

THE QUESTION OF HELL

**Richard K. Murray
Attorney at Law
200-A West Gordon Street
Dalton, Ga 30720
(706) 272-3289
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THE QUESTION OF HELL

I. Three Christian Views of Hell: Eternal Punishment, Annihilationism, and Universalism

A. Eternal Punishment (Hellfire tortures the lost forever).

1. Key verse: "And these [the wicked goats] shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous [the blessed sheep] into life eternal." Matt. 25:41. (Also referred to as Hades, Gehenna, unquenchable fire, the undying worm, outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth, eternal destruction, and the second death, Matt. 16:18-19; Mk. 9:43-48; Matt. 25:30; 2 Thes. 1:9; Rev. 20:14).
2. Key advocates: Tertullian, Augustine, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, J. I. Packer, R. C. Sproul.
3. Quotes:
 - a. *"How shall I admire, how laugh, how rejoice, how exult, when I behold so many kings and false gods. . .roaming in the lowest abyss of darkness! So many magistrates who persecuted the name of the Lord, liquefying in fiercer flames than they ever kindled against Christians; so many sage philosophers, with their deluded scholars, blushing in raging fire! I shall then have a better chance of hearing the tragedians call louder in their own distress; of seeing the actors more lively in the dissolving flame; of beholding the*

charioteer glowing in his fiery chariot; of seeing their wrestlers tossing on fiery waves instead of in their gymnasium. . . Faith grants us to enjoy them even now, by lively anticipation.” Tertullian.

- b. *“Your bodies shall be tormented in every part in the flames of Hellfire . . .the pains of Hellfire will be a thousand times more horrible and tormenting. Your bodies cannot now endure much pain without expiring. . .but thereafter God will strengthen your bodies to endure; they shall have. . .quicker sense and so much more capacity for pain. . . .Your bodies shall roll and tumble in flames, and burn with horrible pain and yet never be consumed. . . .I believe that the space of one quarter of an hour in Hell will seem longer to the damned than a whole life of misery in this world.” Thomas Vincent, *Fire and Brimstone*, Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1999.*
- c. *“It is of faith that Heaven exists for the good and Hell for the wicked. Faith teaches the pains of Hell are eternal, and it also warns us that one single mortal sin suffices to condemn a soul forever because of the infinite malice by which it offends an infinite God.” Anthony Mary Claret, autobiography.*

B. Annihilationism (Hellfire destroys the lost into non-existence).

- 1. Key verse: “And death and Hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the

lake of fire. . .and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Rev. 19:14-15; 20:4.

2. Key advocates: Armodius (4th Cent.), Socinus, Clark H. Pinnock, John R. W. Stott, W. A. Spicer, Ellen G. White, John W. Wenham, Edward W. Fudge.
3. Quotes:
 - a. *"The fire of Hell does not torment, but rather consumes the wicked."* Clark H. Pinnock.
 - b. *"It is the fire that is called everlasting, not the life cast into it."* Archbishop William Temple (i.e. the punishment is eternal, not the punishing).
 - c. *"Unending torment speaks to me of Sadism, not justice. It is a doctrine which I do not know how to preach without negating the loveliness and glory of God. From the days of Tertullian it has been the emphasis of fanatics. It is a doctrine that makes the Inquisition look reasonable. It seems a flight from reality and common sense."* John Wenham, *Facing Hell: An Autobiography*, London Paterroster, 1998.
 - d. *"Well, emotionally, I find the concept [eternal torment] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain."* John Stott, *Essentials: A Literal-Evangelical Dialogue*,

Inter Varsity Press, 1988.

C. **Universalism (God's fire of pure love will eventually save and purge us from our own self-created Hellfire).**

1. Key verses: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." 1 Cor. 15:22.

"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men. . . For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." 1 Tim. 2:1,3-4.

"For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe." 1 Tim. 4:10. ("Specially" at Strong's 3122 means "in the greatest degree.").

"Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." 1 Cor. 3:13-15.

"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliver, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob . . . As concerning the gospel, they [Israel] are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the father's

sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed; that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" Rom. 11:26, 28-33.

2. Key advocates: Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Julian of Norwich, Hans Denk, Peter Bohler, William Law, George MacDonald, Hannah Whitehall Smith, Paul Tillich, C. H. Dodd, John Baillie, Karl Barth, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, William Barclay.
3. Key quotes:
 - a. *"The 'blessed hope' is that God's justice and mercy are not controlled by the power of evil, that sin is not everything, and that in the world to come punishment will be corrective and not final, and will be ordered by a love and justice, the height and depths of which we cannot here fathom or comprehend."* Dean Stanley.
 - b. *"God fights fire with fire. Our fire is the Hell we have ignited with our own unbelief - - our faithless and false identities we have created apart from God (Jas. 3:6). God's fire is the holiness of His love which will burn against our fire of self-deception. Just as firefighters sometimes set controlled fires to quench wildfire,*

so does the Lord set His carefully controlled fire of love and holiness to limit, control and ultimately quench our fire of self-destruction and self-deception (1 Cor. 3:13-15). In the process, all the wood, hay and stubble of our false identities will be purged and destroyed. We will suffer intense loss and anguish, but we ourselves will be saved - - the real you and me, the you and me God created us to be. Some may not wear the crown of a victorious life as they pass through the fire, but all will pass eventually. Some may resist God's flames of love for an extended period, but nobody can outlast the ultimately irresistible and irrepressible love of God. All evil aspects of our personalities will have their part in the lake of fire where all forms of Hell and death will be destroyed." R. Murray.

- c. *"Understanding the love of God diminishes the cruelty of Hell. God is just, but His justice is completely in the service of His love. Heaven can be Heaven, only when it has emptied Hell. If Hell were eternal torture, those in Heaven could only eternally mourn for the lost." Nels Ferre.*

- d. *"There may be many Hells. There may be enough freedom even in the life of Hell for man to keep rejecting God for a very long time. Hell may be not only into the end of the age, but also unto the end of several ages. It cannot be eternal, but it can be longer than we think, depending upon the depth and stubbornness of our actual freedom now and whether or not God will give us fuller freedom in the life to come, and how much." Nels*

Ferre.

II. **The Prevailing View of the Early Church: Universalism**

A. **The first 500 years:** In the first five centuries there were six known theological schools. Four of them taught Universalism: Alexandria, Antioch, Caesarea and Edessa/Nisbis. One taught Annihilationism: Ephesus. Only one taught eternal punishment: Rome/Carthage. Source: *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, "Universalism" entry, p. 96, Baker Book House. Basil the Great (329-379) said that, "The mass of men (Christians) say that there is to be an end of punishment to those who are punished." *De Ascetics*. Saint Jerome (347-420) said, "I know that most persons understand the story of Nineveh and its king, the ultimate forgiveness of the devil and all rational creatures." *Homily on Jonah*. Lastly, even Augustine (354-430), who vehemently opposed Universalism, acknowledged, "There are very many in our day, who though not denying the Holy Scriptures, do not believe in endless torments." *Enchiridion* cxii. (The Latin for "very many" is *imo quam plurimi*, which can be translated "majority").

1. 1st Century: Paul. It is interesting to note that Paul never used the word "Hell" in any of his writings, though he was considered the theologian of the New Testament. It is also interesting to note that the Book of Acts never mentions the word "Hell," except to speak of Jesus' liberation from it. Acts never uses the word "Hell" to describe any part of the Christian message which established the Church (Rom. 5:17,18; 10:9-17; 11:25-33; 14:11; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 15:22-28; 1 Tim. 2:1-6; 4:10; Eph. 1:10; 4:1-10; Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:20,

23; Heb. 2:9).

