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Fire and Brimstone: Analyzing Evangelicalism's Burning of The Bible in Favor of Literature

By

Kylee R. Phalen

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the

Honors-in-Discipline English Program

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East Tennessee State University

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Date

ABSTRACT

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By

Kylee R. Phalen

As a cultural staple, the Christian faith has been a defining characteristic of the United States for generations. Religion has moved from the spiritual and become integral to many parts of this society's social gatherings, artistic outlets, and even businesses. Often rooting itself in conservative values and interpretations of The Bible, Evangelicalism's beliefs regarding damnation and hell contradicts its *sola scriptura* theological view. Yet, with The Bible's near silence on hellish matters when looked at as a whole, the human need to have these gaps filled allowed for literary portrayals of hell and explanations of damnation to become part of this subsect of Christianity. Lining sermons with bits and pieces of Faustus's lost soul, a new tradition was born. Filling churches with paintings of unique layers of hell from Dante's *Inferno*, this tradition took on new life. This thesis analyzes how Evangelicalism has bypassed The Bible in favor of *Doctor Faustus* and *Inferno* as well as how Christianity in the United States influences literature and biblical interpretations.

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DEDICATION

To those who stay at the table out of love and feed their hunger for knowledge by challenging past precedents. Come break bread and drink wine.

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I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the support and encouragement I have received while writing this thesis.

I would first like to thank my father. As this thesis caps my undergraduate journey, you have never failed to be my biggest encourager. Thank you for always believing in me. Thank you for encouraging me to ask questions about my faith. Thank you for pushing me to think outside of the limits of the hell others taught me. Thank you for reminding me that your pride for me comes from who I am, not what I accomplish.

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Non aspettar mio dir più ne mio cenno:

Libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio,

e fallo for a non fare a suo senno.

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Chapter I

Introduction

As one hesitantly steps into the church, a trampled flyer reading “Judgement House: A Look into Hell” can be seen on the hardwood floor. The dim lighting makes it difficult to continue onward, and the sharp sound of fearful tears fills the building. There is no turning back now. Visitors go room to room with their guide, enthralled by each scene being acted out. The guide shines a light toward a door and leads the way to the following scene. After crossing the threshold of the next entryway, the characters of the judgement house deny God as they continue choosing worldly pleasure. Immediately after, characters face an often violent and tragic death. Car accidents. Suicides. Shootings. Shoes stick to the floor as fake blood pools on the church’s gymnasium. Visitors watch as teenagers from the local youth group, their own friends, children, and classmates, are cast into to hell for all eternity. The damned cling to the visitors’ shoes, begging these new faces to warn their family that the lake of fire is as real as their flesh.

Horrified by the scenes behind them, visitors are guided to a quieter, calmer room. The pastor clings to his Bible as he begins his altar call, asking who would like to give their soul to Satan. The silence is cut by muffled sobs. No one responds. “Who would like to instead invite Jesus into their heart today?” A young adult steps forward as church staff pray for his salvation. They recite the Sinner’s Prayer, and tears stream down the newly born-again Christian’s face. More and more step forward, and the process begins again.

These new believers share their faith by standing at street corners and university campuses to pass out gospel tracts that ask, “What if you die tonight?” Often unbeknownst to

them, these individuals are moved by biblically influenced literature that dates back hundreds of years. Evangelicalism fills in biblical gaps and burns The Bible to instead present Dante Alighieri's hell from *Inferno* and Christopher Marlowe's idea of damnation in *Doctor Faustus*. Evangelicalism's ideas and interpretations break past geographical borders.

Though it can be found anywhere, Evangelicalism finds a home in Appalachia. As this Thesis is being written in Northeast Tennessee, it offers an inside perspective on the most prominent branch of Christianity in the area. While many denominations and schools of belief can be explored, Evangelicalism is being analyzed due to the prominence it has in Appalachia. In doing so, others can continue this research by providing a fuller picture of the effect that literature has on Christianity, perhaps in other parts of the country with different texts. However, these Great Smoky Mountains are far older and wiser than the works of literature being explored. These mountains have seen countless generations and their new, vibrant ideas. Today, the Appalachian mountains watch this pattern continue as its Evangelical inhabitants consume The Bible, *Doctor Faustus*, and *Inferno* to create a new understanding of Christianity.

Chapter II

Devil, Demons, and Damnation: An Overview of The Bible's Hellish Accounts

“Him that had the power of death”

-New King James Version, Hebrews 2:14

The Bible's relatively few details regarding Satan, demons, damnation, and hell allow for even more interpretations than there are translations. The Bible creates a both marvelous and intimidating landscape for readers to navigate. Due to this, my thesis presents a guided and pinpointed summary of these topics. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I will discuss a more literal viewpoint that forgoes metaphorical interpretations. In addition, many of the biblical passages used were given by the evangelicals interviewed when asked what verses they point to in order to form their beliefs.

