

Whence Eternity?

Alexander Thomson (1935)

Notes by Bob Evely
Wilmore, Kentucky; 2023.



Alexander Thomson

What follows are some key excerpts from the short (40 page) booklet “Whence Eternity” by Alexander Thomson. This was originally published as a two-part series in Unsearchable Riches Magazine, Volume 26, Numbers 5 and 6 (September and November 1935). This can still be purchased in booklet form from Concordant Publishing Concern (see Concordant.org). This publication includes a concise review of pertinent world history, church history, and the history concerning the translation of the Scriptures from its original languages.

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The inspired Scriptures never speak of eternity. They describe nothing as eternal. They contain no term which in itself bears our time sense of *everlasting*.

The more one explores into the early centuries of Christendom, the clearer does it become that a corrupt theology was alone responsible for displacing the teaching regarding the eons by a dogma respecting “eternity.” (p. 1)

All that the Scriptures reveal is that the eons will terminate (1 Cor 10:11; Heb 9:26), but it seems clear that time of some kind or other must continue. (p. 2)

As the eons are to terminate, it follows that all that is eonian must finish, or be swallowed up in that which follows. Even dooms, which are described as eonian ... shall terminate in due season.

Even to God the Scriptures do not ascribe eternity. What need is there to describe Him as eternal? One must, in order to be God, be eternal. In the beginning of Genesis the fact of God and the existence of God are taken for granted. No attempt is made to explain who God is and whence He came, or to account for His existence. Nature demands His existence. (p. 3)

Eternal is one of the many hundreds of words which gained entrance into English during the Renaissance. Previous to that time it was completely unknown. No such word appears in any old English scriptures. Instead of it, there is found a simple little word with the meaning of *eonian*.

Had the old English Bibles been translated directly out of the Greek, instead of from the Latin Vulgate Version of Jerome (380 AD), it is very probable that the word *eternal* would never have been found in our modern Bibles and theological terminology at all. (p. 5)

Had Jerome been as consistent in rendering the Greek into Latin as Wiclif was in rendering Jerome into English, we should never have had our Authorized Version in its present form. (p. 15)

Farrar says that even the Latin Fathers who had a competent knowledge of Greek knew that *aeternum* was used in the same loose way, for an indefinite period, as *aionion* was used in Greek. (p. 17)

Whatever the Latin word [translated eternal] meant in the time of Jerome, it certainly did not signify *endless* three hundred years earlier. ... Originally the word never meant unending, but this meaning had been injected by theology. (p. 18)

Justinian knew quite well that by itself eonian did not signify endless, and he therefore added a word, the meaning of which is quite unequivocal, a word not found in the Scriptures. A letter of

Justinian which is still in existence ought to convince anyone who is in doubt regarding the true scriptural meaning of the word *eonian*.

It was not until the year 696 at Constantinople that a Council publicly condemned this doctrine of Origen for the first time [referring to his teaching regarding the reconciliation of all]. (p. 19)

The old Latin writers used *aeternum* in the same sense as Greek writers used *aionion*, as meaning eonian. (p. 20)

The truth of the eons became lost very quickly after the time of the apostle Paul. (p. 21)

As the truth regarding the eons was completely lost, we ought to be very suspicious regarding the dogma which became "orthodox" and catholic in a steadily apostatizing Church. (p. 24)

Old English versions were made not from the Greek but from the Latin Vulgate, between the years 680 and 995. (p. 31)

John Wiclif was probably the first person to translate the whole Bible into the English tongue. Well did he live up to one of his sayings, that "Christian men ought to travail night and day about text of holy writ." (p. 33)

Never once does Wiclif use the expression "for ever" or "for ever and ever." Though the expressions used by Wiclif are far from perfect, great is the decline manifested in the next English version to be published. (p. 34)

Our old word *weorulde* is composed of two distinct parts, and where the primitive pronunciation is preserved two very distinct syllables are still heard. The former part of the word consists of *wer*, a man (like the Latin *vir* as in *virile*, and the *-er* in words like *speaker*, also the *wer-* in *werewolf*, the man-wolf). The latter part of the word is *ald-*, or *elde*, meaning age or generation. World is therefore defined as "the generation of men." (p. 38)

Doubtless Wiclif did not have full light regarding the eons to come, yet it seems extraordinary that he could have seen so much as he did when we consider that he had to depend altogether on the blurred light and inconsistent evidence of the Latin Vulgate. (p. 39)

The Reformation, which was a reformation along certain lines only, instead of undoing and reversing this grievous error of the Latin Church, actually confirmed it and established it. (p. 40)

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