

# Divine Energies: The Consuming Fire and the Beatific Vision

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**Abstract:** I argue that a comprehensive ontological assessment of the beatific vision suggests that an individual's experience of God's face is not merely dependent on a revelation of the divine energies, but that it requires a particular mode of reception on the part of the blessed individual grounded in the reality of their faith; lacking faith, what would otherwise be experienced as the blessed vision of God is instead received as a torturous punishment. Therefore, I contend that the beatific vision is one of two possible phenomena resultant from seeing God's face; the other is more commonly labeled "hellfire." Consequently, the often-assumed bifurcated landscape of the Afterlife (into a Heaven suffused with God's presence and a Hell deprived of it) must be reassessed.

**Keywords:** Heaven, Hell, Eschatology, Faith, Divine Energy

The doctrine of the beatific vision portends the human experience of God's beauty in glory; Augustine calls it the "reward of faith" (Augustine 22. 29), Aquinas defends it as the "final purpose" of all humanity (ST II. q.1, a.7),<sup>1</sup> and Jonathan Edwards frames it as that "wherein the eternal happiness of the saints consists" (Edwards, Sermon VIII). Contemporary theologians have described it as that which one discovers when pursuing "the transcendental ecstasies that open the world to us to their ultimate end" (Hart 2014, 290), as well as "a way to talk about the completion of God's work of reconciliation" (Strobel) and the "ultimate aesthetic experience" (Geisler 2004a, 240).

I argue that a comprehensive ontological assessment of the beatific vision suggests that an individual's experience of God's face is not merely dependent on a revelation of the divine energies, but that it requires a particular mode of reception on the part of the blessed individual grounded in the reality of their faith; lacking faith, what would otherwise be experienced as the blessed vision of God is instead received as a torturous punishment. Therefore, I contend that the beatific vision is one of two possible

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<sup>1</sup> For more on Thomas' teleological assessment of the beatific vision see ST II. q. 3. a. 8 and *Supplement* q.92, a.1.

phenomena resultant from seeing God's face; the other is more commonly labeled "hellfire." Consequently, the often-assumed bifurcated landscape of the Afterlife (into a Heaven suffused with God's presence and a Hell deprived of it) must be reassessed.

### 1. The *Ousia–Energeia* Distinction

In St. Paul's first letter to Timothy, he describes Christ as, among other things, "the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see" (1 Tim. 6:15b–16, NASB). Christians have disagreed over the nature of that "unapproachable" light, though theological convergence is found over both the functions of the divine energies and the nature of that light's approach to us in the Incarnation.

The ineffability of God's "unapproachable light" is drawn from various theological strands relating to God's otherness: unlike Creation, God the Creator remains, in the words of Martin Luther, "an inexpressible Being, above and beyond everything that may be said or thought" (Luther 1994, 542–543). Yet, God somehow is able to reveal this otherness to humanity in a genuine manner. To cross this gap, the Cappadocian Fathers developed a distinction between God's essence (*ousia*) and energies (*energeia*) such that humans can access the latter as God reveals it while the former is ultimately unknowable; as Basil says, "The energies are various, and the essence simple, but we say that we know our God from His energies, but do not undertake to approach near to his essence. His energies come down to us, but His essence remains beyond our reach." The Eastern Orthodox theologian Gregory of Palamas would apply this line of thinking to defuse the 14<sup>th</sup> century Hesychast controversy by explaining that God both "cannot be seen (in his being) and that he *can* be seen (in his operations)" (Boersma 2015, 137). Thus is the incarnation of the "unapproachable light" possible: the *ousia* remains unchanged while the *energeia* kenotically descends into Creation to dwell among us (John 1:14, Phil. 2:7).

