

David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell and Universal Salvation*

(New Haven: Yale, 2019), pp. 222. \$26.00.

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This is a genuinely beautiful and irenic book from one of the theological world's most able and creative thinkers. Identifying himself as one who has always been 'an instinctive universalist as regards the question of the ultimate destiny of souls' (p. 65), Hart moves through reflective and personal moments, and proceeds with a series of 'meditations' which are deeply imbued with a broad and detailed sense of the tradition. 'Meditations' are, indeed, apt descriptions for the material herein. The argument is formed philosophically, biblically, and with helpful and careful attention to patristic material as well as some intellectually interesting forays into other fields. Hart relies on his own translation of the New Testament to make many of his helpful exegetical points, and the over-all experience of the book is that it is a delight to read as a piece of literature. Even the most ardent supporter of a binary view of ultimate eschatological destiny would find it difficult not to be impressed with the wit, erudition and genuine pastoral insight and warmth that the book has. Following a broad introduction to the issues at stake in the first part, the main body of the text revolves around the four 'meditations' on apokatastasis. The first of these most helpfully surrounds the doctrine of God and *creatio ex nihilo*. The second is on a biblical account of eschatology. The third concerns theological anthropology in relation to the *imago Dei*. And the fourth a very helpful account of the will. The volume concludes with a constructive and coherent proposal about what may be believed in relation to heaven, hell and universal salvation in light of the foregoing.

In order to summarise the argument made, one can do no better than quote Hart in his own introduction. Describing what will be the fourfold nature of his argument he writes:

One argument that I shall make in this book is that the very notion that a rational agent in full possession of his or her faculties could, in any meaningful sense, freely reject God absolutely and forever is a logically incoherent one. Another is that, for this and other reasons, a final state of eternal torment could be neither a just sentence pronounced upon nor a just fate suffered by a finite being, no matter how depraved that being might have become. Still another is that, even if that fate were in some purely abstract sense 'just,' the God who would permit it to become anyone's *actual* fate could never be perfectly good – or, rather, as Christian metaphysical tradition obliges us to phrase it, could never be absolute Goodness as such – but could be at the most only a relative calculable good in relation to other relative calculable goods. And yet another is that the tradition of hell's perpetuity renders other aspects of the tradition, such as orthodox Christology or the eschatological claims of the Apostle Paul, ultimately meaningless. (p. 18)

Such an account is not an advance in the field of study in relation to the theme of universalism and eschatology within Christian theology. However, the precision and clarity (and accessibility) with which these arguments are made is of great worth, as is the presentation of different pieces of Christian tradition than are sometimes employed to make the case.

It is perhaps in relation to this point that there might be some questions to be asked by scholars who have engaged with this field in detail over the years. There is at times a sense of (at least in the contemporary setting) some of the arguments presented being made as something new. Perhaps in the way that some of the evidence is marshalled, that might be so. But there is little here in terms of the argument which has not been said in recent years by a range of scholars, including Ilaria Ramelli, Gregory Macdonald, Tom Talbot, Morwenna Ludlow and even the present writer. It is perhaps sad that, while there are passing references to George Macdonald, Barth, von Balthasar and Kierkegaard, so few contemporary voices appear at all, and there is little sense (if any) of situating the argument in light of current or even nineteenth- and twentieth-century discussions of the topic. Yes universalism is an area of study which has received a good deal of discussion, especially since Barth. Scholars from Fredric Farrar to Jürgen Moltmann have helpful things to say on these issues, and the current debate is perhaps in a place where it would have been helpful to see what is genuinely moving the discussion on.

However, to judge the book in this way is unjust. My sense in reading it is that this is a book for educated lay people as much for (indeed, perhaps more than) scholars working in the field. The examples and evidence deployed are helpfully arranged and convincing, and the lack of footnoting and the mastery of prose make this a very, very good read for anyone interested in universalism: it is a joy to engage with. Scholars who have dealt with the field will find great delight and affirmation here, while those who have not considered these matters will find no finer guide in terms of a coherent, well-structured and eloquent book.

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Jennifer R. Ayres, *Inhabitanace: Ecological Religious Education*

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This volume explores the concept of inhabitanace, its cultivation within churches (that is to say, in ‘religious education’ in the American use of the term) and related issues. It is a well-written and interesting monograph, which provides both a considerable scholarly discussion (including nearly 60 pages of notes and references) and many illuminating accounts of relevant practice.

‘Inhabitanace’ is an abstract noun coined from the verb to inhabit and the noun inhabitant, which are themselves used with reference to the natural home or habitat