

Discussed: hell, universalism, prayers, death of the wicked,
the incarnation, moral ambiguity, radical seriousness, worst-case scenarios,
John Donne, paradox, ontological blunders

How Inclusive Is Our Hope?

By Fritz Guy

Do Christians, including Adventists, have a vested interest in hell—that is, in the limitation of salvation to a special group along with the eternal damnation of everybody else? If we were to discover that God’s love could in fact save all of humanity, not just a small minority, would we be overjoyed, like the shepherd, the housewife, and the father in Jesus’ stories (Luke 15)? Or would we be dismayed, like the prophet Jonah, unhappy because God was “ready to relent from punishing” (Jon. 4:2)?



Is it possible to be authentically Adventist and at the same time genuinely hope not only for the communication of the gospel to the whole world, but also for the ultimate salvation of every human being? Could this be our vision, our goal? Could we imagine an eschatological scenario with a “lake of fire” that symbolizes the final end of evil and the ultimate triumph of love, that obliterates everything contrary to the good but does not obliterate persons created in God’s own image?¹ Could there be, in other words, an Adventist version of universally inclusive hope—a “hopeful universalism”—that does not claim to *know* that in the end all humanity will be saved, but nevertheless has good reason truly to hope this will be so?

Most Adventists, like most other Christians, would hesitate to say Yes to this question. In this sense, the idea of a universally inclusive vision and hope would be unorthodox: it is not part of the consensus of the Adventist community. The important question, however, is not whether such an idea is orthodox, but whether it is the most adequate understanding of the Christian gospel that God is love. And surely anyone “who has not felt deeply the attraction of universalism can scarcely have been moved by the greatness of God’s love.”² We may disagree over what kind of universalism, if any, is theologically *correct*; but we should all find the idea of complete, universal salvation spiritually desirable.

Universal Intention

It is certainly God’s intention to save the whole world. Because the character of God is love—this is the central content of the Christian gospel, and also the focus of the great controversy between good and evil—and because God is the source of all reality, there is no reasonable doubt about the universal scope of God’s love.³ It is unthinkable that God’s love should be restricted to a fortunate minor fraction of humanity, with another, larger part being excluded.

On the contrary, God loves everyone, everywhere, all the time. God’s love includes absolutely all humanity, intending the ultimate good of salvation—that is, reconciliation to God and eternal life, comprising a present experience of acceptance and security, and an everlasting future—for every person who ever lives on the earth. This is indeed “the one purpose of God.”⁴

Not only is this a theological necessity, the inescapable implication of a Christian understanding of the character of God, Scripture explicitly and repeatedly attests it:

- A divine word brought by the prophet Ezekiel assured the covenanted people of God’s continuing concern: “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live” (Ezek. 33:11).⁵
- Explaining the Parable of the Diligent Shepherd as an illustration of his own concern for children, Jesus said, “It is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost” (Matt. 18:14).
- According to the Pauline letters collected in the New Testament, God’s intention for human salvation is as wide as the human need: God wills to be “merciful to all” (Rom. 11:32).
- According to a Pauline sermon, this means not only that God “commands all people everywhere to repent,” but also that in Christ God “has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:30–31).
- The most famous sentence in the New Testament is also the most important, because it is the most succinct and powerful statement of the gospel: the everlasting good news is the fact that the whole world of humanity is the object of God’s love. “God loved the world in such a way that he gave his unique Son...in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16–17, translation supplied).
- The confirming testimony of the Spirit is that “the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:1).
- The goal of Christ’s mission is “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9–11).
- God “has made known to us the mystery of his will...as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:9–10).



- Prayers for all kinds of persons, including those in high places, are always appropriate because God “desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4).
- A diligent, disciplined ministry is inspired by the knowledge that God is “the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe” (1 Tim. 4:10).
- The fact that God has not yet come again to humanity in the person of Jesus the Messiah—a fact that has been an object of concern for believers and an occasion of ridicule for unbelievers—is to be understood in light of the fact that God is patient, “not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).
- The purpose of the incarnation of “all the fullness of God” in and as Jesus the Messiah was “to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:19–20).
- The reason why Jesus “for a little while was made lower than the angels” was “so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9).
- In the Johannine literature, Jesus is introduced as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) and identified as “the atoning sacrifice...for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2).
- In the Pauline literature, the same point is made in the language of self-sacrifice for others, “We are convinced that one has died for all...He died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them” (2 Cor. 5: 14–15), and in the language of liberation, Jesus the Messiah “gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:6).