By having this background, readers will be able to appropriately explore the often-fundamentalist theology of Evangelicalism alongside Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*. Despite the accompaniment of these literary works, Evangelicalism begins with the most influential text in the English language: The Bible.

Satan, the First of the Damned

The Bible discusses the transformation that Lucifer, the light-bearer fallen from grace, has as he goes from angel to enemy. Once with God, the book of Isaiah depicts this when saying, “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations...I [Lucifer] will ascend above the heights of the clouds;

I will be like the most High” (*King James Version*, 12,14). The reason behind the fall of Satan and the punishment of his transgressions are given briefly. Cast into the fiery pits of hell, a home of torment that both evangelicals and Dantisti study in their readings, Satan finds a new dwelling place, a new beginning. Believing himself to be worthy of the throne God holds, his pride eternally ruins him. Here, the story of Lucifer and his disgraced brethren begins.

Demons

Revelation informs readers of the origin of the demons dragged down with the devil. Once angels dwelling within the confines of heaven, they have been banished alongside their new leader. Revelation says, “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (12:9). Notably, the angels cast out of heaven are referred to as “his angels.” By moving authority over these beings from God to Satan, the transition from angel to demon occurs. Though brief, the power that these two short words hold cannot be underestimated. In service of the devil, demons now play a new role, one of mischief and malevolence.

Temptation and its Power

In the mortal plains of Earth, Satan’s dominion over the humans occupying this space allows him to exert influence over their momentary desires. 1 Peter shows the very nature of Satan’s sway in saying, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (5:8). In this book, a poetic picture of Lucifer’s intention is laid out, contrasting the gruesome nature of his objective. Using a metaphor

of predator versus prey encourages readers to remain ever observant of the tactics that Lucifer could use to pull them astray. As one is unable to defend themselves against the gnashing teeth and swiftness of a famished lion, the only option is to run from the traps placed before oneself. Constantly on the hunt for his meal, the devil prowls for his next victim, ready to pounce.

Not to be underestimated, even Jesus Christ had been nearly enticed by Satan's silver tongue. The book of Matthew states, "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil...And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread" (4:1,3). Showing that even the son of God can become entranced by Satan's slick words, these verses demonstrate the power that the devil holds. Not only does he have the capacity to lead humans (including Jesus Christ) astray, but he has the desire to do so.

Claiming the title "the tempter" demonstrates the importance of this role in the overall work of Lucifer. 1 Thessalonians says, "For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain" (3:5). Relishing in the temptation of humanity, the devil becomes the tempter. As he is known by this title among many, he becomes seen as something more than a rebellious, willful child of God. He has taken on a role opposite to the "most high." This elevation of Satan and his abilities through the means of temptation forces readers to admire the power, albeit biblically limited, that he possesses.

Damnation and Salvation

Though Lucifer may be able to tempt others, his power meets its limits. As he is unable to separate others from the salvation given to them, Lucifer finds himself overpowered by the

god he rebelled against. In the book of Romans, the text says, “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:38-39). Even demons—even angels—cannot interfere with someone’s salvation. Despite the role as fellow “tempters” that has been bestowed upon them by Lucifer, they cannot alter the course of salvation. With this limitation, it is not possible for Satan or his demons to take away anyone’s salvation, no matter how tempted they may be.

Further biblical evidence is given for Satan’s frailty in redemptive matters. The book of John agrees with Romans in saying, “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (10:28). Though this verse uses the word “man” in the King James Version, other translations such as New King James Version and English Standard Version use “one” and “anyone” in its place (BibleGateway). With a new translation comes a new interpretation of these verses. With the consideration of the translational adjustment to “one,” Satan and his demons become included in this verse. Having no authority to bring damnation upon any human, Satan’s dominion over humanity finds itself unable to break this boundary.

Defining the Biblical Hell

Though once damned, there is no turning back. As souls find themselves in hell, punishment for their transgressions against God begins. The book of Matthew touches on hell when saying, “And these shall go into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (10:28). Without salvation, souls face the “everlasting punishment” of hell, forever tortured. It is important to note the cognitive recognition of the experience provided by hell. By interpreting

hell as literal place of punishment, evangelicals believe it to be a horrendous and devastating place.

The Oxford Companion to the Bible offers insight into hell and this interpretation when saying,

When ethical viewpoints are involved, however, [hell] is said to be a place of punishment. Korah and his companions...were burned in fire (Num. 16.31-35). Psalmists and prophets threaten the godless with destruction in hell (Ps. 9.17; 31:17; 55.15; Isa. 5.14; 28.15, 18; 66.24), and wisdom teachers warned the youth to avoid hell (Prov. 7.27; 15.24). (Metzger and Coogan 278)

Here, it shown that there is a well-established precedent for interpreting The Bible's description of hell as place to punish the damned. In considering that religion often centers itself upon ethics, this interpretation becomes more prominent. The image of fire that often comes up is used to deter individuals from a life of immorality and disbelief. By giving into Satan, one is trapped in hell with him.

