belief). His zeal led him to Jerusalem, where in 392 in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher he condemned Origen before Bishop John of Jerusalem and a full house, many of whom,

like John, were ardent admirers of the Alexandrian thinker. Epiphanius's targets were the Egyptian monks who held Origen in high regard. Other suspects were Didymus the Blind and Evagrius Ponticus. Epiphanius then excited a monk named Atarbius for the anti-Origenist cause in 393. Atarbius brought a band of monks to the separate monasteries of Jerome and Rufinus in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, respectively. Jerome, for reasons modern scholars still only guess at, immediately complied with the request to condemn Origen. Rufinus did not, and the relationship between two old friends disintegrated as Jerome increasingly fostered the anti-Origenist cause. By the mid-390s the hostilities between the two, exacerbated by many factors including Epiphanius's intention to have Rufinus roundly condemned as a heretic, were implacable. By 400, despite a brief truce, Jerome and Rufinus had begun a series of ferocious apologies against each other.⁴ For the purposes of this essay, however, it is not the apologies but two translations that matter. Rufinus had not only convinced himself of Origen's orthodoxy, he further believed that his works had been doctored by heretics. He therefore began a Latin translation of *On First Principles* intended to excise these unorthodox interpolations in 397. Upon learning this, Jerome fired back with a more literal translation over the winter of 398–399. Finally, a council at Alexandria in 400 condemned Origen with particular reference to *On First Principles*. The story ends about 150 years later when the Fifth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 553 issued a set of anathemas against Origen. His theory of *apokatastasis* had now been damned by the Church Universal, and although Rufinus softened the emphasis on the salvation of Satan at every turn in his translation, the testimony of Jerome and other evidence make it certain: Origen granted amnesty to the devil. Origen suffered a fate often visited on controversial theologians: his Greek was lost. *On First Principles* survives in Rufinus's Latin, a translation that Jerome's diatribes demonstrate to be nearly disingenuous at critical points. Greek fragments survive from the fifteen anathemas pronounced against Origen at Constantinople, a fourth-century compendium of his works by Basil and Gregory Nazianzus titled the *Philocalia*, and a few other sources. Meanwhile Augustine's careful argument in favor of eternal punishment articulated in his *City of God*, which we will take up later, won not only the day but the Western centuries until the Renaissance and Radical Reformation.

Augustine's favor among the Protestant Reformers combined with their legalistic theory of Atonement further strengthened the belief in eternal punishment.⁵ Origen nonetheless benefitted from the Renaissance's interest in retrieving ancient texts, and the great student of classics, Erasmus, began to write favorably of him. He also found favor with a few of the Anabaptist reformers as well as with a seventeenth-century British thinker, George Rust (Patrides 475–478). Along with these ideas came a revitalization of the con-

cept of the eventual salvation of all human beings, which was known in Protestant circles as universalism. Among Roman Catholics *apokatastasis* gained no foothold. However, Catholic theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar asked the question “Dare we hope that all men be saved?” in a book of that title. Balthasar offers no amnesty to the devil. God’s redemptive act is intended for humanity, not this fiercely evil power (143–147). Yet Balthasar still holds out hope for humanity and finds in scripture at least the warrant for believers to hope that God may eventually save all human beings, even as *apokatastasis* must be rejected. His aspiration for the salvation of all humanity arises from those texts that espouse such hope, but they must be balanced against the bible’s threats of condemnation. Nonetheless, there is sufficient warrant for agnosticism toward the doctrine of humanity’s damnation so that one may trust “that the light of divine love will ultimately be able to penetrate every human darkness and refusal” (178). In his final chapter, Balthasar moves from universalistic hope permitted the Christian to a Christian obligation to hope in the name of neighbor-love. He closes with a long passage from Edith Stein’s *World and Person: A Contribution to Christian Truth Seeking*, from which I repeat: “Faith in the unboundedness of divine love and grace also justifies *hope for the universality of redemption*, although through the possibility of resistance to grace that remains open in principle, the *possibility* of eternal damnation also persists” (220; emphasis in original).⁶