So it is clear that the divine act of atonement “is universal in its outreach and intention” and that “all are called to liberation and salvation.”⁶ The good news of Jesus Christ is good news for all of humanity—indeed, *for all* of creation. There is no limit to the scope of God’s love.

Positive Universalism

In view of the preeminence and universality of God’s love, it is hardly surprising that Christian faith has frequently affirmed universal salvation, although it has usually been a minority view. Sometimes identified by a phrase from the Greek text of Acts 3:21, which is translated literally as “the restoration of all things,” the doctrine of universal salvation has been known

technically as the doctrine of *apocatastasis* (from the Greek *ajpokatavstasi*). It goes back at least as far as the early Christian theologians Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215) and Origen (ca. 185–54), and was also taught by Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 330–95) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350–428), among others.⁷

Later advocates included Anabaptists, Cambridge Platonists, Pietists, and the English devotional writer William Law (1686–1781).⁸ In modern theology, universalism was advocated in the nineteenth century by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89), and in the twentieth century by Paul Tillich, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jürgen Moltmann, and an impressive list of others.⁹ This sort of list does not, of course, mean that the idea of universal salvation is actually correct; but it does suggest that it is not wholly unreasonable.

The vision of universal salvation is eloquently expressed as a part of Christian hope: “There can be no dual destiny in this hope, if there is to be hope at all. No ultimate division between persons who are sheep and persons who are goats, those who participate in God

and those who are condemned to hell, is admissible if the divine power is to be ultimately sovereign and the divine love the ultimate quality of that power.”¹⁰

There are several theological grounds for this rejection of the traditional idea of an ultimate division in human destiny. One is the moral ambiguity of all humanity and thus the moral similarity (albeit not identity) of all humanity. This similarity eliminates the possibility of any sort of spiritual elitism:

It is unthinkable
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Our experience tells us that God is related as creative ultimacy to all humans—and to all creatures alike—and that the differences between our responses to this relation—in our being, our loving and our creativity—are at best relative differences. Whether we speak of faith or of works, commitment or love, we can never discover an ultimate division between ourselves and others. Even more, experientially, if we be honest, we know unequivocally that together we share tragically in the nonachievements and the waywardness that is characteristic of even the worst of us.¹¹

In short, if *I* can be saved, in spite of the moral ambiguity that I know pervades my whole existence, how can I suppose that *anyone* is excluded from salvation? I may be different from some of the rest of humanity, but am I really that different? Am I that much better? Is my understanding of God that much closer to ultimate Truth, and are my moral and spiritual choices that much superior?

Another reason for affirming that all will ultimately be saved and that no one will finally be lost is the idea of salvation by God's grace as expressed in the Christian gospel:

Moreover, the gospel assures us from its side that all alike need mercy at the end if they are to be saved at all, that God's love reaches to the unworthy as well as to the worthy, and so in principle to all. It would be ironic indeed if the gospel preached a love that transcends all differences, divisions and faults, a mercy that was greater than all sin—and then established a new and more ultimate division between faith and unfaith (unfaith being sin) which the divine love could not overcome.¹²

If salvation is indeed a gift of grace, as all Christians agree, can it really be limited to those who jump high enough behaviorally or spiritually, or who jump through the correct hoops ritually and theologically? No. "If grace is true, it is true for everyone." And it is true unconditionally. "Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God. Not even us." As a friend put it, "either we are saved by grace or we aren't."¹³

A third reason is the interrelatedness of humanity. No one, as John Donne famously put it, "is an island."¹⁴ That is, "a person is not an isolated monad whose happi-

ness, or lack of same, is independent of other persons;...it is simply not possible that one should destroy every chance of future happiness in oneself without, at the same time, undermining the future happiness of others as well."