The Bible describes the physical attributes of hell in few places, but one common theme ties all these together: fire. Two accounts in the gospels demonstrate this commonality. The gospel of Mark says, "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched: where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (9:43-44). Once again stating that the banishment to hell is eternal, these flames live forever. Additionally, "the worm" continues in this pain, unable to be relieved by the gentle release of death. Souls find no rest here.

For the tortured and torn, the pain continues. The gospel of Matthew offers further insight when saying, "So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the

wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (49-50). The sounds of suffering echo throughout this space, adding to the horrific scenes being portrayed. Damned souls screech out in the midst of their struggle.

Once again, retribution returns with another illustration of eternal flames. The final book of The Bible warns, “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). A list of wrongdoers and offenders find themselves trapped in hell, burning, hoping for an end that will never come. While eternal flames continually come up in the few areas where hell is discussed, little else is mentioned. Biblical silence pushes the human imagination to fill these gaps and others.

Filling in the Gaps

The hellish gaps begin at the origin of separation: Lucifer. Though little is given about Lucifer, the fallen angels that follow him become even more cryptic through their meager mentions. The first to be damned, their role in challenging the salvation of human souls is what is best described biblically.

Unable to be plucked from the hand of God, salvation appears to be relatively straightforward without much, if any, illumination needed (Romans 10:28). However, other verses muddy the waters when saying things such as how God can graft a lost soul in again (Romans 11:23). With little clarification, confusion arises. If one cannot be plucked from God’s hand, how can they be grafted in *again*? Can none be plucked from the hand, but instead jump of

their own volition? The minute textual evidence clarifying these matters continues to leave gaps on the nature of salvation and damnation, the casting of a soul into hell.

The Bible's descriptions of hell, Satan, and damnation are quite limited. The parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man provides an extended discussion on hell, only fire and the term "place of torment" are used to describe the nature of hell (Luke 16.24). Images of fire describing hell appear throughout The Bible. However, forms of punishment and detailed landscape are left out. Little else besides fire can be found on the nature of hell or its agonizing nature. Though offering a frightening description, much of hell is left to the imagination of the reader. Potentially, the most terrifying aspect is the vagueness that morphs to one's specific fears.

Through these gaps, Evangelicalism draws upon literature to create a complete picture. Ideas of damnation conflict with one another, so the evangelical movement of the Christian Church adopts theology presented by Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* in understanding the nature of salvation and damnation. Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* now works alongside The Bible to provide a fuller illustration of the lake of fire and its torture. A human need to have these gaps filled allows for literary portrayals of hell, demonology, and damnation to become a key part of this trans-denominational Christian movement.

Chapter III

What Began with Eve: Marlowe's Rewriting of Damnation

“Mountains and hills, come, come and fall on me, and hide me from the heavy wrath of heaven.”

-Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*

In his sixteenth-century Christian tragedy, Christopher Marlowe builds upon the ideas of demonology and damnation presented in The Bible. Perhaps left unsatisfied with The Bible's lack of details, Marlowe picks up the pen and scribes his own. A new picture is painted by working between the gaps of The Bible; lost in the pages, readers can nearly taste and smell the world around them. They feel their own feet burn as Faustus is cast into the pits of hell for his betrayal of God.

Bored with the monotony of divinity, Faustus becomes enamored with magic and the promise of power that the damned book of necromancy whispers. Grabbing the leather spine, Faustus is captivated by the art of dark magic. In doing so, Evil Angel tempts Faustus and solidifies its place as a demon. Scholars such as Cosmo Corfield confirm this when saying, “Marlowe, of course, does something similar when he situates Faustus' conscience between a good angel and a bad angel—in other words—a Holy Guardian angel and a Malevolent Demon” (34). Evil Angel continues to entice Faustus with the gift of authority when it says, “Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky, / Lord and commander of these elements” (1.1.76-77). This demon understands, better than most, the temptation to become as powerful as the almighty. Cast from heaven, this fallen angel stood beside Lucifer as he reckoned with God for the very same reason. There is no greater temptation than to become as powerful as the almighty. Even shown in the

first book of The Bible, Eve damns humanity as she partakes in the forbidden fruit in hopes of acquiring this power and knowledge herself (Genesis 3:4-6).