Redeeming Evil: Two Examples in Literature and Film

What has all this to do with controversial theological themes in literature and the arts? I have brought forward a Christian idea that will not go away however much criticized. As von Balthasar contends, that is because the Christian hope that God’s redemption will leave no one behind is a fire banked deep in the hearth of Christian love. From the mid-twentieth century I will examine the reflections of a popular Christian writer, C. S. Lewis, in *The Great Divorce*. I will then turn to a great film with no explicit theological argument, *Unforgiven*. My look at Clint Eastwood’s masterpiece will set us up to examine some ideas in the U.S. criminal justice system that arise from Christian arguments that wrongdoers must be punished severely.

C.S. Lewis wrote *The Great Divorce* in response to William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Blake had argued for the natural oneness of heaven and hell. He blamed religion for ruining that union, writing that priesthood originated in a desire to exploit the plurality of all existence until “men forgot that all deities reside in the human breast” (20–21). Humanity needed to free itself to see things as they are. Blake’s most famous quote, “If

the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite" (26), captures his mystical thought, as do the book's last words: "For everything that lives is holy" (47). Lewis rejected Blake's thesis, not because he feared that all might be saved but because he thought salvation could not come to all unless sinners corrected their course. Between heaven and hell, good and evil, one must recognize not a marriage but a great divorce: "Evil can be undone, but it cannot 'develop' into good" (*The Great Divorce* 466).

The Great Divorce is set somewhere after this life but before judgments stand for all eternity. At the end, the reader discovers that the narrator, Lewis himself, has had a vision in a dream. The conceit allows Lewis to review all sorts of human behaviors, as he also does in *The Screwtape Letters*, and to praise or blame them as he judges right. Those on the right path are the "Solid People." Others are shades. Some characters merit comment for my purposes. There is Len, Jack's murderer. The Big Ghost recognizes him and is surprised to know that he and Jack have reconciled. That is not all. Len's more serious sin, to the Big Ghost's disbelief, is his murdering the Big Ghost in his heart for years. He is here to make up for it. The Big Ghost grows angry. He had done things with an arch sense of responsibility all his life, and now he insists on a justice commensurate with his efforts, his "rights." Len gently tells him he does not understand and asks that he follow along. But the Big Ghost demands those rights with a triumphant "I'd rather be damned that go along with you" (482). Here is the first of Lewis's emphases on the divinely given freedom of the will, a point he will make at the end of the book when he explicitly addresses universalism.

In addition to the refusal to leave the land of shadows (Hell) for Heaven because of a false sense of justice, as the Big Ghost exemplifies, the willful misdirection of love can also keep one from salvation. The illustration now is the mother who cannot, actually *will* not, recover from the loss of her son. After all, she argues, a mother's love "is the highest and holiest feeling in human nature" (519). Not so, argues the Bright Spirit Reginald who had been this ghost Pam's brother. Human parental love is right when it is subordinated to the love of God. As Reginald points out, Pam's instinctive mother-love is no different from the beasts (tigresses, actually). But Pam will have none of it: "I don't believe in a God who keeps mother and son apart. I believe in a God of love.... I hate your religion and I hate and despise your God. I believe in a God of love" (520).

In addition to telling stories to demonstrate the need to reform one's understanding of how things really are, Lewis creates a conversation with the Scottish theologian whom he considered his greatest influence, George MacDonald. Lewis gushes over MacDonald at this point and quite sincerely praises

him for his book, *Phantastes*, which Lewis writes began his long return to Christianity when he was sixteen. MacDonald continues to elaborate the theme that salvation may be granted after death. If that grey town from which Lewis's journey began and which the two men now regard from a distance, is left behind, it is Purgatory; if not, the souls there have chosen to stay and it is Hell. The suffering is purgative if one willingly reforms. It is damning if one responds like Pam or the Big Ghost. The latter choice is made by souls' insistence on focusing on themselves (which is what both Pam and the Big Ghost have done) so that they will say misguidedly "at least they have been true to themselves" (503). Hell is not a physical place of eternal fire. It is a state of mind because "every shutting up of the creature within the dungeon of its own mind — is, in the end, Hell" (504). MacDonald then quotes *Paradise Lost* as the best description of damned souls. They say, "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven." The picture is not bleak, however: "No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it" (506). Lewis has reconstructed MacDonald to give him a belief like Lewis's own. The actual MacDonald was a universalist, however, and toward the end of the book, Lewis questions him. MacDonald's extensive answer again emphasizes humanity's free will, the characteristic that most resembles God. Both predestination and universalism contradict the idea of free will. Although they cannot be true, it is true that with a rightly directed will, anyone can be saved. So Lewis and his mentor both argue for the possibility of each human being's salvation, but it is not unconditional.