Nor is it acceptable to suppose "that God simply 'obliterates' from the minds of the redeemed 'any knowledge of lost persons so that they experience no pangs of remorse for them.'" This simply "reduces God's victory over sin to a cruel hoax; his hollow 'victory' consists not in his making things right, but in his concealing from the redeemed just how bad things really are. Though utterly defeated in the end, God simply conceals from us the enormity of the defeat."¹⁵

A fourth reason is the problem of theodicy. The reasoning here is that "for God to be good to a created person, God must guarantee him/her a life that is a great good to him/her on the whole and one in which any participation in horrors is defeated within the context of his/her own life." This means that the person "must recognize and appropriate meanings sufficient to render [his/her life] worth living." Furthermore, God must "be good to each created person." Indeed, "it would be cruel for God to create...human beings with such a radical vulnerability to horrors, unless Divine power stood able, and Divine love willing, to redeem."¹⁶

Having felt the power and persuasiveness of God's love, can we suppose that its deliberate rejection is a live option for anyone? And could not the gospel triumph over human perversity? Perhaps we can envision even greater possibilities of grace in Jesus' metaphor than we have usually recognized:

To man there remain eternally two ways. And the one that is crowded is still the one that leads to destruction; and many there be that find it. But at some point on that road, be it far or near, each one finds also something, or rather Someone, else. It is a figure, stooping beneath the weight of a cross. "Lord, where are you going?" asks Everyman. And the answer comes: "I am going to Rome, to Moscow, to New York, to be crucified afresh in your place." And no man in the end can bear that encounter forever. For it is an encounter with a power than which there can be nothing greater, a meeting with omnipotent Love itself.



This love will take no man's choice from him; for it is precisely his choice that it wants. But its will to lordship is inexhaustible and ultimately unendurable; the sinner *must* yield.¹⁷

Any thoughtful Christian must surely be impressed not only by the moral sensitivity of this vision and the force of these arguments, but also by the fact that they can be supported by numerous biblical asserions. In any serious consideration of God's love for humanity—the extravagant, suffering love, which, after all, is the essence of the Christian gospel—these assertions cannot be ignored. They seem to go beyond the affirmation of God's *intention* to save all humanity to suggest the *accomplishment* of that intention:

- Elaborating the significance of Jesus' resurrection, the apostle insisted, "For just as all die in Adam, so also all will be made alive in Christ" (1 Cor. 15:22).
- That is to say, regarding the crucial fact of justification, "as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all humanity, so one man's right action leads to right life for all humanity" (Rom. 5:18).¹⁸
- So "the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all humanity" (Tit. 2:11).¹⁹

On the basis of these assertions of Scripture, one can come to the plausible conclusion that "God will ultimately succeed in realizing his purposes for history and for all mankind." For the "good news" is precisely that "God loves the ungrateful and wicked."²⁰

The idea of universal salvation, therefore, is not to be dismissed glibly, much less disdainfully. "Many [Christians] today believe the salvation of all to be both Christian and compelling."²¹ Its primary attractiveness is not its eschatological optimism ("We're all going to be saved"), or its possible seductiveness as a moral opiate ("So we can do whatever we feel like doing"), but instead its radical seriousness about the scope of God's love and the power of God's grace ("God will not let us go").

Christianity, including its Adventist version, has no legitimate interest in populating hell.

Human Choice

Yet this "positive universalism" is not a live theological option for many Adventists and other Christians

because it remains difficult to escape the conviction that "as long as we think in the context of love and freedom there are always two possibilities"—possibilities that are ultimately ontological as well as existential.²² Thus, every person "in the course of his still-ongoing history has to reckon absolutely and up to the very end with the possibility of reaching his end in an absolute rejection of God, and hence in the opposite of salvation."²³ This is the horrendous but real possibility of "definitive destruction."²⁴

We can hardly ignore "the New Testament insistence that our response to the gospel determines for us the outcome of the final judgment."²⁵

The universal love that intends salvation for all also at the same time confronts every person with a genuine choice regarding the meaning of present existence and the nature of the ultimate future. This love loves so extravagantly that it is willing to risk eternal anguish rather than turn its beloved humanity into an object to be controlled by the will of another, even a divine Other. "Precisely because salvation consists in a personal relationship of love, it cannot be forced upon anyone. Love can only exist when it is freely given and freely received."²⁶

Just as it is God's love that intends, wills, and works for the salvation of all humanity, it is the same love that respects human freedom, even to the extent of allowing humanity to do the utterly irrational and perverse—that is, to reject the love that has created, sustained, and redeemed it. But if that happens, God recognizes and respects that rejection in virtue of the very love that has been rejected.