Falling prey to pride, Faustus sinks his teeth into the sweet fruit of necromancy, following in the footsteps of humanity's mother: Eve. Juice drips from his stained lips as he sells his soul to the devil for the price of his salvation. Faustus is aware of what he is doing. He says to himself, "When all is done, divinity is best. Jerome's Bible, Faustus; view it well" (1.1.36-37). Well-versed in theological matters, Faustus understands the cost of his decision. He knows what must come. Having great knowledge of The Bible himself, Marlowe is unable to continue this work while following what is biblically presented. It is here where Marlowe lays the groundwork for evangelical beliefs of damnation.

While some may not interpret Faustus's end as damnation, scholars find validity in this stance. The anonymous author of *The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus* says,

It is written, 'No man can serve two masters,' and 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.' But Faustus threw all this in the wind and made his soul of no estimation, regarding more his worldly pleasure than the joys to come. Therefore at the day of judgement there is no hope of his salvation. (183)

This commentary is taken from the 1592 edition of this legend, the earliest English translation by Thomas Orwin. The understanding that Faustus's damnation is final and concrete dates all the way back to the first English translation. Even Faustus's knowledge of the Bible and Christianity cannot save him from his fate. This interpretation sets the groundwork for Evangelical beliefs of damnation.

Though not presented in The Bible, *Doctor Faustus* shows that a Christian, one believing in God and practicing Christianity, can be damned. Did Romans 11:23 not say that God grafts one in on the basis of belief? Faustus's assistant Wagner demonstrates this when he offers to teach Robin the stableman the dark art of transfiguration. Robin responds by saying, "How! A Christian fellow to a dog, or a cat, a mouse, or a rat" (1.4.62-63). One might counter this by saying that while Wagner dabbles in dark magic, he is never shown selling his soul to Satan. Surely, this must mean one can practice dark magic without sacrificing their soul. Faustus himself shows the audience otherwise. Though able to conjure the demon Mephistopheles, Faustus does not gain his power until he gives away his soul for eternal damnation. This is shown when Faustus signs a deed in his own blood, saying, "Lo, Mephistopheles, for the love of thee / I cut mine arm, and with my proper blood, / assure my soul to be great Lucifer's, / Chief lord and regent of perpetual night" (2.1.53-56). Satan now possesses ownership of Faustus's soul. In turn, Faustus is given the ability to perform dark magic. A conversation between Mephistopheles and Faustus shows this exchange as follows:

FAUSTUS. Speak, Mephistopheles; what means this show?

MEPHISTOPHOLES. Nothing, Faustus, but to delight thy mind withal
And to show thee what magic can perform.

FAUSTUS. But may I rise up spirits when I please?

MEPHISTOPHOLES. Ay, Faustus, and do greater things than these.

FAUSTUS. Then there's enough for a thousand souls.

Here, Mephistopheles, receive this scroll,

A deed of gift of body and of soul,

But yet conditionally that thou perform

All articles prescribed between us.

MEPHISTOPHOLES. Faustus, I swear by hell and Lucifer

To effect all promises between us made. (2.1.82-92)

Here, the relationship between the ability to practice dark magic and the damnation of a soul is solidified. Understanding this, the audience can read between the lines and conclude that Wagner must have also sold his soul. In doing so, he gains the ability to practice dark arts. He states that he has the capacity to lead others in his dark ways, even if they are Christians and have their soul in God's hands. Yet with this, they shall have their soul taken from God and given to Lucifer in exchange for the same power, contradicting Romans 10:28. As is shown, one can be plucked from the hand of God and placed into the claws of Lucifer, facing damnation for all eternity.

Yet once his soul is handed over, *Doctor Faustus* makes the case that hell is inevitable. While Romans 11:23 states that salvation is given on the basis of belief, Christopher Marlowe says otherwise. Knowing the fate that lies before him in less than an hour's time, Faustus finally understands the magnitude of his decision. Hell is coming. There is no delaying it, no way to escape Satan. Frenzied, Faustus says, "O, I'll leap up to heaven. Who pulls me down? / One drop of blood will save me. O, my Christ" (5.3.144-145). Faustus is forsaken. Faustus is forgotten. It appears the blood Jesus shed was never meant to grace his skin, only to taunt him as the metallic fragrance fills the air. Faustus believes, calls upon, and fervently proclaims Jesus as *his* Christ. He does all that his religious text, the one that he earnestly studied, beckoned him to do. His cries fall upon the deaf ears of God.

Before Faustus even begs, pulls on the robe of Christ, and cries out, he feels the nails of Lucifer dig into him. Faustus knows any efforts are in vain, but still he tries. Attempting to comfort him, Faustus's friend says:

FIRST SCHOLAR: Yet, Faustus, look up to heaven; remember God's mercies are
Infinite

FAUSTUS: But Faustus' offence can ne'er be pardoned. (5.2.13-15)

Even in the text, the discrepancies between The Bible's portrayal of salvation and Marlowe's are acknowledged. The scholar looks to verses such as Romans 8:38-39. Here it is stated that nothing can separate one from the love of God, even angels. Though a lovely thought, the fallen angels of Marlowe's Christianity sever the tie between God and his children with the greatest ease. Evangelicalism uses the new rules of salvation to proselytize others in this haunting approach to damnation.