David Bradshaw points out that one marked benefit of the *ousia–energeia* distinction is that it reminds us "that God's manifestation always takes the form of activity" (Bradshaw 2006, 291). God's *energeia* is indeed identifiable with God himself, but even the divine properties, like his power, wisdom, or goodness, "are 'merely' divine activity. God remains ineffably beyond them," in a manner which human language can only approximate (Bradshaw 2006, 291). Similar to the difference between the so-called immanent Trinity (*theologia*, or God's Trinitarian essence) and the economic Trinity (*oikonomia*, that is, God's manifestation in creation), the revelation of God's *energeia* suggests that God is authentically, but not fully, shown through his interaction with

creation because finite humans cannot fully comprehend divine infinity.<sup>2</sup> This accords well with Aquinas' theology of the divine *lumen gloriae* which empowers an individual to come, by God's grace, to understand the divine, even as "no created intellect can know God infinitely... [but only]... in proportion as it receives a greater or lesser light of glory" (ST I., q.12, a.7).<sup>3</sup> Because the *energeia* emphasizes God's own actions, this characterization of God's manifestation necessarily incorporates this consistent emphasis on divine activity.

Another advantage to God's *ousia-energeia* distinction is the preservation of the infinite "drawing-in" of the divine love. Gregory spoke of this inexhaustible discovery and ever-deeper love of God as the *epektatsis* of the divine—something that an individual receives true tastes of in the *energeia* as they perpetually seek to grow infinitely closer to God's *ousia*. Consequently, Gregory's life-defining notion of the beatific vision is driven by a happily insatiable desire such that "what makes the beatific vision glorious is that the soul revels with increasing intensity and intimacy in the infinite, ever-greater gift-giving of the invisible God who in Christ has made himself visible" (Boersma 2015, 150–151).<sup>4</sup> The beatific vision is not a momentous occasion or a once-for-all-time gift, but an eternal activity of ever-deepening relationship.

However, scripture does distinguish between different kinds of manifestations of God's activity in the world; one can argue for at least two (though, possibly three) broad categories of divine interaction with Creation: in his self-giving holiness and love, God is described as the Creator and Sustainer of all things (Gen. 1:1, Col. 1:17, Heb. 1:3),<sup>5</sup> while God's righteousness and judgment also reveal God as the Judge of sin and unholiness (Psalm 98:9, Rom. 2:5–12, 2 Cor. 5:10). In both cases—loving harmony and righteous judgment—God's activity (*energeia*) is in focus; ontologically, divine love and

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<sup>2</sup> On this point, Frances Young (2013, 396-397) explains that "Knowledge of the Trinity through God's *energeiai* breaks open the logic of human reason, challenges the notion that God, though simple, is not simply simple, and invites into an unexpected and profoundly humbling relationship of love and communion. The 'sketch' discerned in the *oikonomia* is true to the reality of God in God's own self – the gulf is there, but not unbridged, since God takes the initiative to bridge it. The reality of the divine is truly communicated through scripture, through the incarnation and through the experience of the Spirit in the life of the church."

<sup>3</sup> See also I. q.12, a.2 and I. q.12. a.6.

<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, Boersma (2015, 144) explains that "the beatific vision – which itself is true purity or perfection – always progresses. Nyssen comments, therefore, that 'the true sight of God consists in this, that the one who looks up to God never ceases in that desire'. And he adds a little later: 'This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see him.' Gregory's definition of the *visio dei* is nearly identical to his definition of purity. The pursuit of both elements of the dominical saying – purity and the vision of God – is driven by never-ending desire."

<sup>5</sup> It might be argued that Creation and Sustenance could be distinguished separately; whether one does so or not has no bearing on the remainder of this argument.

divine judgment are identical, though they are clearly distinguishable phenomenologically.

## 2. The Demography/Ontology Distinction

In this, the eschatological dimension of the *ousia–energeia* distinction (and the perpetual activity of the beatific vision) relates to the doctrine of the afterlife itself and the geography of the post–mortem landscape wherein human individuals may dwell. Traditionally, the geography of the afterlife—at least on locational models<sup>6</sup>—has long been characterized as a bifurcated landscape: the blessed dwell with God in Heaven while the damned are separated from him in Hell. However, several puzzles give metaphysical, ethical, and hermeneutical grounds for rethinking this framework into what can be called a “homogenous” construction of the afterlife.