If salvation is indeed a gift of grace, as all Christians agree, can it really be limited to those who jump high enough behaviorally or spiritually, or jump through the correct hoops ritually and theologically?



It is highly inappropriate, therefore, to think in terms of a “paradox between God’s love and justice” resulting from the conflicting ideas that God’s love wants all to be saved, while at the same time “God’s justice requires all the disobedient to be punished.”²⁷ This seems simply wrong. Although it is a universal truth that “the wages of sin is death,” the good news is grounded in the even greater truth that “the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

To reject the grace that sustains one’s existence is a monumental ontological blunder; it doesn’t have to be “punished” by a new divine act, for its own consequences are intrinsic, inevitable, and decisive. However it is conceived, hell “is not a *punishment* for turning one’s back on Christ and choosing the road that leads to destruction. It is *where the road goes*.”²⁸ It is “the self-chosen state of alienation from God and not an additional punishment inflicted by God upon the sinner.... It is freely-chosen, radical self-isolation and, therefore, quite literally, the sinner’s undoing.”²⁹ So we can be confident that “God does not take vengeance”; the worst that can happen is that God “leaves evil to its own, limited logic.”³⁰

In contrast, it has been argued with equal conviction that “an infinitely resourceful God will ultimately win the cooperation of all rational free creatures.”³¹ As a matter of fact, “much of what God does in relation to us is agency-enabling and thus could not count as coercion.” Even “if this should mean God’s causally determining some things to prevent everlasting ruin,” this is “no more an insult to our dignity than a mother’s changing a baby’s diaper is to the baby.”³² Furthermore, it has been argued that a rejection of God’s love is not in fact a morally free choice:

What might qualify as a motive for someone’s making a fully informed decision to reject God? Once one has learned, perhaps through bitter experience, that evil is always destructive, always contrary to one’s own interest as well as to the interest of others, and once one sees clearly that God is the ultimate source of human happiness and that rebellion can bring only greater and greater misery into one’s own life as well as into the lives of others, an intelligible motive for such rebellion no longer seems even possible. The strongest conceivable motive would seem to exist, moreover, for uniting with God. So if a fully informed person should reject God nonethe-

less, then that person... would seem to display the kind of irrationality that is itself incompatible with [truly] free choice.³³

So a fully informed, and therefore morally free and significant, rejection of God may not be experientially possible, even if it is theoretically possible.

Whatever the outcome of our theological considerations regarding human freedom, however, the fact remains that Scripture repeatedly refers to eschatological judgment. This divine activity is best understood not as an arbitrary determination of eternal destiny but rather as a realistic disclosure of it. In the Torah and the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as the parables and the letters of the New Testament, the dominant picture is not of a single human destiny of universal salvation, but of a dual destiny of being and nonbeing, eternal life and eternal oblivion:

- “The hour is coming,” Jesus said, “when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28–29).
- More specifically, in Jesus’ Parable of the Last Judgment, those who refuse to respond to human needs “go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25:46).
- So Paul wrote that God “will repay according to each one’s deeds: to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury” (Rom. 2:6–8).
- Jesus noted that “the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it,” while “the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matt. 7:13–14).
- According to the Revelation to John, there will be some who experience the presence of God and some who experience the “second death,” some who are finally holy and some who are finally unholy, some who are inside the heavenly city and some who are outside (Rev. 21:7–8; 22:11, 14–15).



The force of these scriptural statements can hardly be missed. Might it be possible, however, to regard the judgment language and pictures of Scripture as dramatic and powerful warnings and exhortations rather than previews of future events? Could this language have been intended to point to the twofold fact (1) that human behavior can have profound and terrifying consequences, ultimate as well as proximate, and (2) that humanity is held morally responsible and called to account for its actions?³⁴

If so, the function of Scripture references to judgment is not to predict a necessarily dual destiny for humanity but to underscore the eternal consequences and significance of human decisions, to warn against the possibility of eternal loss. On the principle that “the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional,” the vivid pictures of final destruction might be understood as descriptions of the “worst case scenario” rather than history written in advance.³⁵