2. 2nd Century: Clement of Alexandria. Clement was the first to speak of God's fire as a "wise fire" which purges the sinner unto salvation. "God's punishments are saving and disciplinary (in Hades) leading to conversions, and choosing rather the repentance than the death of the sinner, and especially since souls, although darkened by passions, when released from their bodies, are able to perceive more clearly because of their being no longer obstructed by the paltry flesh. We can set no limits to the agency of the Redeemer to redeem, to rescue, to discipline, is His work, and so will he continue to operate after this life." Clem. *str.* 5:14.90.4-91.2; see also 5.1.9.4; and *hyp.* (frg. In Stahlin, Clemens Alexandrians, 3:211).
3. 3rd Century: Origen. "When the Son is said to be subject to the Father, the perfect restoration of the whole creation is signified, so also, when enemies are said to be subjected to the Son of God, the salvation of the conquered and the restoration of the lost is in that understood to consist." Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chapter 5, Section 7, Anf, Vol. 4. Origen was the first Christian Systematic Theologian. A fundamental and essential element of his theology was the doctrine of the universal restoration of all fallen beings to their original holiness and union with God. God's mercy and goodness are all-inclusive and ultimately irresistible. Hellfire is corrective and purgative, not punitive and eternal. This doctrine was called "Apocatastasis," the restitution of all things per Acts 3:21. Origen was the greatest enemy of Gnosticism (per his *Against Celsus*)

and is considered the greatest theologian of the early Eastern Church. "There is hardly a major thinker who is not deeply indebted to Origen. From the middle of the Twentieth Century, focused scholarly symposia of the Greek and Latin Church have once again begun to study and critically expound the rich Origenian legacy." *The Westminster Handbook of Patristic Theology*, WJK.

4. 4th Century: Gregory of Nyssa. "What therefore is the scope of Paul's argument in this place [1 Cor. 15:28]? That the nature of evil, at length, be wholly exterminated, and divine, immortal goodness embrace within itself every rational creature; so that of all who were made by God, not one shall be excluded from his Kingdom. All the viciousness, that like a corrupt matter is mingled in things, shall be dissolved and consumed in the furnace of purgatorial fire; and every thing that had its origin from God, shall be restored to its pristine state of purity." Tract, in *Dictum Apostoli, Tunc etiam ipse Filius subjicietur*, and c.p. 137, and seqq. Gregory was one of the three great Cappadocian Fathers who protected the doctrine of the Trinity from the Arians at the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople.
5. 5th Century: Theodore of Mopsuestia. "They who have chosen the good, shall, in the future world, be blessed and honored. But the wicked, who have committed evil the whole period of their lives, shall be punished till they learn, that, by continuing in sin, they only continue in misery. And when, by this means, they shall have been brought to fear God, and to regard Him with good-will, they shall obtain the enjoyment of His grace." *Assemani Biblioth. Orient. Tom.iii.Par.i.p.323*.

6. Miscellaneous points: adapted from *Universalism: The Prevailing Doctrine of the Christian Church During its First Five Hundred Years*; by J. W. Hanson, D.D. (1899).
 - a. Early Christian catacombs have numerous inscriptions on its monuments, none of which support endless torment but rather all harmonize with the Universalism of the early fathers.
 - b. Prayers for the dead were universal in the early Church, which would be absurd, if their condition is unalterably fixed at the grave.
 - c. The first comparatively complete systematic statement of Christian doctrine ever given to the world was by Clement of Alexandria, A.D. 180, and universal salvation was one of its tenets. The first complete presentation of Christianity as a system was by Origen in A.D. 220 and universal salvation was explicitly contained in it. Clement and Origen both taught the torments of the damned are curative and limited.
 - d. Universal salvation was the prevailing doctrine in Christendom as long as Greek, the language of the New Testament, was the language of Christendom.
 - e. The first three hundred years of the Church are generally accepted as the best in its history and were the most remarkable for simplicity, goodness and missionary zeal. This is good evidence that Universalism does not quench

evangelism.

- f. The more Latin became the language of the Church, the less Universalism was remembered. Minucius Felix, Tertullian and Augustine all spoke Latin and were ignorant of Greek. These three were the first outspoken advocates of endless punishment, yet they did not know the nuances of Greek, particularly with regard to the proper meaning of the Greek term used in Matt. 25:41 "kolasis aionios." The Greek-speaking fathers, like Origen, knew that this term meant "curative punishment for an age to be determined by God." Kolasis was a term used to describe the pruning of trees so that fuller growth would occur. Aionios was a term used to describe an age or season to be determined by God alone. The common language of Jews and Pagans in Jesus' day would use the terms "aidios" or "adialeipton timoria" to describe "endless torment," not "kolasis aionios."
- g. The early Christians taught that Christ preached the gospel to the dead, and for that purpose descended into Hades. Many held that He released all who were there - - past, present and future. This act was seen as outside of human time and space in showing God's full and final salvation for all. This shows that repentance beyond the grave was accepted and precludes the modern error that the soul's destiny is decided at death.
- h. Of all the numerous heresy lists compiled over the

first four hundred years, from Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Epiphanius, "the hammer of heretics," not once is Universalism mentioned as a heresy.

- i. The first defense of Christianity against infidelity (Origen's *Against Celsus*) puts the defense on Universalistic grounds. Celsus charged the Christians' God with cruelty, because he punished with fire. Origen replied that God's fire is curative; that He is a "Consuming Fire," because He consumes sin and not the sinner.
- j. Not a single Christian creed for five hundred years expresses any idea contrary to universal restoration, or in favor of endless punishment.
- k. Two early and important Christian documents advocate Universalism, while many others allow for it through their non-advocacy of eternal punishment. *The Sibylline Oracles* has a portion expressing universal salvation around 80 A.D. Here, it is the prayer of the redeemed saints which saves the lost out of Hell. This document was one of the most quoted Christian documents other than the Bible. It was often quoted by Athenagaras, Thelphilus, Justin Martyr, Lactantius, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, and Augustine. The second century *Letter to Diognetus* is also strongly Universalistic in Chapter X when it declares Hell as a limited chastisement which will end.
- l. The principal Christian Universalists were born

and raised in Christian households. The main Latin leaders, in contrast, who advocated eternal torment were all heathen-born converts to Christianity who did not speak or read fluent Greek, were not raised and educated in Christian homes and schools, and were not known for kind and gentle temperaments. These include Minucius Felix, Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine. Their view of Hell often adopted and integrated pagan and heathen poetry into their Christian beliefs.

- m. Justinian, a half-pagan emperor, who attempted to have Universalism officially condemned, lived in the most corrupt epoch of the Christian centuries. He closed the theological schools, and demanded the condemnation of Universalism by law; but the doctrine was so prevalent in the Church that the council refused to obey his edict to suppress it. Lecky says the age of Justinian was "the worst form civilization has assumed." Even though some scholars claim that Universalism was denounced as heresy in 544-546 by a local council in Constantinople as ordered by Emperor Justinian, the council in fact refused to anathematize Universalism even though the Emperor demanded it. The Emperor continued the pressure. The Fifth General Council of 553 met and did condemn Origen, whose teachings the Emperor hated with a passion. Yet, again no specific condemnation of Universalism was made by the Church councils until the Council of Constantinople in 696. The previous councils had honored the memory of

Gregory of Nyssa, who was well known for teaching Universalism in the strongest terms.

