



# The Christian Universalist

Published monthly by the Christian Universalist Association  
[www.christianuniversalist.org](http://www.christianuniversalist.org)

## Scripture that supports universal salvation

It's known by a variety of names, including Christian Universalism, the Blessed Hope, the Larger Hope, Universal Restoration, and the Victorious Gospel.

They all describe one main belief and teaching: Eventually, God will save all men and women.

Contrary to what many still believe, God will not consign his beloved children to ever-lasting torment in a fiery Hell. Some conservative/evangelical/charismatic Christians who also reject this dogma are featured in this issue.

Scripture that supports universal salvation include:

*Matthew 18:21-22; Luke 15:3-6; John 12:32; John 12:46-47; Romans 5:18; Romans 8:38-39; Philippians 2:10-11; 1 Peter 3:18-20; 4:6; Colossians 1:19-20; 1 Timothy 2:4-6; and 1 John 2:1-2.*

"There are passages of Scripture on both sides of the issue of universal salvation," **Kalen Fristad**, a minister and co-founder of the *Christian Universalist Association*, writes in his book, *Destined For Salvation - God's Promise to Save Everyone*.

"There are numerous additional relevant passages, which may be helpful to us in our quest to discern the truth, but I believe the ones I have set out above are most significant".



## Water of Life

*"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."*

- John 4: 13, 14 NRSV

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## The Christian Universalist

*The Christian Universalist is a digital newsletter published monthly by The Christian Universalist Association (CUA), with news, information and commentary for anyone interested in Christian Universalism. Editorial reports, letters to the editor and photos are welcome.*

*Deadline is the 28th of the month preceding the month of publication. Reports and photos may be emailed to the editor Pat Moauro at: patmor123@gmail.com*

*Please send all photos and illustrations as separate JPEGs at high resolution of at least 300 dpi.*

*Opinions expressed are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect those of The Christian Universalist Association.*

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## Word of mouth

... with Pat Moauro, Editor

### Conservative, evangelical universalists

Some “liberal” universalists might raise an eyebrow or two when they learn that orthodox conservative and evangelical believers can also believe in Christian Universalism. I know I was pleasantly surprised when I first learned that some evangelicals also believed in Christian Universalism, or Universal Restorationism.

This issue of *The Christian Universalist* features some of our fellow universalists who just happen to be members of conservative/evangelical/charismatic churches and groups, large and small.

Not all Evangelical Universalists call themselves universalists, perhaps because of the negative connotations that this word has with the rest of the more orthodox evangelical religious community. Evangelicals and conservatives prefer to use descriptions, such as “Larger Hope” or “Blessed Hope” and the “Victorious Gospel”.

Conservatives and evangelicals who also believe in Christian Universalism likely have had their share of criticism from their fellow conservatives and evangelicals who still cling tenaciously to the medieval dogma of everlasting torture in Hellfire.

Evangelical Universalists and other orthodox Christians who have rejected Hell as a place of eternal torment are to be commended for their courageous stand in the face of opposition from fellow hellfire and brimstone evangelicals and conservatives.

One of the first questions likely to come up when someone learns that some evangelicals also believe in universalism is, “Can an Evangelical be an Universalist?”

That question is explored by **George W. Sarris** in his article with that same title on pages 4 and 5. Mr. Sarris, who has a Master of Divinity from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, is also the narrator for the 2011 revision of The Holy Bible, New International Version by Zondervan



Pat Moauro

Publishing House.

What about Universal Restorationism? What does it involve, and how is it being received generally? These and other questions are explored in an article on pages 6 and 7, adapted from an article on Universal Restorationism on the <http://evangelicaluniversalism.org> website.

Evangelical universalists have no organized denomination, but they can be found sprinkled throughout various evangelical denominations, and many Christian Universalist Fellowships and ministries, including *The Christian Universalist Association*.