Chapter IV

Damned if I Do, Damned if I Don't: Marlovian Salvation

“The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown.”

-H.P. Lovecraft, “Supernatural Horror in Literature”

Doctor Faustus provides the influence only art can as it impacts Evangelical Christianity. A fearful man, Faustus is aware of the end that awaits him. He is aware of the righteousness he sacrificed. He is aware of his inexorable damnation. To evangelicals, Faustus's life presents a cautionary tale of forsaking the almighty. The power of his story influences biblical interpretations. This is shown in evangelical tools such as gospel tracts. Marlowe's spin on salvation over The Bible's original statements is demonstrated in this instrument. Fighting off a Faustian fate, evangelicals proselytize and sing Marlowe's perspective from the pulpit to even universities.

On college campuses across the United States, evangelical preachers can be found standing on steps and stools as they share the necessity of salvation. Rock Heritage Baptist Church of Kingsport, Tennessee, made its way to a local campus to do the very same. Handing out gospel tracts to students entering the library, they mimicked Marlowe's perception of salvation. Bits of this author's work can be found in quotes from the gospel tract. However, the cover's title that asks, “Would you like a new start?” brings to mind the new start in Faustus's life—his pursuit of power through necromancy. Presenting a dichotomy, this “new start” can be towards savior or Satan. Understanding the path that many take—the path Faustus himself

took—this tract works to guide others away from the same demise. Understanding what led to his salvation, this tract says, “All people are searching for something, for someone to fill the emptiness within. Some try religion; others try pleasure. All try something” (Would you like a new start?). As Faustus searched for power, he lost his soul.

Looking further, other gospel tracts more overtly draw from *Doctor Faustus*. A tract opening with “If I die tonight, where will I spend eternity?” presents the very same scenario that Faustus found himself in. The tract says:

Everlasting punishment for me? Can it be possible that I’ve been intensely busy with the cares, debts, money-making and fun surrounding me and have left God out? Oh, how blind I’ve been! I’ve given my youth, my talents, my thoughts and my ambitions for things that are only passing, and I’ve neglected the most important thing of all — my soul’s salvation! (If I die tonight, where will I spend eternity?)

Faustus, giving his own soul’s salvation for power, is reflected in this gospel tract’s statement. The speaker notes their pursuit of pleasure and comes to regret the decisions in their life that led to the loss of their salvation. Faustus shows this same regret when he says, “And what wonders I have done, all Germany can witness, yea, all the world—for which Faustus hath lost...heaven, the seat of God, the throne of the blessed, the kingdom of joy, and must remain in hell for ever. Hell, O, hell, for ever!” (5.2.46-51). Faustus, much like the speaker of the gospel tract, recognizes that eternal damnation is quickly approaching. He sees all that he has sacrificed and finds it to be unworthy of the cost, much like the gospel tract.

Additionally, this same tract uses a similar thought process with an example. The gospel tract says:

After a life spent pleasing himself, Sir Francis Newport, the noted English atheist, lay dying. He exclaimed, ‘That there is a God, I know, because I continually feel the effect of His wrath. That there is a hell, I am equally certain. Oh that I were to lie a thousand years upon the fire that never is quenched to purchase the favor of God and be reunited to Him! But it is a fruitless wish — millions of years will bring me no nearer to the end of my torments than one poor hour! Oh, eternity, eternity! WHO CAN DISCOVER THE ABYSS OF ETERNITY? OH, THE INSUFFERABLE PANGS OF HELL!’ and he died.

(If I die tonight, where will I spend eternity?)

In both the gospel tract and *Doctor Faustus*, a belief in God is depicted alongside damnation. Despite this belief in God at the end of his life, Newport understands that he is destined for hell. The inclusion of this in the gospel tract demonstrates an evangelical take on salvation that belief is not enough, contradicting The Bible’s claim that this brings salvation (Romans 10:9-8). This Marlovian theology exists in *Doctor Faustus* rather than The Bible. At the very end of his life, in his final moments, Faustus says, “O, mercy, heaven! Look not so fierce on me!” (5.3.182). Though believing in heaven and begging for mercy, Faustus is dragged into the pits of hell alongside Newport. Continuing this, Faustus and Newport reflect each other when Faustus says, “Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years, / A hundred thousand years, and at last be saved” (5.3.164-165). The stunning parallels between this gospel tract and *Doctor Faustus* demonstrate a connection that leaves out biblical beliefs on damnation and salvation.