- B. **The Augustinian Shift into the Dark Ages:** Augustine said many wonderful things. Augustine said many horrible things. He was the first Christian theologian to condone torture for heretics and forced conversions to Christianity. (Letter to Publicola; Against Faustus; Letter to Marcellinas; Letter to Vincentius; The City of God, 19:6; The Correction of the Donatists, 22-24). He also consigned unbaptized and deceased infants to eternal Hell. *Enchir.* 93; III; 113; de civ. dei 21, 16. His progenitor in things Hellish, Tertullian, believed that after baptism, a believer could only be forgiven for one serious sin. For this reason, Tertullian believed a believer should be baptized only after he had matured to near-perfection. (Tertullian, *On Baptism* ANF3). The point here is that these men had a primitive blood-lust which occasionally tainted their views with wrath and vengeance. This tainted view infected Western theology and led the way into the Dark Ages. Church history eventually was re-written as Origen and others were branded heretics and Alexandrian Christianity denounced and forgotten. "In no other respect did Augustine differ more widely from Origen and the Alexandrians than in his intolerant spirit. Even Tertullian conceded to all the right of opinion. Gregory of Nazianzus, Ambrose, Athanasius and Augustine himself in his earlier days, recorded the tolerance that Christianity demands. But he afterwards came to advocate and defend the persecution of religious opponents. Milman observes: 'With shame and honor we hear from Augustine himself that fatal axiom which impiously arrayed cruelty in the garb of Christian charity.' He was the first in the long line of Christian persecutors, and illustrates the character of the theology that swayed him in the wicked spirit that impelled him to advocate the right to

persecute Christians who differ from those in power. The dark pages that bear the record of subsequent centuries are a damning witness to the cruel spirit that actuated Christians, and the cruel theology that impelled it. Augustine 'was the first and ablest asserter of the principle which led to Albigensian crusades, Spanish armadas, Netherland's butcheries, St. Bartholomew massacres, the accursed infamies of the Inquisition, the vile espionage, the hideous bale fires of Seville and Smithfield, the racks, the gibbets, the thumbscrews, the subterranean torture-chambers used by churchly torturers.' And George Sand well says that 'the Roman Church committed suicide the day she invented an implacable God and eternal damnation.'" *Universalism The Prevailing Doctrine of The Christian Church During Its First Five Hundred Years*, by J. W. Hanson, D.D. (1899).

- C. **Historical Trends:** Pantaenus, Clement of Alexandria, Athenasius - Archbishop of Alexandria, Didymous the Blind, Bishop Ambrose, John Chrysostum, Gregory of Nyssa, Macrina the Younger, Basil the Great (?), Gregory of Nazianzus, Jerome (?), Theodore of Mopsuestia, Eusebius, Bishop Diodore; Maximus the Confessor, Clement of Ireland, John Scotus Erigena, Johann Tauler, Julian of Norwich, John Donne, Jacob Boheme, Gerrard Winstanley, Hans Denck, Jane Leade, Anabaptists, Albigenses, Lollards, Peter Bohler and the Moravians, William Law, Sir Isaac Newton, Johann Kasper Lavater, Goethe, Victor Hugo, Canon Kingsley, Isaac Watts, Marie Huber, Anne Bronte, Oberlin, Immanuel Kant, James Rely, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Lord and Lady Byron, Robert and Elizabeth Browning, William King - Archbishop of Dublin, Lewis Carroll, Samuel Johnson, Thomas Hobbes, Elhanan Winchester, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, Frederick the Great, Charles Dickens, Alexander Pope, Henry Wasdworth Longfellow, Hans

Christian Anderson, John Murray, Thomas Potter, Hosea Ballou, Hannah Whitall Smith, Bishop Westcott, Dr. George De Benneville, Florence Nightengale, Clara Barton, John Wesley Hanson, Thomas Allin, Abraham Lincoln, Judith Sargent Murray, Rev. Charles A. Pridgeon, Sadhu Sundar Singh, Thomas Wittimore, Cannon F. W. Farrar, Hans Christian Anderson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry Ward Beecher, Andrew Jukes, Madeleine L'Engle, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Cannon Wilberforce, John A. T. Robinson, A. E. Knoch, J. W. Hansen, George MacDonald, John Baillie, A. P. Adams, Jacques Elul, Paul Tillich, C. H. Dodd, Hannah Hurnard, Karl Barth, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, William Barclay, J. Preston Eby, Ernest Martin. [**Please note:** the above list contains the names of people who grappled with the ideas of salvation, redemption, Hell and the fate of the unsaved. While some believed in Universalism as a hope or possibility, others believed in it as an established doctrine. Some were strong supporters. Others were open to it. All were great minds. Still others have hinted at their interest in it - - like G. K. Chesterton, Catherine Marshall, Andrew Murray and C. S. Lewis].

III. **Is Universalism a Heresy, a Hope or a Doctrine?**

- A. **A Heresy?** No, not if it was the prevailing doctrine of the Church for its first 500 years. Heresy is "error from traditional doctrine." The weight of evidence is that Universalism was a, if not the, traditional doctrine of the Church. *The Evangelical Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth Among Evangelicals* (ACUTE) stated in its 2000 Report that differences of opinion regarding the duration and quality of Hell are "less essential" to Evangelical faith, which I take to mean non-heretical.

- B. **A Hope?** Karl Barth and many others believe Universalism is best presented and understood as a real possibility to hope for rather than a doctrine to dogmatically declare. This is why Universalism is called "the blessed hope." Barth called eternal Hell an "impossible possibility." Its possibility seems to be a clear and present danger because of the evil that men do. But, Hell's impossibility seems just as clear when we see the infinite love which permeates the nature of God. This love leaves the ninety-nine to go after the one. This love joyfully meets every prodigal with a warm embrace when he or she is ready to return home. This love was willing to forgive all from the cross because they knew not what they were doing in crucifying the Lord of glory. Eternal torture does not fit the nature of this love. As F. F. Bruce said, "Eternal conscious torment is incompatible with the revealed character of God." See Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: A Global Ministry, "The Later Years,"* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter Varsity Press, 2001), 2:354-355. For this reason, we may hope that God's unsurpassed love will ultimately trump and redeem man's unsurpassed evil.
- C. **A Doctrine?** Theologians like William Barclay, John Baillie and John A. T. Robinson believe that Universalism is thoroughly scriptural. There is a strong line of Scriptures which promise that all men, even the enemies of the Gospel, will come to a saving knowledge of God, preferably in this lifetime, but certainly in the next. The title of Robinson's book on this subject, *In the End God* is self-explanatory. Under this view, post-mortem conversion is a possibility. Whereas hard-liners like Martin Luther thought it "the highest degree of faith to believe that God is merciful who saves so few and damns so many," others have preferred to believe that the highest form of faith is to believe that God will ultimately save all men from all evil in all ages for all time.

The evil of men and fallen angels simply can't outlast and out-manuever the love of God. A man can perhaps avoid and deny God during this earthly existence, but in the afterlife the crisis heightens and intensifies. God will send wave after wave of His love and forgiveness to the soul trapped in his own Hell. The soul will scoff, sneer and spit at this love - - at first. The sinner may keep it up for days, months, years or millenniums, but God will not quit. His love will wait out the sinner. God's love will minister truth to the sinner in and through the sinner's delusions. God's love will torment the sinner because of the sinner's hatred of good. Evil can escape God only by believing lies about God. As God strips away the lies, the sinner will wail in pain and travail as these fig leaves are wrenched away from him one deception at a time. These fig leaves make up the false identities behind which the sinner has hidden from God. As the fig leaves go, the sinner's nakedness and shame before God is revealed. In this process, repentance is birthed and Jesus delivers this soul from Hell. This is what is meant when Jesus is said to have preached (evangelized) all the lost in Hell (1 Pet. 4:6) and then "led captivity captive" by harrowing and emptying the power of Hell (Eph. 4:8-10; Col. 2:15). Under this view, Hell is infinitely intense because Jesus is saving us to the uttermost parts of our deepest being, but Hell is not of infinite duration because evil can't resist God eternally. Jesus did not suffer the pangs of Hell in infinite duration, but He did suffer them in infinite intensity. If the nature of Hell was endless torment, then Jesus should still be there and in fact should never leave there. Since He is not there now, and never will be again, we can know that His full payment for our sins was of infinite intensity rather than infinite duration. The major difference between Jesus' view of Hell and our view of Hell is that Jesus knew that the Father would not abandon Him in Hell (Acts 2:26-28). We, however, with our

limited faith in His goodness and power to save, believe that Hell is eternal abandonment by God. Jesus knew better, and so can we. God will not eternally leave any soul in Hell. This belief works both as a hope or a doctrine, but it is not a heresy.