In his article on page 10, **Gary Amirault**, founder of *Tentmaker Ministries* of Hermann, MO, comments about **Rob Bell's** recent book, *Love Wins*, and how it is helping to raise consciousness and stimulate discussion on Christian Universalism.

Gary also notes that the Christian Universalist message is steadily finding new believers. He also believes that more of the Church world can be reached and won over from belief in the dogma of everlasting torment in hellfire.

Although not aligned with any specific church or organized religious organization, Gary comes from a conservative, evangelical background and relies heavily on scriptures in his many articles on Christian Universalism, or restorationism.

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## From the Coordinator

... with Rich Koster, Coordinator

### FOLLOW YOUR HEART: "Confirmation is nice but conviction is sacred ..."

One of the precious blessings of being the **CUA** coordinator is to read the emails that come to us every day. Oh yes, there are the messages that cuss us out for thinking that God could be so good and loving, and those that call us to go back to the old fear-based warnings that we are all "sinners in the hands of an angry God". But far more are those heart-lifting emails like this one that just came today:

*"I'm so happy I found this site! I've always doubted that the clear message of the Bible said that if you reject Christ as your lord and savior you will burn in hell, that is just so unlike god! I'm crying right now".*

So many writers tell us they are so happy to have found us, and to see their hopes and ideas confirmed:

*"I had been seeking God on some questions I've had about his Love vs. hell-fire/damnation. I am excited to find your site; it confirms what I believe and who I believe God and Jesus really are. THE TRUTH!! Thank you. I know God led me here, I just happened upon your website. AMEN!!"*

Anyone with awareness of what's happening has to realize that there is a wave of energy and excitement right now as more and more people come to comprehend that only a complete salvation of all human beings can bring a right understanding of how God is acting in this world and the future God has planned for the whole creation.

A part of this surge is still a bit of a concern to me, and that is my sense that for some people at least their faith in the salvation of all would be rather shaky if they did not see it "confirmed" by what they read and hear others are saying. It would be good to hear more testimonies like that of this woman from the Corn Belt:

*"I have no 'sources' for what I experience - it is simply what I directly experience from within. I cannot cognitively defend what I know to be so. For me, it simply is, yet that knowing and direct experience is an evolving/transforming one. But I*



Rich Koster

*do believe we all are called to awaken our own Hearts - to listen to them, to let them receive both that which has been buried/hidden . . . and that which is of our spirits . . . ."*

I know that for a lot of people it is absolutely imperative that they find convincing evidence for the salvation of all people in the Bible. And there certainly is a lot of support for our faith there. But I would still believe that God is redeeming and saving all people even if I could not find one verse I could point to that I could say "proves" or "confirms" what I believe. Like this friend in Kansas, it is a conviction that I came to simply by following my heart.

Why in the world of romance are we so often encouraged just to "follow your heart?" Of course, we are still talking about mind, but here it is mind that goes deeper than facts and rational observation, that draws from those wells of "pure knowing" which rise from the depths of soul. Such knowledge, such faith, if you will, is not disconnected from data and empirical "evidence"; but neither does it seek to draw the critical learnings for how to live entirely from what the world presents to us as "just the facts".

Most important, I submit, is our own confidence in what we glean from within, as we draw the lessons of life from our experience of it, and as we ponder the possible answers we might give to the deep questions of existence. If we do not construe them by our pride, we might well hearken to these words from the

great sage of Concord, **Ralph Waldo Emerson**:

*"Ah me! No man goeth alone. All men go in flocks to this saint or that poet, avoiding the God who seeth in secret . . . . They think society wiser than their soul, and know not that one soul, and their soul, is wiser than the whole world."\**

If you were to find yourself to be the only one of the seven billion men, women, and children on the face of the earth who believed that God will save them all and bring them at last into heaven, would you then keep still? Would you hide? Would you begin to doubt what your heart is telling you? Would you look here and there, wherever, to find a piece of Scripture, an inspired poem, a cutting-edge book, that might even at least dimly echo the joyous song emanating from the heartstrings within you?