Firstly, it is helpful to distinguish between the afterlife’s ontology and its demography: many of the recent debates over the nature of the afterlife pertain to the latter category insofar as they focus on either, a) the number of individuals who reside in a particular postmortem destination, or b) the grounds on which an individual’s postmortem destination is determined. In contrast, a sketch of the ontology of the afterlife will focus on the metaphysical nature of Heaven and Hell in themselves, apart from their inhabitants. In brief, there are three general ontological frameworks around which a doctrine of the afterlife may be mapped:

- i) The unified view that recognizes a single postmortem location wherein all individuals, both blessed and damned, will find themselves,
- ii) The commonly–assumed bifurcated view that sees Heaven and Hell as two distinct and completely disconnected locations, and
- iii) The multi–faceted view which sees one or more postmortem locations in addition to Heaven and Hell (such as Purgatory, Limbo, and the *limbus patrum*).

In short, if one takes for granted the existence of the afterlife, then the landscape of its geography will either involve one, two, or more possible elements.

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<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this argument, I am taking a locational view of the afterlife – wherein eschatological destinations, whatever they are, occupy some form of space – for granted. Although non-locational constructions, such as the social grouping model championed by Davis may ultimately coincide with the homogenous model expressed below in light of the ultimate Christian hope of embodied resurrection, their standard denial of an extended eschatological geography sets them off in at a different argumentative vector from their start. For more on issues surrounding the locational view of the afterlife, see Davis (2018) and chapter eight of Hudson (2005).

Of these three frameworks, the generally Protestant (ii) holds the largest historical influence, often being assumed without debate even outside of its denominational bounds; Heaven and Hell are seen as ontologically distinct spaces characterized by their relationship with the presence of God: in the words of Norman Geisler, “Heaven is the abode of righteous human souls and angelic spirits in God’s presence” (2004b, 313), while “Hell is the other direction from God, eternal separation from Him” (2004b, 338). As described above, this self-given presence of God amounts to the *energeia*; the further one departs from said energies, the further one descends into the sufferings of Hell.

For many, framework (ii) functions with total bivalency: there are no additional options in between Heaven and Hell—one either simply is or is not in the presence of God. However, within the more complicated Roman Catholic tradition, framework (iii) suggests that the *energeia* is not simply an eschatological switch that is either ‘on’ or ‘off,’ but functions instead in descending gradations through at least five separate postmortem locations;<sup>7</sup> only in Heaven can one behold and participate in the beatific vision, consequently, all other species of postmortem locations retain some element of hellishness insofar as the beatific vision is unavailable. Because the inhabitants of these subdivisions of Hell are not all treated the same way (for such is dependent on the location) at least some (such as the limbo of the children) are thought to still experience shades of God’s presence, if not the full revelation of the beatific vision.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, this multi-faceted view of the afterlife sees a multiplicity of postmortem locations, the *energeia* as radiating (and gradually diminishing in distance) throughout the full landscape, and Hell constituting the furthest distance possible from God.

The amount of that possible distance is puzzling: following from the classical conception of God as the only necessarily existent being (and the corollary idea that all of Creation thus depends on God for its continued, contingent existence), complete separation from God becomes impossible on the pain of stepping into non-existence. Such is precisely the argument for so-called annihilationism: just as the lamp is extinguished once the electricity to it is cut, so too will an individual cease to exist once her connection to the ground of her existence (Col. 1:17) is severed. If Hell truly consists of separation from the *energeia* of God, whether that plays out as described in either (ii) or (iii), then Hell must simply be the extinguishing (annihilation) of the damned.

However, the Bible speaks of the phenomenology of Hell in a different manner: not only does it describe the experience of Hell being by God’s hand (Psalm 7:11, 145:20; James 4:12), but scriptural accounts abound where damnation itself is a result of God’s presence. Jesus warns the apostles in Matt. 10:28 that they should not “fear those who

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<sup>7</sup> For an overview of these five varieties of Hell (*sheol*, *gehenna*, purgatory, the limbo of the children, and the limbo of the Fathers) see Pitstick (2007, 14-18).

<sup>8</sup> The doctrine that Christ preached to the dead in some, but not all, portions of the afterlife space indicates this, as described in sections 632-637 of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2012).

kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell," something demonstrated in Revelation 14:10–11 when the damned

drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and *in the presence of the Lamb*. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever,

A passage with clear ties to historical descriptions of hellacious suffering (Isa. 34:10).