It would seem from *The Great Divorce*'s final comments that Lewis rejects *apokatastasis*. He certainly rejects its modern British descendent, universalism. Yet he may do so reluctantly. Why else have shades review their lives *post mortem* encouraged throughout by Solid People to see things differently? The key to the gates of heaven is a free will that neither stubbornly insists on its own prerogatives like the Big Ghost, nor turns its love inward like Pam. What Lewis will not compromise is human freedom. His case is that there may be many chances to get it right, but not a God who will in any way force a happy ending.⁷ Lewis argued the point more forcefully a few years earlier in *The Problem of Pain*.

In his discussion of Hell in *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis refers several times to the refusal of some human beings to be saved, writing, "Some will not be redeemed" (620).⁸ Lewis readily admits that he has denied a long-believed divine attribute:

Finally, it is objected that the loss of a single soul means the defeat of omnipotence. And so it does. In creating beings with free will, omnipotence from the outset submits to the possibility of such a defeat. What you call defeat I call miracle: for to make things which are not Itself, and thus to become, in a sense,

capable of being resisted by its own handiwork, is the most astonishing and unimaginable of all the feats we attribute to the Deity [626].

Lewis somewhat lightly rejects the doctrine of God's power. Why did he not reclaim Origen? Certainly Pharaoh remains problematic in any scriptural discussion of free will. Origen knew the tension between holding that an almighty will and power desired the salvation of all and insisting that creatures were made in that Being's image and, therefore, were entirely free. It might be said that Origen advanced a theory of double causation. He lived with ambiguity and resolved it as best he could. Lewis instead apparently saw an either-or choice between universalism and free will. Yet he did not envision a vengeful God and took no pleasure in his conclusion. Referring to Hell, Lewis writes, "There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power" (620). His defense of the doctrine of hell is not vindictive but one of loving concern for his fellow human beings. He closes *The Problem of Pain* by telling readers to be attentive not to the damnation of our enemies but ourselves: "This chapter is not about your wife or son, nor about Nero or Judas Iscariot; it is about you and me" (627).

Clint Eastwood's gripping *Unforgiven* is also about you and me. What would we do to ensure that our children will eat? Would that passion rekindle our cold-blooded murderous ways, if only for a moment, to regain financial equilibrium for them and us? How many times can we descend in the depravity of contract killing compounded by an alcohol-fueled slaughter, an act of indiscriminate vengeance in memory of a beloved friend, and hope not to be lost eternally? Sara Anson Vaux, citing Mikail Bakhtin, writes that ambiguity marks a great narrative and praises Eastwood for the ambiguity of this movie (73). Vaux's analysis focuses on Eastwood's rejection of violence as a means to justice. I want to look at the ascent and descent of Eastwood's character, William Munny, within the context of what has been discussed in this essay.⁹