Let us have more courage, my friends! Confirmation is nice but conviction is sacred, and that only comes from within. If you wish to be like Jesus, then say too as did he, "You have heard it said . . . but now I say unto you . . ." Emulate the Apostle as when he declared that the Gospel he preached came from no one else but Jesus. And run the race that lies ahead with this summons from Emerson stirring your soul:

*"The foregoing generations beheld God face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?"\*\**

Yes, read and listen and see what bits of truth and wisdom you can glean from other minds, but when all is said and done the only true source of conviction is deep within you, as you bravely walk alone that lonesome valley and FOLLOW YOUR HEART.

\* From *Address to the Senior Class in Divinity College, Cambridge*

\*\* From *Essay on Nature*

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# Can an Evangelical be a Universalist? - it depends

By George W. Sarris

Can an Evangelical be a Universalist?

The wagons are circling around what seems to have become the defining issue for evangelicalism today – the belief that Hell is eternal, conscious punishment.

According to **Christian Post** reporter, **Audrey Barrick, Rick Warren** “held back a few tears” in his interview with **John Piper** as he expressed his deep sadness about the 74 million people who will die this year alone and spend an eternity in Hell.

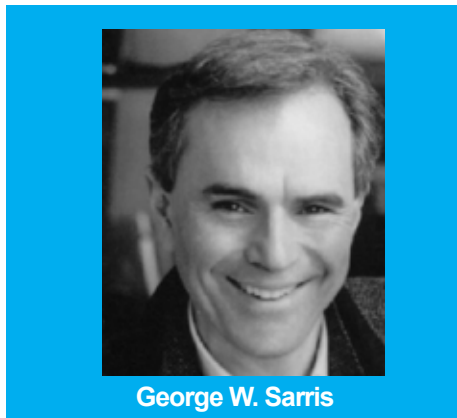
“I can’t live with that,” he said. “My love compels us to care about that.”

**Publishers Weekly** noted that four books from evangelical publishing companies will be coming out this summer supporting the traditional view. **David C. Cook** will be publishing a book by well known pastor **Francis Chan** in July and another by **Brian Jones** in August. **Tyndale** has set a July release for a book on the subject by **Mark Galli**, Senior Managing Editor of *Christianity Today*, and *Zondervan* will likewise be coming out with a short compilation of essays on the subject from contributors including **Timothy Keller, R. Albert Mohler Jr.**, and other prominent evangelicals, also in July.

All of which brings us back to the question that has suddenly become a major focus of attention in recent weeks – are evangelicals required to believe that Hell lasts forever?

In a recent blog post, I pointed out that many in the early Church, including some of the leaders who actually helped formulate the classic creeds of the faith, believed that Hell was remedial in nature and temporary in duration. But, what about today? Is that belief still a viable option for someone who is part of the modern evangelical church?

Without question, the belief that Hell is a place of never-ending torment is clearly the dominant view within the general Protestant evangelical Christian world. In a special report entitled “*The Nature of Hell*,” the *Evangelical Alliance Commis-*



George W. Sarris

*sion on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals (ACUTE)*, a group based in the UK, explained,

“We recognise that the interpretation of hell as eternal conscious punishment is the one most widely attested by the Church in its historic formulation of doctrine and in its understanding of Scripture. We also recognise that it represents the classic, mainstream evangelical position”.

The Statement of Faith of the *National Association of Evangelicals* reads,

“We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation”.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, which is the guiding document of the **Presbyterian and Reformed churches**, says, in Chapter III, Article III, Of God’s Eternal Decree,

“By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death”.

Similarly, the Statement of Faith of the **Southern Baptist Convention** – the largest Protestant denomination – states: “The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment”.

## Most . . . But Not All

While most of the evangelical evangelistic ministries hold to the belief that Hell is the place of eternal torment, there is at least one notable exception. The Statement of Faith of the *Billy Graham Evangelistic Association* does not specify any-

thing about the nature or result of God’s judgment. It simply says,

“That all men everywhere are lost and face the judgment of God, and need to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through His shed blood on the cross”.