Taking the connection between Evangelicalism and *Doctor Faustus* a step further, this piece of literature has even been referenced in defense of Marlovian theology. In an interview with Lincoln Trail Christian Church of Irvington, Kentucky, Pastor David Buckham confirms

that his church is indeed an evangelical branch of Christianity. Buckham serves as the pastor and has done so for a decade. In his 2018 sermon titled “The Monster in Me—Doctor Faustus,” Buckham refers to the German legend of Faustus and its many iterations, including Christopher Marlowe’s. He says, “It’s too late [for Doctor Faustus] to resent the deal. It’s too late to...to turn from it. It’s too late to say ‘I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it. I wanna undo it.’ It’s too late...It’s [Faustus’s salvation] gone, never to be seen again” (Buckham). Buckham leans upon Marlovian damnation to form his beliefs. However, when speaking to a Judaic group, Jesus says, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24). Though Faustus calls upon God, believes in the saving nature of Christ’s blood, he is abandoned (5.3.144-145, 182-185). Buckham uplifts Marlovian salvation. In doing so, a pattern of allowing literature to influence one’s interpretation of scripture begins to form and is demonstrated through gospel tracts as well as sermons. With Faustus being damned, readers are dragged to hell and handed off to Dante Alighieri.

Chapter V

Dante's Invention of Hell: How The Bible is Bypassed

“Abandon all hope, ye who enter here”

-Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*

Over 700 years ago, Dante Alighieri created the single most influential piece of art on the Christian idea of hell: *Inferno*. By working off The Bible's minimal details, Dante fashioned a new hell with his pen. Hell is no longer the lake of fire, a place of torment for Satan and his followers. Hell is what Dante creates. The influence of this piece fills biblical gaps and crosses the boundary of literature to enter into the Christian faith as well as modern perceptions of what exactly hell may be.

Most notably, Dante's use of contrapasso—suffering the opposite of the sin that damned each soul—forms many perceptions of hell. In Canto 5, Dante is taken aback by the sinners he meets. Dante says, “The infernal whirlwind, which never rests, drives / the spirits...I understood that to this torments were damned / the carnal sinners, who subject their reason to their / lust” (31-32,37-39). Dante recognizes that these souls were damned for their lust, thrown by the wind of their emotions. In setting aside logic, they give into their lust. Just as they were tossed to and fro by their lust, they are now and forever at the mercy of the wind of hell. Dante the pilgrim faints from the overwhelming emotions (142). Dante shows his humanness here by experiencing hell with the readers.

Dante the poet writes himself into *Inferno* as Dante the pilgrim experiencing hell. *Inferno* opens by quickly introducing Dante's the pilgrim's guide through hell, the Roman poet Virgil.

While lost in a dark wood, Dante says:

Poet, I beg you by that God whom / you did not know, so that I may flee this evil
and / worse, / that you may lead me where you have just now said, / so that I may
see the gate of Saint Peter and those / whom you call so woebegone." / Then he
moved, and I followed after him. (1.130-136)

After identifying this stranger as the author of the *Aeneid* himself, Dante is relieved to see the author who most influences his art. Dante pleads for guidance as he begins his journey into hell, and Virgil silently accepts his role as Dante's guide. This is where Dante first begins to drift away from biblical presentations of hell. Wasting no time, his artistic embellishment begins in the very first canto. Notably, in all of The Bible there is no single mention of a living human travelling through hell. If no one in hell is a living person, there is no need for a guide to keep them safe. Virgil's continuous presence throughout *Inferno* creates a constant contradiction to the hell of The Bible.

There is no precedent for discussions with the damned. As Virgil guides Dante through hell, the pair attracts shades—souls without a living body—to themselves. This occurs in numerous cantos. Dante finds a soul he knows in Canto 10. Dante writes, "See / there Farinata who has stood erect: from the waist up / you will see all of him" (31-33). Farinata, Dante's political enemy, names himself. Thus, Dante recognizes the soul before him. Though Dante the poet uses these encounters as lessons for Dante the pilgrim, there is once again no biblical precedence for this whatsoever.

Though readers can see this pattern, scholars of Dante add commentary. Author Jon M. Sweeny provides a unique perspective as a former evangelical protestant himself. In his book *Inventing Hell: Dante, The Bible, and Eternal Torment*, Sweeny explains:

For Dante...the bible's earlier, vaguer references [to Satan and hell] just didn't cut it...Even the tempter who became Satan, and a fallen lucifer trapped in chains for his haughtiness, needed an upgrade. (66)

In discussing *Inferno*, Sweeny states that Dante loosely based his work on The Bible. Dante's Satan—as well as his punishments—is nearly unrecognizable. Sweeny comments on the biblical Satan verses the Dantean Satan. The Bible describes Satan's punishment as being cast into the lake of fire (Romans 20:10). However, Dante's Satan silently tortures the most wicked souls in ice (34.52-54). Dante works to go beyond what the Bible originally presented and makes something entirely new. In doing this, Dante's work has been used to strike fear into the hearts of many. Sweeny, having experienced the effects of this through evangelicalism himself, says, “Dante would be pleased if we still feared his version of Hell, as earlier generations of Christians certainly did. Much of the *Inferno*'s power in centuries past was derived from its threatening hand” (188). Today Christians still fear Dante's version of hell. However, it has now become an evangelical tool for protolyzing.