This “conditionalist” interpretation would obviously be radically different from the traditional “predictivist” one, but it certainly is logically possible; and it might be encouraged by a recognition of the highly metaphorical nature of the most prominent scriptural references to ultimate destruction. It might also turn out to be no more radical a reinterpretation of Adventist faith than was the abandonment of the early Adventist shut door theology or the shift from law to grace following the General Conference session of 1888. For a community of faith as well as for its individual members, “life is a series of experiences that continually challenge the beliefs we hold sacred.”³⁶

A review of Adventist history shows that “from the beginning Seventh-day Adventists have been prepared to modify, change, or revise their beliefs and practices if they could see a good reason to do so from the Scriptures.”³⁷ This is precisely why the current statement of Fundamental Beliefs includes in its preamble the explicit acknowledgment, “Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when

the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word.”

Universal Hope

God’s passionate love for all creation and the corresponding intention to save all humanity certainly imply the universal possibility of salvation, and this must logically entail, in some sense, the possibility of universal salvation. The eternal reality is that “Jesus is the expression of the radical unwillingness of God to abandon sinners.”³⁸ Although it is true that “the wages of sin is death,” it is just as true—and the thesis of the Christian gospel—that “the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). “God stands at the door and knocks, and if we don’t answer, he looks for an open window.”³⁹

The option of rejecting God and life, furthermore, is thoroughly irrational. God, our loving Creator, “wills for us exactly what, at the most fundamental level, we want for ourselves,” namely, “that we should experience supreme happiness, that our deepest yearnings should be satisfied, and that all of our needs should be met... How, then, are we to understand human disobedience and opposition to God?”⁴⁰

Yet we are unable to affirm “positive universalism” and its confident prediction that all humanity will ultimately be saved—partly because human beings often do make thoroughly irrational choices that contradict their own best interests, but mostly because we just do not have the kind of knowledge that is presupposed by that sort of prediction.

This does not, however, preclude universal hope and the possibility that all humanity will be saved. This distinction possibility and predictability may be subtle, but it is significant. On the one hand, the turning of hope into prediction led to the Great Disappointment of Millerite Adventists in 1844. On the other hand, the fact that the salvation of all humanity cannot be confidently affirmed does not mean that it cannot be a gen-

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uine Christian hope. Indeed, one of the reasons universal salvation cannot be confidently predicted is also the reason why it cannot be confidently precluded: we do not have the requisite knowledge.

The idea that universal salvation remains a proper hope has been maintained not only most prominently by Karl Barth, but also by such diverse post-Barthian figures as the Reformed theologians Emil Brunner in Switzerland and G. C. Berkouwer in Holland, the Roman Catholic theologians Karl Rahner in Germany and Hans Urs von Balthasar in Switzerland, the Lutheran Helmut Thielicke in Germany, and the Anglican Brian Hebblethwaite in England.⁴¹

Although it is still true that “human freedom can be neither broken nor neutralized by divine freedom,” it is also true that human freedom “may well be, so to speak, outwitted. The descent of grace to the human soul is a free act of divine love. And there are no limits to how far it may extend.”⁴² There is, therefore, a sense in which it is reasonable to say that “the sinner *must* yield,” without implying some sort of coercion. The traditional language of romantic love—recall God’s luring of Israel symbolized in the story of Hosea—recognizes an external force that is “enthraling” and “captivating” without eliminating real personal freedom. Indeed, it can be plausibly claimed that it is this kind of love that creates true freedom.⁴³

We must also remember that although eschatological judgment is not arbitrary divine decision making, neither is it just a matter of tallying up the score and announcing the results in the way the court clerk reads a verdict in the American judicial system. Judgment is also God’s own, and therefore potentially creative, act:

If the process of Christian dying were nothing more than a “freezing” of what we have already accomplished (or failed to accomplish!), then the gospel would hardly be good news and we should approach death and judgment with horror. But strictly speaking, God’s final judgment can only be the final future fullness of God’s forgiving, life-giving judgment in the cross and resurrection of Christ. It cannot be merely a neutral “taking stock”; it is an expression of God’s real victory over sin and death, in which anything and everything which has been done in love is saved and perfected by God. Thus, God’s final act is a life-giving judgment which forgives, heals, purifies, and bestows fullness and therefore, finality upon human life, that final identity for which it was created and toward which it is directed.⁴⁴

So God’s judgment, too, is grace; it is part of redemption, part of the total process of universal atonement and reconciliation.