IV. **The Benefits of Spiritual Speculation:** Jesus taught primarily in parables, metaphors and analogies. Jesus did not teach explicitly what the Kingdom of Heaven was, but rather He taught what the Kingdom of Heaven was like. "All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world." Matt. 13:34-35. Jesus activated our imaginations so that we could use our understanding of things we already experientially know (farming, shepherding, etc.) and then apply this knowledge to understand the Heavenly realm through Spiritual speculation. If Heaven can only be understood by analogy, so too must Hell. "Whereunto shall we liken the Kingdom of God? Or with what comparison shall we compare it [or the Kingdom of Hell]?" Matt. 4:30.

A. **Types and Shadows:** Jonah and Nivevah.

1. Jonah in the belly of a whale (Jonah 2:1-10) was used by Jesus as a type and shadow of Him being in Hell for three days. Matt. 12: 39-40. Jonah believed he had been in the belly "forever" (v. 6) when in fact it had only been three days. Jonah in fact called the whale's belly the "belly of Hell" (v. 2). Thus, Jesus and Jonah both referred to it as a type of Hell, yet it was not in fact eternal. From Jonah's viewpoint, it certainly seemed

eternal and hopeless, yet God was working repentance in Jonah's heart during this three days in Hell. For Jesus it was different. Even though he suffered infinitely intense torment over His three days in Hell, He was aware of something the hopeless Jonah did not have the faith to know: "Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in Hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Acts 2:26-27. Verses 29-31 confirm that this above-quoted passage is referring to Jesus' confidence during His worst moments in Hell that the Father would not abandon Him. Perhaps this is why Jesus holds the "keys to Hell and death" (Rev. 1:18). The key out of Hell is the hope that God could never abandon His children to eternal torment. Jonah thought God would abandon him forever. Abraham thought God would abandon the rich man to eternal damnation in Luke 16:19-31. But, hallelujah, they were wrong.

"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of Hell and of death." Rev. 1:18.

"Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all Heavens, that he might fill all things.)" Eph. 4:8-10.

The challenge here is that some things are stated in the Bible from man's limited view, while others are

described from God's limitless view. For instance, from man's limited view, it was the kings of the earth, the Jews and the Gentiles who killed and crucified Jesus (Acts 2:22-23; 3:13-15; 4:26-28). But, from God's view nobody took Jesus' life. Rather, He voluntarily laid it down (Jn. 10:18). Let's consider another example. From man's view, it seems impossible for any man to be saved (Mk. 10:26). But, from God's view, "all things are possible" (Mk. 10:27). Romans 7 and Psalm 90 describe the dismal viewpoints of men. Romans 8 and Psalm 91 describe the joyfully unlimited viewpoint of God. I believe that much of what is said about the hopeless, eternal and tortuous nature of Hell is an accurate portrayal of man's view. But, other verses which seem to trump this view of Hell by emphatically declaring that all men will eventually be reconciled to God are portraying God's viewpoint. Speculative faith is what allows us to grow out of our own limited view of things into God's unlimited view of things.

2. Nineveh's repentance. As stated earlier, Saint Jerome said that in his day, "most persons understand the story of Nineveh and its King [to be a type and shadow of] the ultimate forgiveness of the devil and all rational creatures." If true, then God's purging fire will separate our false identities from our true identities. Each of us has a true name (nature) or essential self which only God knows. Unfortunately, the identities we create for ourselves during our lives here are often false, warped and artificial. If Satan is a false identity of Lucifer, is it possible that at the day of final judgment, Satan will be cast into the lake of fire along with Hell and death (Rev. 20:14; 21:4) and all other "former things," but that Lucifer's created self will be saved, yet

as by fire (1 Cor. 3:11-15)? Can such a thing be possible? When the Scriptures say that all the unbelievers, liars, fearful, idolaters, whore-mongers, etc. "shall have their part" (Rev. 21:8) in the lake of fire, which is the second death; does this mean that the only part of us to go into the final flames will be the false identities of evil we have worn as fig leaves? Will we ourselves be saved, yet as by fire? Is this possible? Dare we hope it? Dare we believe it?

"That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Phil. 2:10-11.

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" 1 Cor. 15:22-29.

Let's not be like Jonah, who was angry with God when Nineveh repented. Let's not be like the older brother in the Prodigal Son story, who was angry when his father fully forgave and restored the younger brother who had been lost in sin. Let's be open to the idea that God will reconcile all things to Himself without the use of eternal torture.

B. **Parables and Analogies**

1. Scarecrow Parable: There is a Batman villain from the comics named Scarecrow. His evil power was to spray a gas which would produce fearful hallucinations in whoever breathed it. In this delusional state, every perception was twisted into fearful torture. If anybody moved to help these infected people, the helpers would be perceived by the infected as monsters on the attack. No matter how harmless and helpful the gesture, it would be perceived as an act of aggressive terrorism. What if God's love is perceived the same way by lost souls after death? These souls are so infected with sin and fear that even Heaven itself seems like Hell to their deluded and guilt-ridden minds. The loving arms of Jesus to them might appear as monstrous appendages seeking to kill. C. S. Lewis adopted a similar theme in *The Great Divorce*, where Heaven seemed horrible to the inhabitants of Hell due to their self-created delusional states. If this is the case, we can see God's challenge in trying to minister to these deluded souls so that bit by bit the effects of the Scarecrow gas dissipate so that true repentance can come. One gets the flavor of this dynamic in Romans 12:20-21. "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with

good." Rom. 12:20-21.

2. Insane Asylum: What if Hell, from God's viewpoint, was a medical facility for the criminally insane, the fearfully delusional and the murderously mad? What if Hell, from God's view, was man-made - - fig leaves of delusions behind which the fearful and unbelieving hide from God? What if God patiently endures and ministers to these sick people in, through and around their delusions? What if God uses the spiritual shock treatment needed to awaken these poor souls to the truth - - a truth which will set all men free - - God loves them and gave His life to cure them from their sicknesses?

3. Redemptive Journeys Through Hell: What if God took Adolph Hitler, one of the most evil men who ever lived, on a journey right after Hitler's soul left his body at death? What if this journey had a purpose - - to take Hitler back to the point where it all went wrong? What if this journey, because of Hitler's intense will to evil, took months, years, or centuries by our measurements? But what if God's irresistible goodness eventually, ultimately and totally outlasted and overcame Hitler's defiance. Hitler's wood, hay and stubble would be burned off and he would be saved, yet so as by fire. (Examples: *The Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens; Joseph's treatment of his brothers (Gen. 42-45); and the movie *The Three Burials*).