The primary passage that would appear to describe Hell as separation (and, therefore, metaphysical annihilation) from God is 2 Thessalonians 1:9, where those who do not know God "will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (Fudge 2001, 249). However, Charles Quarles (1997) points out that the key preposition in this phrase is ambiguous in its reference and often carries a causal suggestion, not simply a reference to location. If this ambiguity is amended in a different, valid construction, then the passage would read that the damned "will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, *that comes from* the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."<sup>9</sup> As Quarles (1997, 211) explains

eternal destruction does not consist of the Lord's evacuation but of his confrontation with the unrepentant sinner," which would explain why the damned are warned in scripture to "enter the rock and hide in the dust from the terror of the Lord and from the splendor of His majesty (Isa. 2:10).<sup>10</sup>

Such passages will lie at the core of any defense of the homogenous construction of the afterlife outlined by framework (i). However, the general focus of the debate about the afterlife bypasses such ontological concerns, typically assuming the position of framework (ii), to focus instead on demographic issues about the inhabitants of the various postmortem spaces.

For example, the recent update to the *Four Views on Hell* volume of the Counterpoints series focuses not on Hell itself, but on the reasonings for which individuals are sentenced to Hell as well as Hell's ultimate population. At their core, the metaphysical differences between the frameworks labeled "eternal conscious torment," "terminal punishment," "universalism," and the "purgatorial" view are essentially irrelevant: each of the four paints Hell as an ontologically separate space from Heaven, with the argumentative emphasis focusing on the inhabitants of the spaces and their relationships with God. If one wishes to debate whether Hell is filled with people in

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<sup>9</sup> Robin Parry makes this same point in Macdonald (2012, 152) as do the margin notes in some Bibles.

<sup>10</sup> My thanks go to Ben R. Crenshaw for this reference and helpful discussions surrounding it.

conscious torment for either no time, for a limited time, or for all time, one is not debating the nature of the space wherein said torment is supposed to be possible; consequently, although Preston Sprinkle (2016, 11) states in the introduction that all of the book's contributors "agree that hell exists, but they differ on what this hell is like" this is actually not the case. In reality, the contributors have an identical view of what Hell itself is like, they simply disagree on the demographics of its population and the conditions for which one deserves to go there.

### 3. The Homogenous Afterlife and the Beatific Vision

To emphasize the ontology of the afterlife is to focus on the direct manifestation of God's *energeia* within whatever amounts to postmortem space. Both frameworks (ii) and (iii) posit that it is in some way possible to be either gradually or abruptly separated from God's *energeia*, with hellacious suffering as the necessary result. In particular, framework (ii) must explain either a) how Hell can maintain its composition while being utterly separated from the ground of all existence, or b) how God's *energeia* is still active there, but in a fundamentally different manner that shares no properties with the ontologically distinct location of Heaven. In contrast, the far simpler framework of option (i) suggests that God's *energeia* is ontologically unified (in a manner consistent with other elements of classical theism), but phenomenologically appropriated in subjectively different ways by the blessed (as the beatific vision) and the damned (as the fires of Hell).

This phenomenological distinction has long been a centerpiece of Eastern Orthodox theology, appearing prominently in the writings of Gregory, Basil, Maximus the Confessor, and others. In particular, the aesthetic theology of Maximus develops what Gibson (2008, 50) calls a "cosmic aesthetic" which frames all of creation as refracting the unapproachable light of God in its very being; insofar as someone chooses to harmoniously participate in this loving *energeia*, Maximus argues that they position themselves ever-deeper within the beatific vision.<sup>11</sup> For those who choose otherwise, they still find themselves as a part of the universal redemption of creation (Eph. 1:10, Col. 1:20), but that exposure to God is experienced as judgment; as Maximus (Number Twelve, 116) says,

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<sup>11</sup> Summarizing this, Loudovikos (2014, 30) explains that in "Greek patristic tradition heaven or hell are born from the personal and free ('in accordance with nature' or 'contrary to nature') choice alone of creatures, not from created nature which is universally resurrected – and precisely for this reason heaven and hell are active realizations of freedom, not simply decisions of passive reward or punishment on the part of God. Heaven is the free choice ('in accordance with nature') of the dialogical and participatory development of created nature in Christ, for all eternity, as 'ever-moving stasis', according to Maximus, of the creature within God – whereas hell is the free choice ('contrary to nature') of refusal of the dialogical liberation of nature in the absolute meaning of the Incarnation."