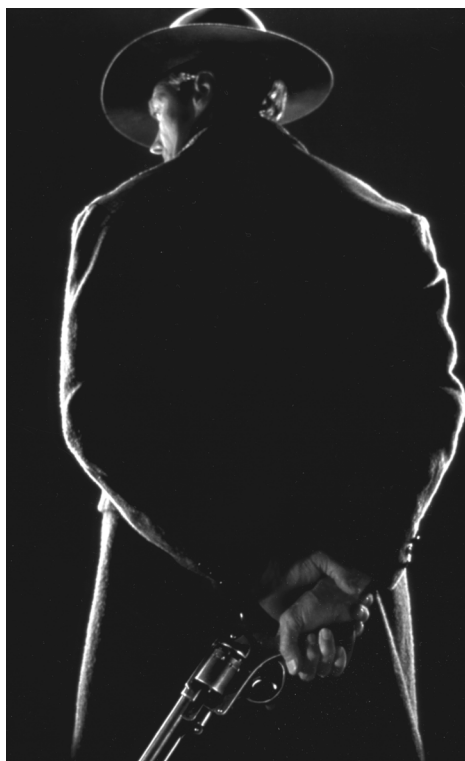
William Munny is the recipient of a salvific grace. Her name is Claudia Feathers and she is his deceased wife. He says to the Schofield Kid, who recruits him into the murder plot, "I ain't like that no more kid." He goes on to say that Claudia changed him; he does not drink anymore either. As Vaux comments, Munny has had a conversion and he now practices a virtue ethic (64–65). Munny's virtue is strong but the moral hazard in which he finds himself is stronger. To return to contract killing or to let his children starve is a stark choice. He takes the job, but vows not to descend into the evildoer who once killed women and children. Relearning old skills is not easy, however, and at first Munny cannot even mount his horse, falling to the ground to the embarrassment of his son and daughter. As he, Ned Logan, and the

Kid ride north to Wyoming, he maintains his virtue and refuses Ned's bottle. And the more the Kid pushes him for details of his past life, the more his responses are words like "I don't recollect." Things soon change, however. Ned Logan cannot return to the life of a mercenary killer. Will has to shoot one of the marks with Ned's prized Springfield rifle. The Kid's attempt to legitimate the killing with an appeal to just deserts is met by Will's laconic "We all have it comin,' Kid."

The opposite of virtue is vice and it too comes by habit. Will's descent, motivated by adversity as was his original decision, continues. He does not drink whiskey until he is told of Ned's death. The Kid shortly afterward recognizes what Will has become. After the next shooting, in which the Kid has shot an unarmed and helpless man sitting on an outhouse john, he tells Munny, "I'm not like you, Will." The Kid rides off with the reward money and instructions from Will to see that Ned's widow gets Ned's share.

William Munny is again the solitary killer he once was. He returns to the Greeley Saloon where Ned's corpse has been desecrated by Little Bill's sign warning off hired killers. His first shot kills the unarmed saloon owner. After the ensuing bloodbath, he threatens to kill anyone who takes a shot at him as he leaves the saloon — and their wives, too. He swears a vengeful return if he discovers that Ned's body has not been properly buried. As Origen might have speculated, William Munny has again descended by choice to the demonic. As Balthasar might have suggested in his discussion of Satan, William Munny has so thoroughly cut off relationship with anyone that he is, in a sense, an un-person (145–147). We no longer see the human being watchful of his children and of his wife's grave. We see only murderous rage. The movie ends with a scrolling epilogue that not only tells us that Munny once again returned to his family responsibilities, but also that he succeeded at them. We also learn that Claudia's mother could not understand why her daughter married him. We know why, however. The assaulted prostitute, Delilah, has a grace-filled conversation with Will. She was already dehumanized in her work, an object of pleasure treated brutally for insulting a customer. Now scarred, she has lost her standing even as a prostitute. As the saloon owner and pimp, Skinny Dubois, complains to Little Bill, no man will want to pay for her now. But Munny does not see that, even as he refuses to humiliate her again by accepting her offer of a "free one." Her scars are external; his internal. They both have scars, but she retains her dignity in Will's eyes. In a scene reminiscent of Jesus' forgiveness of the adulteress condemned to be stoned (John 8. 1–11), Will returns Delilah to a noble state: "You're a beautiful woman." Prostitution is not Delilah's road to dignity; knowing her intrinsic worth is. A virtuous spark remained in Will — a reason to hope that even this man would be saved.