Although there is no reason to reject the scriptural narratives of the suicide of Judas (Matt. 27:3–10; Acts 1:18–19), or to wonder why he has become a symbol of personal betrayal, we simply do not know what went on in his mind as he ended his life. Was his suicide in any sense an act of repentance as well as remorse?

Nor do we know how his life as a whole was judged by the God who loves and wants to save every member of the human family. The matter is not for us to decide, or even to wonder about for long, but only to recognize as something we do not and cannot know. And the same is true in regard to every other villain of history and of our own acquaintance. But we can remember “the radical unwillingness of God to abandon sinners.”

Although the ultimate salvation of all humanity can never be a certainty but only a hope, for the person who has experienced God’s love, it can perhaps be an “unshakable hope,” a hope that is morally and theologically impossible to abandon.⁴⁵ Would it be reasonable to conclude that “to hope for one’s own salvation and not for the salvation of all would be utterly un-Christian, since Christ died for all men and women,” and that in this context “there can be no particularism of hope; hope loses all sense and all force if it does not imply...an ‘all of us’ or an ‘all together’”?⁴⁶

Although the rejection and contradiction of God’s universal love remains a theoretical possibility, it is surely the strangest, most inexplicable—indeed, the most irrational—of all possible human actions. For “if God is our loving Creator, then he wills for us exactly what, at the most fundamental level, we want for ourselves, he wills that we should experience supreme happiness, that our deepest yearnings should be satisfied, and that all of our needs should be met. So if that is true, if God wills for us the very thing we really want for ourselves, whether we know it or not, how then are we to understand human disobedience and opposition to God.”⁴⁷ But if it were ever actualized, then some of humanity would not experience eternal life in God’s presence.

Yet the reality of God’s love would still mean what it has always meant: that God wills what is best for all



creation, including salvation for all humanity, and that God does not abandon sinners. If this is God's will and persistence, shouldn't we have it in mind when we pray, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10)? Shouldn't our hope be this inclusive? Shouldn't we be less like Jonah and more like the shepherd, the housewife, and the father in Jesus' stories?

Notes and References

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3. For more detailed argument of this point see Jan Bonda, *The One Purpose of God: An Answer to the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 74–111; Fritz Guy, "The Universality of God's Love," in *The Grace of God, The Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 31–49.
4. See Bonda, *One Purpose of God*.
5. See also Ezek. 18:23:

6. Donald J. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper, 1978–79), 1: 165, 168.
7. See Origen, *On First Principles* 1.6.2, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, repr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 4:260–61.
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9. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh, 2 vols., repr. (New York: Harper, 1960), 2:711–22; Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, repr. (Clifton, N.J.: n.p., 1966), 125–39; Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1951–63) 3: 406–9, 415–19; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 272–73; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (New York: Harper, 1974), 130–34, 177.
10. Langdon Gilkey, *Reaping the Whirlwind* (New York: Crossroad-Seabury, 1976), 298; see also Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951–63), 3: 408.
11. Gilkey, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 298.
12. *Ibid.*, 298.
13. Philip Gulley and James Mulholland, *If Grace Is True: Why God Will Save Every Person* (San Francisco: Harper, 2003), 18;

Further Reading on Universalism

See, for example, John Baillie, *And the Life Everlasting* (London: Oxford, 1934), 237–45; John A. T. Robinson, *In the End, God*, 2nd ed. (London: Fontana-Collier, 1968), 108–23; Nels F. S. Ferré, *The Christian Understanding of God* (New York: Harper, 1951), 242–49; John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York: Scribners, 1966), 322–23, 325–26; Gordon D. Kaufman, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1968), 305–6, 459n, 471–72; William Barclay, *William Barclay: A Spiritual Autobiography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 58–61; Langdon Gilkey, *Reaping the Whirlwind* (New York: Crossroad-Seabury, 1976), 298–99; John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (New York: Harper, 1976), 242–61; idem, *Evil and the God of Love*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper, 1978), 341–45; Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), 51, 127–28, 156–57, 175–77, 199–202.