God, it is said, is the Sun of righteousness (cf. Mal. 4:2), and the rays of His supernal goodness shine down on all men alike. The soul is wax if it cleaves to God, but clay if it cleaves to matter. Which it does depends upon its own will and purpose. Clay hardens in the sun, while wax grows soft. Similarly, every soul that, despite God's admonitions, deliberately cleaves to the material world, hardens like clay and drives itself to destruction, just as Pharaoh did (cf. Exod. 7:13). But every soul that cleaves to God is softened like wax and, receiving the impress and stamp of divine realities, it becomes 'in spirit the dwelling-place of God' (Eph. 2:22).

And all of this takes place within the simple geography of a unified postmortem landscape.

Similarly, the American theologian Jonathan Edwards developed a theology of the beatific vision that carries certain phenomenological assumptions. Popularly known for his sermons on God's judgmental wrath, Edwards' theology was notably theocentric, including his doctrine of the afterlife: "The eternal heaven is nothing so but the divine nature itself. The only heaven that is unalterable is the state of God's own infinite and unchangeable glory . . . the eternal abode of the blessed Trinity, and of the happiness and glory they have in one another" (Gibson 2008, 75). Happy to distinguish the immanent and the economic Trinity, Edwards' developed a doctrine of the beatific vision wherein the blessed "come to participate, in a real way, in the immanent life of God, but this participation is mediated christologically" (Strobel 2011, 181). Because Edwards agrees that this *energeia* of God is pure action, the experience of this participation in the life of God amounts to a perfect experience of love; as Edwards says, "This very manifestation that God will make of himself that will cause the beatifical vision will be an act of love in God. It will be from the exceeding love of God to them that he will give them this vision which will add an immense sweetness to it" (Sermon VIII). For Edwards, to revel in the beatific vision is precisely to experience the energies of God as divine love.

However, Edwards recognized that God's *energeia* also sometimes manifests as righteous judgment—even as it remains the same divine energy:

The Scripture uses the same way of arguing to prove the dreadfulness of God's anger, from the greatness of his Being and majesty and power; and therefore we may be sure that the argument is good...Where there is evidently an argument implied, that the punishment and destruction of unbelievers will be exceedingly dreadful, because it comes from the presence of the Lord and because it is inflicted by such mighty power (Strachan and Sweeney 2010, 67–68).

Just as in the case of Nadab and Abihu, who were destroyed by a divine act for coming into the tabernacle (Lev. 10:1–2), the presence of God carries an inherent possibility of



danger for the contingent humans who depend on it for their continued existence. By musing on the implications of passages like Hebrews 10:31, Ezekiel 22:14, Psalm 90:11, and the aforementioned 2 Thessalonians 1:9, Edwards noted that a manifestation of God's energies, though wonderful for some, is horrible for others.

This is all to argue that the beatific vision is not the guaranteed manner of experiencing God's *energeia*, for it depends on certain perceptual conditions on the part of the individual; for those with the necessary quality (or qualities), the full revelation of the *energeia* of God manifests as what Edwards called the "happifying" beatific vision (Sermon IX); for those who lack faith, the *energeia* manifests as God's hellacious judgment.

#### 4. The Element of Faith

The final question concerns the nature of the determining factor which grounds this phenomenological distinction about the *energeia* of God; the Christian tradition has long determined faith to be that which separates the blessed from the damned, both in this life and the next.

Repeatedly, scripture warns of the possibility that the activity of God might be received in more than one way depending on certain subjective qualities within an individual: for example, Paul cautions the believers in Corinth to treat the sacramental experience of the Eucharist with the utmost respect, for those who take it "unworthily" risk physical consequences like illness and death (1 Cor. 11:30). The most simple reading of this warning suggests that it would be possible for two people—one who possesses faith and one who does not—to share a blessed piece of communion bread and not experience the same results (if one is struck with punishment and the other is not). Similarly, Peter's water-walking experience on the Sea of Galilee offers another example: the ontological presence of Christ never wavered; it was merely Peter's own subjective faith which determined whether he was able to draw near to Jesus above the waves or not (Matt. 14:28–31).