It is clear that Eastwood, in Sara Vaux's words, "asks again and again, when, if ever, we need to kill; it [*Unforgiven*] insists that as flawed human beings we can and must be redeemed by love" (72). Lewis, in contrast, defends retributive punishment in *The Problem of Pain* (604–605). Writing that the suffering of bad men appeals to the universally human instinct for justice, Lewis rejects deterrence and rehabilitation as logical reasons for punishment. Pain serves to eject the wrongdoer from his illusion with a dose of reality. Pain is God's megaphone, God's way of shouting to get our attention, and as such "it plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul" (605). In this view, William Munny should have been hanged not once but twice. We are given no reason why he escaped apprehension in Missouri and managed to establish a farmstead in Kansas, nor are we apprised of how he managed to reach San Francisco and become a successful businessman. Except for Little Bill's small-town tyranny in Big Whiskey, law enforcement is absent in *Unforgiven*.



How do we treat our evildoers? *Unforgiven* (1992, Warner Bros.), directed by and starring Clint Eastwood, raises questions about the possibility of redeeming William Munny, a killer of women and children, in the spirit of Universalism and Origen of Alexandria's idea of *apokatastasis*.

To this point, this essay has examined the thought of theologians ancient and modern and of an essayist and a filmmaker. Only one, Lewis, addressed crime and punishment, and he did so abstractly and briefly. Theological doctrines should have ethical application, however, especially those that claim to understand God's intentions toward wrongdoers. Our discussion now should take up the enforcement of criminal justice. That conversation begins with an examination of the dominant idea of divine punishment in Western Christianity.

The Augustinian Purpose of God's Punishment

After the Origenistic Controversy, the Latin West reemphasized the doctrine of the eternal punishment of evildoers, both human and demonic, that it had long held. At the beginning of the third century, the man considered the father of Latin theology, Tertullian, had made the point in several writings. He enjoined the issue extensively in his *Apology*. Toward the end of that work, Tertullian criticized the Pythagorean theory of the transmigration of souls and sarcastically dismissed it with the remark that, if true, we must all become vegetarians under pain of digesting a former relative (53; xlviii). His more serious turn was to state "the profane ... shall be consigned to the punishment of everlasting fire" (54; xlviii). Tertullian set the tone for Latin Christianity and his intellectual descendent, Augustine, elaborated on God's eternal judgment in the penultimate book of *The City of God*. This is an important passage for our purposes since Augustine explicitly mentions Origen's theory.

In the midst of the Origenistic Controversy, Augustine had written his friend Jerome and asked him to continue to translate Greek biblical commentaries, especially Origen's, into Latin. Later, Augustine also asked Jerome to list specifically what errors he found in Origen's thinking (Kelly, *Jerome*, pp. 217–220). In Book XXI of *The City of God*, finished in 426, Augustine lists eight objections to the doctrine that God plans eternal punishment for sinners. These are the punishments are merely purgative, no human will be punished eternally, the intercession of the saints shall prevent damnation at the Last Judgment, heretics are preserved from damnation if they have once been baptized and partake of the Eucharist, those baptized as Catholics are similarly protected, Catholics who remain catholic unto death will not be damned despite sinful lives, a life comingled with sins and almsgiving will not be damned, and the punishment of the devil and wicked persons is not eternal (463–478; XXI.13–27). Augustine carefully refutes all these suggestions in a comprehensive series of arguments. These mistaken notions come from "tender-hearted" Christians who propose that no humans will be punished eternally. Origen was softer still, he contends, since he argued for the deliverance of the devil (468; XXI; xvii). Augustine points to three mistakes in Origen's argument (468–469; XXI. xxiii).¹⁰ The first is theological.

Origen's theory jeopardizes the possibility of eternal blessedness if saints can rise and fall from one incarnation to another. The second is biblical. Scripture speaks of everlasting fire, most notably in Matthew's parable of the sheep and the goats at the Last Judgment (Matt. 22.31–46).¹¹ Last, the idea of happiness everlasting but punishment that is merely temporal is both unscriptural and illogical. In Matthew's parable the clarity of the Judge's (Christ's) decree cannot be mistaken, for he says "eternal fire" and "eternal blessedness."