C. **Redefining Terms:**

1. "Time" to God is not the same thing as time to man. "Kairos" is the Greek term generally used to describe

God's time. It is not run by a clock, but by the heart. "Kairos" is measured by relational events, renewed thoughts, repentant hearts and acts of love. "Chronos," by contrast, is man's time measured apart from God. Chronos is linear "clock time" which is running down this fallen world like a "time bomb" waiting to explode. Chronos is the sand of our lives slowly but surely emptying out our life force. Chronos is the process of dying. Chronos doesn't caress, doesn't change and doesn't forgive. Chronos ages us, disappoints us, crushes us and ultimately kills our bodies. Kairos cures us, restores our youth and allows us to be fully present in the "now" with our God. The problem arises when men apply Chronos concepts to Kairos events. To label Heaven or Hell as "endless" means that it is being measured by man's time, which can't begin to grasp the Kairos reality involved. Heaven is not Heaven because clocks will be ticking and ticking for all eternity without interruption. This Chronos concept that we will be sitting around stroking our harps forever and ever is not eternal life in the Kairos sense. Eternal life in the Kairos sense means life of infinite quality and blessedness. It is life which has evicted death altogether. Chronos doesn't even exist anymore where Kairos life exists. This life doesn't extend time, it transcends it altogether. So too, with Hell it is not a Chronos reality but a Kairos event which will be determined by God alone. That God doesn't view time from Chronos' viewpoint is established by 2 Peter 3:8 which states, "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." 2 Pet. 3:8. In fact, Revelation 10:6-7 says that when the seventh angel declares that "the mystery of God should

be finished,” that “there should be time (literally “Chronos”) no longer”! Isn’t it likely that both Heaven and Hell exist outside of time and space as we know it? Eternity is just a term to describe the limitless life of God which operates apart from the constraints of time and space. To use four dimensional terms (length, width, height and time) to describe 100 dimensional realities is completely inadequate. A Christian writer and theologian, Edwin A. Abbott, once wrote a book called *Flatland*. It is a science fiction novel about a planet called Flatland where the inhabitants have only two dimensions - - length and width. Since they lack height, they all appear as lines to each other. Some have more sides than others, but all still appear as simple lines. One day, a three dimensional being enters their world. He tries to explain three dimensional reality but the flatlanders can’t understand it because all they know is two dimensions. Ultimately, the three dimensional messiah lifts one of the flatlanders up and out of his two dimensional reality. The flatlander now is astounded with the Heavenly reality of height that has always existed both above and beneath him. The two dimensions the flatlander did know have now been blended with the Heavenly truth of height which now gives everything he knows limitless depth and beauty. In this same way, we who live by Chronos can’t grasp the eternal essences of Heaven and Hell until our Messiah lifts us up to spiritual realities which transcend the time and space limitations of our flatland. Do we really believe that when Jesus descended into Hell to lead “captivity captive” and disarm all the demonic principalities and powers (Eph. 4:8-10; Col. 2:15), that this was done in linear Chronos time? No, Jesus died once for all. What He did was

outside of time and space. He died for all men - - past, present and future. He preached (literally, "evangelized") to all the dead in Hell - - past, present and future (1 Pet. 4:6). If Jesus had done all this in Chronos time, we could assume only that He paid for the sins of those who were in Hell as of 33 A.D. Since we know this can't be the case, we must toss Chronos considerations out of our definitions of Heaven and Hell. As A. W. Tozer said in his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*: "Because God lives in an everlasting now, He has no past and no future. When time-words occur in the Scriptures they refer to our time, not to His. When the four living creatures before the throne cry day and night, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come,' they are identifying God with the flow of creature-life with its familiar three tenses; and this is right and good, for God has sovereignly willed so to identify Himself. But since God is uncreated, He is not Himself affected by that succession of consecutive changes we call time."

2. "Eternal Punishment" is the term used in the English translation of the Bible on which most people base their view of eternal torment in Hell. The term in the Greek is "kolasis aionios." If this term does indeed mean "eternal punishment," then Universalism would appear to violate this scripture. But, such is not the case. let's first consider the opinion of the great Greek scholar William Barclay, who was professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at Glasgow University and the author of many commentaries and books, including a translation of the *New Testament* and *The Daily Study Bible Series*. Barclay discusses this point regarding Matthew 25:46 in his well-known letter entitled, *I am a*

Convinced Universalist, published in his autobiography. "One of the key passages is Matthew 25:46 where it is said that the rejected go away to eternal punishment, and the righteous to eternal life. The Greek word for punishment is kolasis, which was not originally an ethical word at all. It originally meant the pruning of trees to make them grow better. I think it is true to say that in all Greek secular literature kolasis is never used of anything but remedial punishment. The word for eternal is aionios. It means more than everlasting, for Plato - who may have invented the word - plainly says that a thing may be everlasting and still not be aionios. The simplest way to put it is that aionios cannot be used properly of anyone but God; it is the word uniquely, as Plato saw it, of God. Eternal punishment is then literally that kind of remedial punishment which it befits God to give and which only God can give."

There are seven passages which speak of "everlasting" destruction (2 Thes. 1:9), "everlasting" punishment (Matt. 25:46), "everlasting" fire (Matt. 18:8; 25:41; Jude 7), "eternal" sin (Mk. 3:29) and "everlasting" judgment (Heb. 6:2) - - all translated from the Greek word "aionios." If "aionios" does not mean "everlasting" in the Chronos sense, then the New Testament basis for "endless torment" splinters considerably. In addition to Barclay's opinion above, let's consider some other points of persuasion about the proper translation of "aionios."

a. *Rotterdam Emphasized Bible* translates "kolasis aionios"

in Matthew 25:46 as "age abiding correction."

- b. *Young's Literal Translation* translates "kolasis aionios" in Matthew 25:46 as "punishment age."
- c. *Concordant Literal Translation* translates "kolasis aionios" in Matthew 25:46 as "chastening eonian." (Our English word "eon" derives from the Greek word "aionios." Eon, as we use the word, speaks of ages or cycles of indeterminate amounts of time. The term is often used in the plural form, such as "It's been eons since we've talked," or "Eons ago the universe was formed." The point is that we don't even use the term today to refer to "everlasting" in the sense of never ending. Think how silly it sounds to pluralize "everlasting" into "everlastings").
- d. The best translators of the New Testament Greek text would be the Greek fathers of the church over the first 500 years. They were Christian. They were scholars. They lived nearest to the time the New Testament was written and would have a better grasp of grammatical nuances of recent generations. Koine Greek was a lost language for hundreds of years and it is somewhat presumptuous for modern scholars to think they know Biblical Greek better than the Greek-speaking Church fathers did.
- e. The Church fathers and writers who used the term "aionios" in their writings to refer to an indefinite "age" and not to an "unending" or "everlasting" eternity are: Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hermogones, Origen, Eusebius, Gregory of Nyssa, Avitus, plus all those Greek Fathers mentioned in III. C. Above. Augustine, who

knew no Greek, claimed for years that the only meaning of "aionios" was "everlasting," yet even he had to acknowledge his error when visited by the Spanish presbyter Orosius, who convinced Augustine of his error. Augustine relented, but only to the extent that "aionios" did not only mean "everlasting." Augustine still believed it means "everlasting" with regard to Hell.