Chapter VI

Becoming Dante: How *Inferno* Created Hell...and Judgement Houses

“I went down, down, down, and the flames went higher”

-Johnny Cash, “Ring of Fire”

By bringing the pits to the people, *Inferno*-esque scenes and declarations fill the pews of evangelical churches. In adding the ideas of Dante’s work into evangelical perceptions of hell, the mystery of the afterlife is lost. The vicious details that Dante provides work to convert unbelievers through fear of a punishment they may not have considered. Assigning specifics to hell allows Evangelicalism to now use a tool that works to impact believers and unbelievers alike.

With fear as the great motivator, evangelicals use Dante’s creative portrayals of hell to bring others into their faith. Perhaps the most well-known example of this is the judgment house. Each year when the foliage itself appears aflame, Judgement House rises to seize its opportunity. An alternative to a haunted house, Judgement House strikes fear into the heart of attendees by creating a theatrical depiction of eternal damnation. While shaking and scared, visitors pray for God to show mercy on their souls.

In the mountains of Appalachia, Tennessee’s oldest church once held a yearly judgment house for two decades, only stopping in 2019. Sinking Creek Baptist Church of Johnson City, Tennessee, became known for the remarkable production quality of their judgment house. Phil Harris, still serving as the youth pastor, began holding this event while a freshman at East Tennessee State University. Despite his work as a student, Harris wrote the scripts for Sinking

Creek's judgment house himself for the first five years of their annual event as well as facilitating and managing the budget. Each year, Harris took six to nine months to write the script for his production.

In an interview with Harris, he confirms Sinking Creek's stance as an evangelical church within the Southern Baptist denomination, going as far as to say, "Only truth you're gonna have is in the scripture." Harris believes that hell is a literal place and emphasizes *sola scriptura*. Due to this, the primary purpose of the judgement house becomes the saving and rededicating of souls. In order to accomplish this, the afterlife must first be created from the ground up.

Much like Dante, Harris pens his own portrayals of hell and punishment. Though Harris confirms that he has never read Dante's *Inferno*, there is a striking similarity between their hells that anyone familiar with the Italian poet can see. Dante was influenced by Virgil. Harris was unknowingly influenced by Dante the poet. By both creating hell in an artistic way, the cycle of influence continues. Those attending the judgement house mirror Dante in a unique way.

The moment visitors walk into the judgement house, they step into the shoes of Dante the pilgrim. By entering into new and unfamiliar territory, they must navigate this frightful landscape. However, just as Dante needs a guide, so do the attendees. In Harris's judgement house, "shepherds" become an incarnation of the poet Virgil, guiding the attendees through hell. Taking on this performative role, "the shepherd would tell a story" (Harris). While each judgement house had a shepherd, "Some years, they'd memorize the whole thing, and they would tell the scripture all the way through" (Harris). Finding that it was common for the shepherd to guide the visitors the entire way through the judgement house, their role as Virgil becomes clear.

These shepherds become more like Virgil as Harris further describes their role. When referring to the shepherds, Harris says they “make sure everybody was safe.” Dante is unable to navigate the layers of hell alone, and Virgil’s knowledge of his own eternal damnation allows him to assist Dante and provide guardianship. In Canto 23, Virgil is shown to do just this. As demons threaten the safety of Dante, Virgil quickly acts. Dante says, “My leader seized me quickly, like a mother...and down from the neck of the hard bank, he / gave himself supine to the sloping rock that encloses / the near side of the next pocket” (23.37,43-45). As the shepherds keep the visitors safe, so too does Virgil keep Dante safe as he visits hell.

Yet most meaningfully, it is how the shepherds guide their visitors that best parallels the relationship between Virgil and Dante. Harris closes his discussion of the shepherds with one final sentiment: “[the shepherds] shine the light to lead the way for ‘em.” In the very first canto of *Inferno*, the audience wakes to find themselves lost with Dante when he says, “Midway upon the journey of our life / I found myself within a forest dark, / For the straightforward pathway had been lost” (1.1-3). Shrouded in shadows, Dante is unable to make out the path that lie before him. Yet it is Virgil who finds Dante in the darkness and shines a light to lead the way.

And I to him: ‘Poet, I beg you by that God whom
 you did not know, so that I may flee this evil and
 worse,
 that you may lead me where you have just now said,
 so that I may see the gate of Saint Peter and those
 whom you call so woebegone.’”