Moreover, beatitude and damnation are correlative: if heaven is eternal, so is hell. With Augustine's multifaceted attack on the idea that divine punishment is merely corrective and not eternal, the door to *apokatastasis* in the West was not only closed, it was nailed shut.¹² As Balthasar points out, Augustine's Matthean argument is a tipping point in that "Augustine interprets the relevant texts in such a way as to show that he plainly and simply *knows* about the outcome of divine judgment" (65; emphasis in original). As he also suggests, we do the greatest Latin theologian an injustice to paint him so cruelly, for he also was a man of love, manifested as a concern for the souls of Christians who in their enthusiasm over their salvation might think a dissolute life no threat to eternity with God (71).

U. S. Criminal Justice and Harsh Sentences

America worries about law and order. It worries about crime on the streets. For a few decades now, one of the growth industries in this country and fastest-rising items in state budgets has been the construction of prisons. The phenomenon owes its existence in part to Christian ideas of reward and punishment, indebted, as I have pointed out, to Augustine's theology. Protestant theologian T. Richard Snyder explored the Christian influence on our politics of retribution in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Punishment*. Snyder's is a work of theological analysis followed by a constructive proposal to foster restorative punishment in a society he finds to have gone too far in the direction of payback. His thesis can be buttressed by a scientific study that suggests that certain Christian doctrines may lead believers more readily into harsh ideas of retributive punishment in criminal justice. Sociologist Harold G. Grasmick, assisted by three colleagues, surveyed 330 people in a southwestern city to test the hypothesis "that individuals affiliated with fundamentalist Protestant denominations will score higher on a measure of support for the retributive doctrine than individuals with other religious affiliation or no affiliation" (27). With Likert-scale questions that asked about the appropriateness of the *lex talionis* as a sentencing guideline and similar sentiments, Grasmick *et al.* demonstrated their hypothesis. I do not intend to single out a particular population of Christians with either this study or Snyder's book, however. I want to look at the content of these beliefs and follow Snyder's recommendations for an alternative philosophy of punishment. Consequently, although Snyder focuses on the Protestant tradition in America, the attitudes he criticizes can be seen throughout American Christianity, and I intend no criticism of Protestant thought alone. Moreover, as Snyder contends, the argument applies to American culture and its contempt for those convicted of crimes.

Snyder writes out of lived Christian experience. Raised a fundamentalist and a graduate of Philadelphia Bible Institute, now Philadelphia Biblical University, he had taught prisoners at Sing Sing for nearly twenty years before writing his book. He sees two problems with American Protestant theology: its emphasis on the thorough corruption of humanity through Original Sin and the emphasis on redemption in individualistic terms. Combined, these emphases lead to an evaluation of criminals and other marginalized as justly deprived of certain human goods. They also help shape a societal response to crime that focuses on the individual and is insufficiently attentive to other causes. He writes, "It is incumbent upon us to discover other ways of thinking about God and God's grace that might provide a foundation for a more humane response to crime" (15). He sees these possibilities as those things broadly named restorative justice. Snyder does not mention *apokatastasis* or universalism. His tack is different but his moral impulse the same.

Snyder works with three doctrines central to Christian faith, Covenant, Trinity, and Incarnation. Snyder uses Jacob's wrestling with the angel as his example of covenant (112–117). This illustration is important to him for two reasons. First, Jacob is "a liar, a schemer, and a thief." Second, Jacob does not let go of the angel (God?) until he blesses Jacob. These show that even criminals have rights under covenant and that covenant requires mutual accountability. Most important, Jacob does not have this experience until he first makes amends with his brother Esau, whom he cheated out of his birthright. The relevance of the story arises because Snyder had earlier placed restorative justice in the role of reconciling parties while repairing injuries done. It brings together victims, offenders, and communities. Consequently, there is a correspondence between restorative justice and covenant. Second, Incarnation implies that one can meet God Incarnate (Christ) in the face of those on the margins (120). Snyder tells of his own experience of "the presence of God" in the incarcerated with whom he has worked. Ironically, although Snyder does not mention Matthew's parable, it is the foundational text in the doctrine of seeing the face of Christ in another, especially the poor, sick, and imprisoned. When both the blessed sheep and the damned goats are assigned their everlasting fates, they ask, "Lord, when did we see you?" Augustine used the text to prove eternal damnation; Christians have often used it as a mandate for social justice and in Snyder's case restorative justice in the penal system. Last, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, although illogical, is born of the Church's experience and teaches that God is intimately relational. Thus, the doctrine of Trinity does not demand that Christians merely recognize the intrinsic relationship between the individual and her fellow human beings—it requires that relationship to be spiritually intimate, that is, to hear the "sighs" of the most wanton. Snyder follows this theological excursus with a

