

Objection 1. It would seem that Christ went down into the hell of the lost, because it is said by the mouth of Divine Wisdom (Ecclus. 24:45): “I will penetrate to all the lower parts of the earth.” But the hell of the lost is computed among the lower parts of the earth according to Ps. 62:10: “They shall go into the lower parts of the earth.” Therefore Christ who is the Wisdom of God, went down even into the hell of the lost.

Objection 2. Further, Peter says (Acts 2:24) that “God hath raised up Christ, having loosed the sorrows of hell, as it was impossible that He should be holden by it.” But there are no sorrows in the hell of the Fathers, nor in the hell of the children, since they are not punished with sensible pain on account of any actual sin, but only with the pain of loss on account of original sin. Therefore Christ went down into the hell of the lost, or else into Purgatory, where men are tormented with sensible pain on account of actual sins.

Objection 3. Further, it is written (1 Pet. 3:19) that “Christ coming in spirit preached to those spirits that were in prison, which had some time been incredulous”: and this is understood of Christ’s descent into hell, as Athanasius says (Ep. ad Epict.). For he says that “Christ’s body was laid in the sepulchre when He went to preach to those spirits who were in bondage, as Peter said.” But it is clear the unbelievers were in the hell of the lost. Therefore Christ went down into the hell of the lost.

Objection 4. Further, Augustine says (Ep. ad Evod. clxiv): “If the sacred Scriptures had said that Christ came into Abraham’s bosom, without naming hell or its woes, I wonder whether any person would dare to assert that He descended into hell. But since evident testimonies mention hell and its sorrows, there is no reason for believing that Christ went there except to deliver men from the same woes.” But the place of woes is the hell of the lost. Therefore Christ descended into the hell of the lost.

Objection 5. Further, as Augustine says in a sermon upon the Resurrection: Christ descending into hell “set free all the just who were held in the bonds of original sin.” But among them was Job, who says of himself (Job 17:16): “All that I have shall go down into the deepest pit.” Therefore Christ descended into the deepest pit.

On the contrary, Regarding the hell of the lost it is written (Job 10:21): “Before I go, and return no more, to a land that is dark and covered with the mist of death.” Now there is no “fellowship of light with darkness,” according to 2 Cor. 6:14. Therefore Christ, who is “the light,” did not descend into the hell of the lost.

I answer that, A thing is said to be in a place in two ways. First of all, through its effect, and in this way Christ descended into each of the hells, but in different manner. For going down into the hell of the lost He wrought this

effect, that by descending thither He put them to shame for their unbelief and wickedness: but to them who were detained in Purgatory He gave hope of attaining to glory: while upon the holy Fathers detained in hell solely on account of original sin, He shed the light of glory everlasting.

In another way a thing is said to be in a place through its essence: and in this way Christ’s soul descended only into that part of hell wherein the just were detained. so that He visited them “in place,” according to His soul, whom He visited “interiorly by grace,” according to His Godhead. Accordingly, while remaining in one part of hell, He wrought this effect in a measure in every part of hell, just as while suffering in one part of the earth He delivered the whole world by His Passion.

Reply to Objection 1. Christ, who is the Wisdom of God, penetrated to all the lower parts of the earth, not passing through them locally with His soul, but by spreading the effects of His power in a measure to them all: yet so that He enlightened only the just: because the text quoted continues: “And I will enlighten all that hope in the Lord.”

Reply to Objection 2. Sorrow is twofold: one is the suffering of pain which men endure for actual sin, according to Ps. 17:6: “The sorrows of hell encompassed me.” Another sorrow comes of hoped-for glory being deferred, according to Prov. 13:12: “Hope that is deferred afflicteth the soul”: and such was the sorrow which the holy Fathers suffered in hell, and Augustine refers to it in a sermon on the Passion, saying that “they besought Christ with tearful entreaty.” Now by descending into hell Christ took away both sorrows, yet in different ways: for He did away with the sorrows of pains by preserving souls from them, just as a physician is said to free a man from sickness by warding it off by means of physic. Likewise He removed the sorrows caused by glory deferred, by bestowing glory.

Reply to Objection 3. These words of Peter are referred by some to Christ’s descent into hell: and they explain it in this sense: “Christ preached to them who formerly were unbelievers, and who were shut up in prison”—that is, in hell—“in spirit”—that is, by His soul. Hence Damascene says (De Fide Orth. iii): “As He evangelized them who are upon the earth, so did He those who were in hell”; not in order to convert unbelievers unto belief, but to put them to shame for their unbelief, since preaching cannot be understood otherwise than as the open manifesting of His Godhead. which was laid bare before them in the lower regions by His descending in power into hell.

Augustine, however, furnishes a better exposition of the text in his Epistle to Evodius quoted above, namely, that the preaching is not to be referred to Christ’s descent

into hell, but to the operation of His Godhead, to which He gave effect from the beginning of the world. Consequently, the sense is, that “to those (spirits) that were in prison”—that is, living in the mortal body, which is, as it were, the soul’s prison-house—“by the spirit” of His Godhead “He came and preached” by internal inspirations, and from without by the admonitions spoken by the righteous: to those, I say, He preached “which had been some time incredulous,” i.e. not believing in the preaching of Noe, “when they waited for the patience of God,” whereby the chastisement of the Deluge was put off: accordingly (Peter) adds: “In the days of Noe, when the Ark was being built.”

Reply to Objection 4. The expression “Abraham’s bosom” may be taken in two senses. First of all, as implying that restfulness, existing there, from sensible pain; so

that in this sense it cannot be called hell, nor are there any sorrows there. In another way it can be taken as implying the privation of longed-for glory: in this sense it has the character of hell and sorrow. Consequently, that rest of the blessed is now called Abraham’s bosom, yet it is not styled hell, nor are sorrows said to be now in Abraham’s bosom.

Reply to Objection 5. As Gregory says (Moral. xiii): “Even the higher regions of hell he calls the deepest hell. . . For if relatively to the height of heaven this darksome air is infernal, then relatively to the height of this same air the earth lying beneath can be considered as infernal and deep. And again in comparison with the height of the same earth, those parts of hell which are higher than the other infernal mansions, may in this way be designated as the deepest hell.”