- f. The Emperor Justinian in A.D. 540 tried to extinguish Origen's teachings by defining Catholic doctrine at that time. "The Holy Church of Christ teaches an endless aionios (ATELEUTETOS aionios) life to the righteous, and endless (ateleutetos) punishment to the wicked." Aionios was not enough in his judgment to denote endless duration, so he employed ateleutetos. The point is that "aionios" by itself did not mean "everlasting." It needed to be strengthened with another word to in fact mean "endless," like "ateleutetos."
- g. Jews who were contemporaries with Christ, but who wrote in Greek, show that "aionios" was not used to mean "everlasting." Josephus the historian used "aionios" to refer to temples which were already destroyed (and thus not "everlasting"), indeterminate prison sentences and time lapses between historical events. He never used the word to denote "everlasting," but rather to mean an indeterminate period or season. The Jewish writer Philo always used the words athanaton, ateleuteton or aidion to denote endless and aionion for temporary duration.
- h. Early documents like the *Sibylline Oracles* always used "aionios" in contexts of not being "everlasting." The

oldest version of the New Testament, the Syriac (Peshito), renders "aion" as "Olam" or "the world to come." In no sense was "everlasting" used in this translation of Matthew 25:46.

i. "What kind of life is eternal (aionios)? It is the very life of God Himself. It is the very energy, force, being, essence, principle, and power of life. It has more to do with quality and with what life really is than with duration. To live forever in the present world is not necessarily a good thing. The world and man's body need changing. That changed life is found only in eternal life. The only being who can be said to be eternal is God. Therefore, life - - supreme life - - is found only in God. To possess eternal life is to know God. Once a person knows God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, that person has eternal life - - he will live forever. But more essential, the person has the supreme quality of life, the very life of God Himself." *Practical Word Studies in the New Testament*, 1998.

j. Consider the following excerpt from Chapter Three of Louis Abbott's *An Analytical Study of Words*:

"Dr. R. F. Weymouth, a translator who was adept in Greek, states in *The New Testament in Modern Speech* (p. 657), 'Eternal, Greek aeonian, i.e., of the ages: Etymologically this adjective, like others similarly formed does not signify, 'during' but 'belonging to' the aeons or ages.'

Dr. Marvin Vincent, in his *Word Studies of the New Testament* (vol. IV, p.59): 'The adjective aionios in like manner carries the idea of time. Neither the noun nor

the adjective in themselves carries the sense of 'endless' or 'everlasting.' Aionios means enduring through or pertaining to a period of time. Out of the 150 instances in the LXX (Septuagint), four-fifths imply limited duration.'

Dr. F. W. Farrar, author of *The Life of Christ and The Life and Work of St. Paul*, as well as books about Greek grammar and syntax, writes in *The Eternal Hope* (p. 198), 'That the adjective is applied to some things which are 'endless' does not, of course, for one moment prove that the word itself meant 'endless;' and to introduce this rendering into many passages would be utterly impossible and absurd.' In his book *Mercy and Judgment*, Dr. Farrar states (p. 378), 'Since aion meant 'age,' aionios means, properly, 'belonging to an age,' or 'age-long,' and anyone who asserts that it must mean 'endless' defends a position which even Augustine practically abandoned twelve centuries ago. Even if aion always meant 'eternity,' which is not the case in classic or Hellenistic Greek-aionios could still mean only 'belonging to eternity' and not 'lasting through it.'

Lange's Commentary American Edition (vol. V, p. 48), on Ecclesiastes chapter 1 verse 4, in commenting upon the statement 'The earth abideth forever' says, 'The preacher, in contending with the universalist, or restorationist, would commit an error, and, it may be, suffer a failure in his argument, should he lay the whole stress of it on the etymological or historical significance of the words, aion, aionios, and attempt to prove that, of themselves, they necessarily carry the meaning of endless duration.'

The Rev. Bennett, in his *Olam Hanneshamoth* (p. 44), says, 'The primary nature of olam is 'hidden,' and both as to past and future denotes a duration that is unknown.' Olam is the Hebrew word for the Greek aion.

The *Parkhurst Lexicon*: 'Olam (aeon) seems to be used much more for an indefinite than for an infinite time.'

Dr. MacKnight: 'I must be so candid as to acknowledge that the use of these terms 'forever,' 'eternal,' 'everlasting,' shows that they who understand these words in a limited sense when applied to punishment put no forced interpretation upon them.'

Dr. Nigel Turner, in *Christian Words*, says (p. 457), 'All the way through it is never feasible to understand aionios as everlasting.'

The Pulpit Commentary, vol. 5, p. 385, says, 'It is possible that 'aeonian,' may denote indefinite duration without the connotation of never ending.'

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 4, p.643, says 'The O.T. and the N.T. are not acquainted with conception of eternity as timelessness.' Page 644: 'The O.T. has not developed a special term for eternity.' Page 645: 'The use of the word aion in the N.T. is determined very much by the O.T. and the LXX. Aion means long, distant, uninterrupted time. The intensifying plural occurs frequently in the N.T....but it adds no new meaning.'

Dr. Lammenois, a man adept with languages, states, 'In Hebrew and Greek the words rendered 'everlasting'

have not this sense. They signify a long duration of time, a period; hence the phrase, 'during these eternities and beyond.'"

3. "Damnation" is from the Greek word "krisis," from which we get the word "crisis." "Damnation" does not mean "eternally cursed" or "doomed to everlasting Hell." Rather, damnation, or krisis, literally means "a decision for or against something." *Vines Expository* says it "primarily denotes the process of investigation, the act of distinguishing and separating, and hence a passing of judgment upon a person or thing." Webster's definition of "crisis" is "a serious or decisive state of things, or the turning point when an affair must soon terminate or suffer a material change; a decisive or crucial time, stage or event; in medicine the turning point in the course of a disease, which indicates a recovery or a worsening." All of this woven together surely paints Hell as a "crisis" of the utmost importance and imminent seriousness, but there is nothing in all this which brings everlasting torment or eternal cursing into the mix.

Crisis in the English is the perfect word to substitute for damnation. For example, Jesus in Matthew 23:33 asks the Pharisees, "how can you escape the damnation of Hell?" This makes more sense when we translate it with the above definitions: "how can you escape the crisis of Hell where you will be investigated, your works distinguished and separated, with all the wood, hay and stubble of your false identities burned and painfully purged from you?"

4. "Hell" needs to be redefined. Hell is nowhere in the original languages of the Bible. It is an English word used to translate several other Greek and Hebrew terms. "Sheol" (Hebrew) is translated "Hell" 31 of 65 occurrences. "Hades" (Greek) is

translated "Hell" 10 of 11 occurrences. "Gehenna" (Greek) is translated "Hell" 11 of 12 occurrences. "Tartarus" (Greek) is translated "Hell" 1 out of 1 occurrence. Briefly, "Sheol" and "Hades" represent the same place - - the land of the dead who await the final judgment. "Tartarus" is a place beneath Hades where certain fallen angels are chained awaiting final judgment. "Gehenna" is equivalent to the lake of fire where the final judgment shall occur at the end of the ages. Interestingly, Jewish beliefs, as reflected in the Talmuds from three centuries before Christ to three centuries after Christ, according to eminent Hebrew scholar Emmanuel Deutsch, limit Gehenna's final judgment to be temporary (from generations to 12 months to a day). Deutsch wrote in his essay on the Talmud: "There is no everlasting damnation according to the Talmud. There is only a temporary punishment even for the worst of sinners. 'Generations upon generations' shall last the damnation of idolaters, apostates and traitors. But there is a space of 'only two fingers' breadth between 'Hell and Heaven;' the sinner has but to repent sincerely, and the gates to everlasting bliss will spring open. No human being is excluded from the world to come. Every man, of whatever creed or nation, provided he be of the righteous, shall be admitted into it." *Literary Remains*, p. 53, cited in *Salvator Mundi*, by Samuel Cox (Kegan Paul, Trench and Co., 1884).