detailed outline for restorative justice in the U.S. prison system that I do not report here. More important for my purposes is his final call for a conversion first in the churches and then throughout U.S. culture that moves both “from the spirit of punishment to the spirit of healing” (155–157).

The Instantiation of an Idea and Its Consequences

With Snyder my essay has moved from a theological controversy to a political and social issue. The study by Grasmick *et al.* cited earlier attributed the preference for retributive punishment to a tendency to interpret scripture literally (32–33). Snyder argued that the doctrine was present throughout Protestantism. The doctrine, however, has its origin in Augustine and, therefore, influences all of American Christianity. As both authors conclude, their findings have consequences for the fabric of future U.S. society. Grasmick *et al.* simply warn that undoing the retributive movement is difficult; Snyder offers an alternative. If Origen were alive today and teaching prominently, would he be considered tender-hearted if he tried to apply his theories to our prison system? Would his supporters bowdlerize his works as did Rufinus? Would we heartily approve of Augustine? What can we glean from our contemporaries Eastwood and Lewis?

I look for a clue in the life experiences of these men, but find little help. Origen saw his father murdered by the power of the state when just a boy, but Augustine saw the sack of Rome by Alaric and the horrible pillaging and rape that followed. It spurred him to write the *City of God*. Lewis was in the military and was wounded in the trench warfare of World War I. Eastwood had the hardscrabble childhood of a poor family in the depression. All saw suffering and their judgments differ. Having discussed film and literature, I turn to music for a final word. Iris Dement is a country singer who often writes her own hymns. Alternately beautiful, profound, and wry, she takes up the matter of the end-time in “Let the Mystery Be” on her 1992 CD *Infamous Angel*. Having reviewed the options offered by religions (Christian and otherwise, but mostly Christian), she opts to “let the mystery be.” I am convinced that the country’s move toward increasingly severe retributive punishment over the last few decades is bad policy and by no means the only Christian alternative. Experiments in restorative justice continue to occur and should be fostered.

As for eternity, I, too, will let the mystery be.

Notes

1. There are many good scholarly biographies of Origen. All depend on Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Ecclesiastical History*, Book VI, as does this account.

2. Indeed, I assign the story of the Exodus to my students in the 100-level introduction to theology and some inevitably object to God's behavior in this tale. As one student put it rather angrily, "Pharaoh didn't have a choice."
3. The story is engagingly told over several chapters by J.N.D. Kelly. The following summary depends on Kelly's excellent work.
4. English translations of the apologies and other relevant writings are available in *Theodoret, Jerome, Gennadius, Rufinus* (405–568).
5. The course of this idea in Western Christianity is the subject of Patrides's article.
6. Von Balthasar titles this chapter "The Obligation to Hope for All."
7. Jerry L. Walls wrestles with the same ambiguity in Lewis (255, 258–263). He rightly concludes, "Lewis's picture, however, is of a God of love who does everything he can to save all persons, short of overriding their freedom" (262).
8. See also pp. 622, 626–627.
9. I am captivated by Eastwood's films because of the moral ambiguity of his heroes. His is no simplistic morality.
10. Balthasar provides an excellent and useful comparison of the two (47–72).
11. Balthasar points to the importance of the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25. 31–46) to the argument for the eternality of hell from the second century on (49–50).
12. Balthasar tries to reopen that door by quoting a French theologian, Andre Manaranche, in a footnote that bears repeating. "The limitation of the great Saint Augustine is found at that point where he throws sacred history out of balance by centering it on Adam instead of Christ.... How does Augustine know that there are men who are damned? ... Augustine ... has damned the whole world in Adam. He is no better informed than Origen, who puts no one in there" (72).

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