Two recent, book-length expositions of positive universalism by less well-known authors are Thomas Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God* (Universal,

1999), and Philip Gulley and James Mulholland, *If Grace Is True: Why God will Save Every Person* (San Francisco: Harper, 2003). A significant difference between the two books is that whereas Talbott endeavors to show that the New Testament itself is universalist, Gulley and Mulholland regard the New Testament evidence as mixed but take the universalist passages as affirming their own spiritual experience of God as "unlimited patience, infinite love, and eternal faithfulness" (12). For a vigorous discussion of Talbott's views and his response, see Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge, eds., *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate* (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K.: Paternoster, 2003). This book is an excellent introduction to the subject from an evangelical perspective. Gulley and Mulholland have published a second book, *If God Is Love: Rediscovering Grace in an Ungracious World* (San Francisco: Harper, 2004), attempting to answer the question, "What could our world look like if we took seriously God's love for all people?" (xi).

Bruce Wilcox, in a conversation in the late 1990s.

14. John Donne (1572–1631), “Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions: Meditation XVII.”

15. Thomas Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God* (Universal, 1999), 192–93. The internal quotation is from William Lane Craig, “Talbott’s Universalism,” *Religious Studies* 27 (Sept. 1991): 306.

16. Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), 156–57. See also Michael Peterrson et al., *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 3d ed. (New York: Oxford, 2003), 148–49.

17. John A. T. Robinson, *In the End, God*, 2d ed. (London: Fontana-Collier, 1968), 133.

18. My translation.

19. My translation.

20. Gordon D. Kaufman, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Scribner’s, 1968), 471–72; Gully and Mulholland, *If Grace Is True*, 64.

21. William Barclay, quoted by Gully and Mulholland, *If Grace Is True*, 223.

22. Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1981), 514.

23. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Crossroad-Seabury, 1978), 443.

24. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1972), 413, citing Albrecht Oepke, “*apollumi*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76), 1: 396.

25. Hans Schwarz, “Eschatology,” in *Christian Dogmatics*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jensen (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 2: 578. See also I. Howard Marshall, “The New Testament Does Not Teach Universal Salvation,” and Jack Sanders, “A Freewill Theist’s Response to Talbott’s Universalism,” in Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge, eds. *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate* (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K.: Pasternoster, 2003), 55–76, 169–87.

26. John R. Sachs, “Current Eschatology: Universal Salvation and the Problem of Hell,” *Theological Studies*, 52 (1991): 233.

27. See Schwarz, “Eschatology,” 2:578.

28. Stephen H. Travis, *Christian Hope and the Future* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1980), 121; emphasis added.

29. Sachs, “Current Eschatology,” 235.

30. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 138.

31. Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 51, summarizing an argument of John Hick.

32. Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 157.

33. Talbott, *Inescapable Love of God*, 186.

34. Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1949–62) 3:418–20.

35. Ellen G. White, ms. 4, 1883, in *Selected Messages from the Writings of Ellen G. White*, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1958–80), 1:67; compare Jer. 18:5–11. See also, for example, Matt. 25:41, 46; Rev. 14:9–11; 20:7–15; and compare Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1911), 662–73.

36. Gully and Mulholland, *If Grace is True*, 30.

37. Neal C. Wilson, “A Word to the Reader,” in George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day*

Adventist Beliefs (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2000), 8.

38. Sachs, “Current Eschatology,” 244.

39. Gully and Mulholland, “If Grace Is True,” 19.

40. Talbott, *Inescapable Love of God*, 185.

41. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols. in 13 (Edinburgh: Clark, 1936–69), 2/2 and 4/1, passim; 4/3: 461–78; and *The Humanity of God* (Richmond, Va.: Knox, 1960), 60–62; Brunner, *Dogmatics*, 1:334–39, 352–53; 3:415–24; idem., *Eternal Hope* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 170–84; G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of*

Christ (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1972), 387–423; Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 443; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope “That All Men be Saved”?* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988); Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–82), 3:453–56; Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Christian Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 192–95, 215–18.

42. Balthasar, *Dare We Hope*, 221, quoting Edith Stein.

43. See especially Hos. 2:14–15: “I will now allure her...and speak tenderly to her...I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor [the site of Achan’s sin and the ensuing disaster] a door of hope. There she shall respond as in the days of her youth.”

44. Sachs, “Current Eschatology,” 251–52.

45. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 435.

46. Sachs, 243; Balthasar, *Dare We Hope*, 81.

47. Talbott, *Inescapable Love of God*, 185.

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