Scripturally, faith is defined as the "assurance of things hoped for" and "the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1), a description that accords well with Anthony Kenney's less poetic notion that faith is a special category of belief "in something as revealed by God; belief in a proposition on the word of God" (Kenny 1992, 47). Faith is not simply belief about something, but rather trust in the person herself; as James points out, even demons believe *that* God exists, they simply shudder rather than affirming his supreme position (James 2:19).

When Paul argues that faith is the mechanism through which a believer receives God's grace (Eph. 2:8–9), he centralizes faith as a necessary property for understanding an individual's relationship with God. Debates abound about the nature, duration, presentation, and origin of faith, but scripture is explicit on at least one point: without

faith, it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). If faith is the determining factor for how God's *energeia* is to be experienced by an individual, then the phenomenological difference between the blessed and the damned will fulfill Paul's reminder to the Philippians to:

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for *the faith of the gospel*; in no way alarmed by your opponents—*which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you*, and that too, from God. (Phil. 1:27–28, emphasis added).

Altogether, faith could easily function as the feature that separates the sheep from the goats in this unified eternal framework.

In his introductory notes to the book of Romans, Martin Luther defined faith as a “living, bold trust in God’s grace, so certain of God’s favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it.” Much like how the inhabitants of Jericho experienced destruction at the hands of Joshua’s army, yet Rahab’s trust in Joshua’s mercy saved herself and her family (Joshua 6:24–25, Hebrews 11:31), the dying believer’s trust in the mercy of God’s presence would save her, even as that same presence would destroy an unbeliever.

On a related note, it may well be the case that this characterization of faith would preclude any possibility of postmortem salvation (on something like Hick’s requirement of epistemic distance for true faith), however, the scriptural description of faith as a “gift” would suggest that it might still be divinely given to individuals in the afterlife. If Hick’s justification of divine hiddenness is right,<sup>12</sup> then post-mortem salvation within the homogenous afterlife (wherein, for better or worse, God is no longer hidden) would be inexplicable; however, if faith is always and only a gift, as in the views of Luther,<sup>13</sup> Calvin,<sup>14</sup> and others meditating on biblical passages like Romans 10:8, Galatians 3:8, and

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<sup>12</sup> John Hick (2010, 281) argues that “God must be a hidden deity, veiled by His creation. He must be knowable, but only by a mode of knowledge that involves a free personal response on man’s part, this response consisting in an uncompelled interpretative activity whereby we experience the world as mediating the divine presence. Such a need for a human faith-response will secure for man the only kind of freedom that is possible for him in relation to God, namely cognitive freedom, carrying with it the momentous possibility of being either aware or unaware of his Maker.”

<sup>13</sup> As Luther (2005, 238) explains “...no one should understand faith as coming out of his own powers as many do. When they hear of faith they consider it as something they receive by an act of their own will. In this way they credit themselves with what alone belongs to God since it is purely a divine work to have true faith.”

<sup>14</sup> “We shall now have a full definition of faith if we say that it is a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favor toward us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, and revealed to our minds, and sealed on our hearts, by the Holy Spirit” (Calvin, Sec. 3.2.7).

Ephesians 2:8–9, then we should hesitate before ruling out God’s ability to bestow such a gift at the divine pleasure. This is simply to say: such uncertainties require further consideration of this corollary issue, though it is beyond the scope of this article to do so.<sup>15</sup>

## 5. The Consuming Fire and the Beatific Vision

Altogether, I have argued that if the *energeia* of God has but a single composition, then the geography of the afterlife is most easily mapped as a unified landscape where both the repentant and unrepentant are metaphysically reconciled to God, but only the former group enjoys the experience.

For the blessed, the *energeia* amounts to the life–defining experience of the ever–deepening beatific vision in the presence of God; for the damned, the same *energeia* constitutes active punishment in Hell—which is the same presence of God. Ontologically, God’s *energeia* never changes, though it is phenomenologically received simultaneously in disparate ways. Consequently, both the love and judgment of God are demonstrated through the same device within the homogenous arena that is simultaneously Heaven and Hell; as the writer of Hebrews comments (in Heb. 12:28), “Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Additional questions include details like the manner and degree to which the blessed and damned interact within the postmortem landscape.

<sup>16</sup> My thanks to David Worsley and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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