V. **Cautions and Snares**

A. **Eternal Punishment**

1. Fear based
2. Contradicts revealed nature of God

3. Justifies torture, violence, inquisitions and anger-retention by believers
4. Evil eternally exists
5. The love and will of God is eternally defeated

B. Annihilationism

1. Less scriptural
2. They shoot horses don't they?
3. Out of sight, out of mind
4. Destruction is expedited torture with eternal lostness
5. The love and will of God is eternally defeated

C. Universalism

1. Beware pluralism
2. Beware New Age forgeries
3. Beware chilling of evangelism
4. Beware chilling of our hatred of evil
5. Beware attacks on the Trinity

VI. Conclusion

The early Church had a significantly different view of Hell than much of the Church does today. Hell, for the Church fathers, was God's "crisis-management" for lost souls who did not receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior during their earthly lives. God's fire was wise in that it cleansed and cured the lost soul of its false identities accumulated during their fallen lifetimes. The wood, hay and stubble of these false identities would be burned off of the lost soul, but they themselves would be saved. Hell, from this viewpoint, was a redemptive journey to repentance and restoration. Hell was still seen as infinitely intense and unimaginably painful - - just not eternal. When the Church rejected this high view of God's goodness and replaced it with a view of God as an eternal torturer, the dark ages began, almost to the day. Ever since, there has remained a small, constant and stubborn strand of Universalism imbedded in the Church waiting to restore "the blessed hope" to mainstream Christianity. Universalism can withstand any Scriptural challenge if you accept four premises previously addressed in this outline:

- A. "Aionios" in Scripture does not mean "unending" or "everlasting" in quantity. Rather, it speaks to an indeterminate age set by God alone to consist of a certain quality of being - - whether it be aionios life or aionios punishment\correction. Aionios is qualified by what it is describing. For instance, the word "great," when applied to a merciful sentence imposed by a kind-hearted judge, might refer to a small amount of time in jail. Conversely, "great," when applied to an atrocious crime for which the judge "throws the book" at the defendant might refer to decades in jail. Similarly, the duration and quality of "aionios" when applied to "the life of God" is entirely different than when it is applied to "the chastening or punishment of God." "Great" life in God is certainly unending, since death will have been completely defeated. "Great" punishment by God will not be unending since He punishes to correct and rehabilitate and He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." 2 Pet. 3:9. "Life in God" is not

everlasting because it is "aionios," but rather "aionios" is everlasting because it is referring to "life in God." Conversely, "aionios punishment" is not temporary because "aionios" means temporary, but rather "aionios" is temporary in this context since God's chastening is curative and incapable of being eternally resisted. "Aionios," by itself, means an "indeterminate age." Only the context of the passage provides guidance as to the actual quality and duration of the age.

- B. The work of Jesus by and through the Cross began in man's time (Chronos) but ended in God's time (Kairos). Jesus died once for all men for all times for all sins. Heaven and Hell are realms outside of this present Chronos time. When Jesus "led captivity captive," He simultaneously rescued all men from every past Hell, every present Hell, and every future Hell. We must not apply terms of "fallen" time to describe God's "perfect" time. Chronos terms of quantity of time like "unending" or "everlasting," simply do not properly define Kairos events like "eternal punishment" or "eternal life," both of which speak to "quality" of time rather than "quantity" of time.
- C. God separates our wood, hay and stubble of false identities accumulated in this lifetime and casts them into the lake of fire. 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 clearly envisions such a separation. For Christians who win the crown of an overcomer, there is little if any wood, hay and stubble to separate and burn by flame. However, for the lost, the burning will be intense and they will lose much, but they themselves will be saved. The lost will "have their part in the lake which burneth with fire," but their part will be their wood, hay and stubble and not their essential selves. Rev. 21:8. This idea of losing portions of our personality to the flames but not our essential being is clearly shown in 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 and supported by 1 Corinthians 5:5 and 1 Thessalonians 5:23.
- D. God's nature only overcomes evil one way - - with goodness. Rom.

12:21; Matt. 5:43-48. It simply could not be in His nature to eternally torture any of His children, no matter how prodigal they have become. God's goodness will ultimately, irresistibly and totally overcome and reconcile all forms of evil. As George MacDonald wrote, "Nothing is inexorable but love. . . . Love is one, and love is changeless. For love loves into purity. Love has ever in view the absolute loveliness of that which it beholds. . . . There is nothing eternal but that which loves and can be loved, and love is ever climbing towards the consummation when such shall be the universe, imperishable, divine. Therefore, all that is not beautiful in the beloved, all that comes between and is not of love's kind, must be destroyed." *George MacDonald: Scotland's Beloved Storyteller*, by Michael Phillips, p. 201 (1987). What then is Hell, where did it come from and how are we delivered from it? William Law's answer is simply this: "There is no Hell but where the heart of the creature is turned from God, nor any heaven but where the heart of the creature worketh with God....Purification therefore is the one thing necessary, and nothing will do instead of it. But man is not purified till every earthly, wrathful, sensual, selfish, partial, self-willing temper is taken from him. He is not dying to himself till he is dying to these tempers, and he is not alive in God till he is dead to them." *Selected Writings of William Law*, by William Law and Stephen Holohouse (1940). Hell, then, is the heart turned from God and Heaven the heart turned toward God. The crisis of Hell is God's emergency rescue of lost souls from their self-made and Satan-generated Hell which has hardened their hearts toward God. But, they may run but they can't hide in Hell. God will go after and save them from themselves. It will be painful and agonizing, but it will ultimately lead to repentance, redemption and life. As the *Theologia Germanica* states, "Nothing burneth in Hell but self-will." This echoes William Law's statement, "Nothing separates us from God but our own self-will. Rather, our own self-will is separation from God." George MacDonald famously said, "The one principle of Hell is, 'I am my own.'" C. S. Lewis said, "Hell's gate is locked

from the inside." But, praise God, Jesus has the keys to both death and Hell. He is truly the "stronger" one who enters Hell, binds Satan, and saves us from our own destructions (Matt. 12:28-29). This is the heroic view of God which is most consistent with His revealed nature in Jesus Christ. John A.T. Robinson summed it up best when he observed that the idea of God's deliverance from Hell for all men comes from "insight rather than foresight." In other words, an "insight" into God's love makes the permanency of Hell impossible. It is not based on the "foresight" of what exactly Hell will be, but rather is based on an "insight" into what God's character is.

I will close with two excerpts, one from Andrew Murray regarding Universal Salvation, and the other William Barclay's famous letter as to why he was a "convinced" Universalist. Although Murray was an Arminian early in his life, the influence of William Law's book *An Affectionate and Earnest Address to the Clergy*, in which Law outlined his belief in Universalism and was a book which Murray wholeheartedly endorsed, forever changed Murray's view of salvation as reflected in the following passage:

The Salvation of All
By Andrew Murray
(Chapter 23 of his book "God's Will")

"I exhort therefore, that, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who will have all men to be saved - - 1 Timothy 2:14.

The Lord is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9.

After Paul urged that supplications, prayers, and intercessions should be made for all men, he reminded us that we may do so in confident assurance that it is good and acceptable to God. He wills that all men should be saved.

The knowledge and faith of God's will for all is to be the motivation and the measure of our prayer for all. What God in heaven wills and works for His children on earth we are to will and work for, too. As we enter into His will for all, we will know what we are to do so fulfill that will. And, as we pray and labor for all, the faith in His will for all will inspire us with confidence and love.

Perhaps the question arises - if God wills the salvation of all, why is it not happening? What about the doctrine of election, as Scripture teaches us? And, what about the Omnipotence of God, which is surely equal to His love that wills the salvation of all? As to election, remember that there are mysteries in God and in Scripture which are beyond our reach. If there are apparently conflicting truths which we cannot reconcile, we know that Scripture was not written, like a book of science, to satisfy the intellect. It is the revelation of the hidden wisdom of God, which tests and strengthens faith and submission, and awakens love and childlike teachableness.