Then he moved, and I followed after him. (I.130-136)

Despite the darkness, Virgil shows Dante the way out. Once again mirroring this relationship, the shepherds lead their visitors out of the night.

Visitors experience infernal warnings, a reflection of Dante's infernal warnings. While this is not a concept found in anywhere in The Bible, Dante's text is riddled with them. When referring to his script, Harris mentions how the damned in his judgement house commonly give warnings along the lines of "Tell my family that hell is real." As the visitors come through, the damned readily approach them in hopes of sparing those they care for from their own fate. Dante does the very same, particularly in Canto 28 of *Inferno*. The prophet Muhammed, now a shade in Dante's hell, says:

"Now then, you who will perhaps shortly see the / sun, tell brother Dolcino, if he does not want to / follow me soon down here, / to provide himself with enough food that the / barrier of snow may give not the victory to the Novarese, which otherwise would not be easy to acquire." (55-60)

Muhammed asks Dante to warn Dolcino, attempting to keep a loved one from entering through the same gates. Taken directly from *Inferno* itself, this theatrical choice draws from the hell that Dante created. While Luke 16:22-28 shows a wealthy man begging Abraham to allow Lazarus to warn his brothers in attempt to save them, Lazarus is not damned to hell or visiting it. Further, the wealthy man is begging Abraham to be a medium between himself and Lazarus with no direct contact.

By having the damned engage directly with the visitors entering hell alongside their own guide, judgement houses draw upon Dante's *Inferno* for artistic inspiration. With guides and infernal warnings, evangelical uses of *Inferno* bypass The Bible's limited depictions of hell in

favor of Dante's vivid portrayal. Evangelicalism uses judgement houses as a tool built in the fires of *Inferno*.

Chapter VII

The Feedback Loop: How and Why Literature and Christianity Influence Each Other

“Art and Religion are, then, two roads by which men escape from circumstance to ecstasy. Between aesthetic and religious rapture there is a family alliance. Art and Religion are means to similar states of mind.”

-Clive Bell

Separating literature and Christianity betrays the rich history they share. The Bible stands as the single most influential work of literature in the Western world. The impact it continues to have on art, religion, and therefore culture cannot be overstated. Christianity and literature both stand firmly in this shared foundation. As each grow together, their tangled roots join as one, inseparable.

The Christian faith is built upon literature, and this ancient connection only grows with time. Darryl Tippens, literary and biblical scholar, eloquently captures the heart of this relationship in saying:

When the creator poet composed us, he planted within us his own divine image; the *imago dei*; and a central feature of the *imago dei* is the capacity and the passion to create and savor created things. That is to say, as he is Creator, so he calls us to be creators as well. As he rejoiced in creation, so should we. When we create, critique, or appreciate art, we reveal our holy heritage. (p.8)

It is no wonder that a religion which so values the art of creation both influences and is influenced by literature. Tippens answers a valuable yet often overlooked question: Why? The

influence of Christianity and literature can be studied without ever looking past their shared biblical heritage. While the contradictions presented in this thesis can force one to brush aside the soundness of Evangelical interpretations, Tippens challenges readers to look deeper, to see these acts of creation as a way of honoring the god they worship. To see the full picture, one must step into the Christian perspective, the outlook which shapes both their religion and the literature they create. In doing so, readers better connect with authors such as Dante Alighieri and Christopher Marlowe.

As Christian authors themselves, Dante and Marlowe viewed The Bible as a sacred religious text as well as literary inspiration. By using The Bible to fuel their works, they too mirrored their god. Dante and Marlowe became creators of classic literature and Christian theology. While they continue to mold Christian thought, they particularly influence Evangelical Christianity. In doing so, a cyclical feedback loop is formed. The Bible informs works of literature. This literature molds Christian perspectives. The Christians impacted by this often unknowingly bypass The Bible's teachings and instead rely on literature influenced by The Bible. This shapes their understanding of The Bible, and new literature will be written based on the influence of these authors.

However, directly reading texts such as *Inferno* and *Doctor Faustus* is not required for this cycle to continue. Many pastors, such as Phil Harris of Sinking Creek Baptist, have never touched these pieces of literature, yet they mirror Dante and Marlowe. The power of these works goes beyond the written text to form an oral tradition that mingles with biblical beliefs and interpretations. This oral tradition is passed from generation to generation. The two, literature and Christianity, fully become one through the feedback loop.

Only a momentary snapshot of the feedback loop is explored in this thesis. In doing so, anyone studying literature and Christianity can deeply understand *how* they influence each other. By analyzing the influence that *Inferno* and *Doctor Faustus* has on Evangelical Christianity, their theology, and their methods of proselytizing, this cycle becomes clearer. With this perspective, individuals are better equipped to identify this cycle as well as explore it on their own. The continuation of this analysis will add to the understanding of biblical influence as well as continue the legacy of the authors being studied.

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