If we cannot understand why His power does not work what His will has purposed, we will find that all that God does or does not do is decided by conditions far beyond our human comprehension. It requires a Divine wisdom to grasp and to order God's ways. We will learn that God's will is as much beyond our comprehension as God's being. And, it is our wisdom, safety, and happiness to accept every revealed truth with the simplicity and the faith of little children. We must yield ourselves to the utmost to this blessed word: God will have all men to be saved.

God is love. His will is love. As He makes His sun to shine on the good and the evil, so His love rests on all. However, little we can understand why His love is so long-suffering and patient, we can believe in and be assured of the love that God gives to us a love whose measure in heaven is the gift of His Son, and on earth every child of man. His love is nothing but His will in its Divine energy doing its very utmost in accordance with the Divine law. Thus, His relationship to mankind is regulated to make men partakers of His blessedness. His will is nothing but His love in its infinite patience and tenderness delighting to win and bless every heart into which it can gain

access.

If we only knew God and His love, how we would look on every man we see as one upon whom that love rests and for whom it longs. We would begin to wonder about the mystery of grace that has taken up the Church, as the body of Christ, as a partner in the great work of making that love known, and rendered itself dependent upon its faithfulness. And, we would see that all who live to do God's will must believe this to be its central glory: our doing the will that wills that all men should be saved.

God will have all men to be saved. This truth is a supernatural mystery. It can only be understood by a spiritual mind through the teaching of the Holy Spirit. It is in itself so Divine and beyond our apprehension-the difficulties that surround it are so many and so real-that it needs so much time and sacrifice to master its teaching. To very many who do not possess a humble, loving heart, the words carry little meaning.

To the believer, who in very deed seeks to know and to do all God's will, God's words give a new meaning to life. He begins to see that this call to love and to save his fellowmen is not something accidental or additional. He begins to realize that, along with the other things that make up his life, he can devote as much time and thought to this as he sees fit. He learns that just as this loving, saving will of God is the secret source of all His will and rules it all, so this loving, saving will is to be the chief thing that he lives for, too. I have been redeemed, organically united to, and made a member of the saving Christ, who came to do this will of the Father.

I have been chosen and set apart and fitted for this as the one object of my being in the world. I begin to see that the prayer, Thy will be done! Means, above everything else, that I give myself for this loving, saving will of God to possess, inspire, use, and if need be, consume me. And, I feel the need of spelling out the words of the sentence until my heart can call them its own: God-my God, who lives in me - - will have, with His whole heart, in that will which He has revealed to His people that they may carry it into effect - - all

men, here around me, and to the ends of the earth - - to be saved, to have everlasting life.

Paul wrote these words in connection with a call to prayer for all men. Our faith in the truth of God's loving, saving will must be put into practice. It must stir us to prayer. And prayer will most certainly stir us to work. We must not only seek to believe and feel the truth of these words, but we must also act. This will of God must be done. Let us look upon those around us as the objects of God's love, whom His saving will is seeking to reach. Let us, as we yield ourselves to this will, go and speak to those around us about God's love in Christ.

It is possible that we are not succeeding in doing God's will in our personal life because we neglect the chief thing. As we pray to be possessed and filled with the knowledge of God's will, let us seek, in all things, to have our hearts filled with this love. Let us have tongues which speak of Jesus and His salvation, and a will which finds its strength in God's own will - - that all men be saved. So will our life, our love, our work, and our will in some measure be like that of Jesus Christ - - a doing of the Father's will, that none of these little ones should perish."

I AM A CONVINCED UNIVERSALIST

by William Barclay

Professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at Glasgow University
and the author of many Biblical commentaries and books,
including a translation of the New Testament, "Barclay
New Testament," and "The Daily Study Bible Series."

"I am a convinced universalist. I believe that in the end all men will be gathered into the love of God. In the early days Origen was the great name connected with universalism. I would believe with Origen that universalism is

no easy thing. Origen believed that after death there were many who would need prolonged instruction, the sternest discipline, even the severest punishment before they were fit for the presence of God. Origen did not eliminate hell; he believed that some people would have to go to heaven via hell. He believed that even at the end of the day there would be some on whom the scars remained. He did not believe in eternal punishment, but he did see the possibility of eternal penalty. And so the choice is whether we accept God's offer and invitation willingly, or take the long and terrible way round through ages of purification.

Gregory of Nyssa offered three reasons why he believed in universalism. First, he believed in it because of the character of God. 'Being good, God entertains pity for fallen man; being wise, he is not ignorant of the means for his recovery.' Second, he believed in it because of the nature of evil. Evil must in the end be moved out of existence, 'so that the absolutely non-existent should cease to be at all.' Evil is essentially negative and doomed to non-existence. Third, he believed in it because of the purpose of punishment. The purpose of punishment is always remedial. Its aim is 'to get the good separated from the evil and to attract it into the communion of blessedness.' Punishment will hurt, but it is like the fire which separates the alloy from the gold; it is like the surgery which removes the diseased thing; it is like the cautery which burns out that which cannot be removed any other way.

But I want to set down not the arguments of others but the thoughts which have persuaded me personally of universal salvation.

First, there is the fact that there are things in the New Testament which more than justify this belief. Jesus said: 'I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself' (Jn. 12:32). Paul writes to the Romans: 'God has consigned all men to disobedience that he may have mercy on all' (Rom. 11:32). He writes to the Corinthians: 'As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive' (1 Cor. 15:22); and he looks to the final total triumph when God will be everything to everyone (1 Cor. 15:28). In the First Letter to Timothy we read of God 'who desires all men to be saved and to come to the

knowledge of the truth,' and of Christ Jesus 'who gave himself as a ransom for all' (1 Tim. 2:4-6). The New Testament itself is not in the least afraid of the word all.

Second, one of the key passages in Matthew 25:46 where it is said that the rejected go away to eternal punishment, and the righteous to eternal life. The Greek word for punishment is kolasis, which was not originally an ethical word at all. It originally means the pruning of trees to make them grow better. I think it is true to say that in all Greek secular literature kolasis is never used of anything but remedial punishment. The word for eternal is aionios. It means more than everlasting, for Plato - who may have invented the word - plainly says that a thing may be everlasting and still not be aionios. The simplest way to out it is that aionios cannot be used properly of anyone but God; it is the word uniquely, as Plato saw it, of God. Eternal punishment is then literally that kind of remedial punishment which it befits God to give and which only God can give.

Third, I believe that it is impossible to set limits to the grace of God. I believe that not only in this world, but in any other world there may be, the grace of God is still effective, still at work. I do not believe that the operation of the grace of God is limited to this world. I believe that the grace of God is as wide as the universe.

Fourth, I believe implicitly in the ultimate and complete triumph of God, the time when all things will be subject to him, and when God will be everything to everyone (1 Cor. 15:24-28). For me this has certain consequences. If one man remains outside the love of God at the end of time, it means that that one man has defeated the love of God - and that is impossible. Further, there is only one way in which we can think of the triumph of God. If God was no more than a King or Judge, then it would be possible to speak of his triumph, if his enemies were agonizing in hell or were totally and completely obliterated and wiped out. But God is not only King and Judge, God is Father - he is indeed Father more than anything else. No father could be happy while there were members of his family for ever in agony. No

father would count it a triumph to obliterate the disobedient members of his family. The only triumph a father can know is to have all his family back home. The only victory love can enjoy is the day when its offer of love is answered by the return of love. The only possible final triumph is a universe loved by and in love with God."

[Quoted from *William Barclay: A Spiritual Autobiography*, pg. 65-67, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1977.]

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