In recent years, several well-respected scholars, such as **John Wenham, John Stott, Clark Pinnock**, and others, have questioned the traditional teaching. Most of them have rejected the idea of Endless Punishment and lean toward Conditional Immortality – the idea that the “wicked” will ultimately be annihilated and cease from existence. The effect of this is seen in another statement in the **ACUTE** report mentioned above:

Evangelicals diverge on whether hell is eternal in duration or effect – that is, whether an individual’s punishment in hell will literally go on “for ever”, as a ceaseless conscious experience, or whether it will end in a destruction which will be ‘forever’, in the sense of being final and irreversible.

It should be acknowledged that both of these interpretations preserve the crucial principle that judgment is on the basis of sins committed in this life, and that when judgment is to hell, it cannot be repealed (Matt. 25:41-6; Mark. 9:43-8; Luke 16:26).

## An Evangelical Universalist?

But, can an evangelical actually believe that God will ultimately restore all of His creation to its initial perfection?

Much of the recent discussion surrounding the publication of *Love Wins* has focused on whether or not **Rob Bell** is a “universalist.” Bell denies the accusation. But, his book and the fury surrounding it brought the issue to light in an unexpected and very visible way.

In point of fact, there are those who clearly claim to be “evangelicals” who believe in the classic doctrines of the Christian faith except for the area of ultimate destinies. Like some of those in the early Church, they believe that the Scriptures teach that Hell is remedial and temporary.

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## Can an Evangelical be a Universalist? - it depends

*continued from page 4*

**Jan Bonda**, a Dutch Reformed pastor, supported this view in *The One Purpose of God: An Answer to the Doctrine of Endless Punishment* published in English in 1998. His argument focused on a systematic study of the apostle Paul's teaching in the book of Romans.

**Robin Parry** wrote a book with the actual title, *The Evangelical Universalist*, under the pseudonym **Gregory MacDonald**. (see pages 11 and 12 of this newsletter) The book is a scholarly work that addresses the philosophical problems associated with a belief in endless punishment, points out broad outlines of Biblical theology that support a belief in ultimate restoration, and examines specific passages in the Bible that relate to the issue. The book was published in 2006.

**Gerry Beauchemin** has been involved in missions since 1986. He served as a missionary in Mexico, the Philippines, and Senegal, West Africa. Since 2001, he has directed Dental Training For Missions where he trains missionaries in primary dental care. His book, *Hope Beyond Hell*, lays out a detailed argument in favor of ultimate restoration from a clearly Biblical and theologically conservative perspective.

One of the leading proponents of the belief in universal salvation is **Thomas Talbott**, currently Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Willamette University. In 1983, he authored a series of articles in the *Reformed Journal* debating the issue with **John Piper**. He penned *The Inescapable Love of God* in 1999, and was the lead contributor to *Universal Salvation: The Current Debate*, published in 2004. (See page 12 of this newsletter)

In a discussion of how his views on the subject developed, Talbott wrote,

"... the Western theological tradition seemed to leave me with a choice between an unjust and unloving God, on the one hand, and a defeated God, on the other. But of course this hardly exhausts the logical possibilities; there remains the additional possibility that it is God's very nature to love, as I John 4:8 and 16 appears to declare, and that he is also wise and resourceful enough to accom-

plish all of his loving purposes in the end.

"Why, after all, should an assumption concerning everlasting punishment be the only unquestioned assumption in a context where some are limiting the extent of God's love and others are limiting the scope of his ultimate victory? Why not at least examine the pros and cons of universal reconciliation alongside those of limited election and those of a limited victory over sin and death?

"... I now view universal reconciliation as something more than a vague hope of some kind. To the contrary, I now view it as essential to a proper understanding of salvation, essential to a Pauline understanding of grace, and essential to the inclusive nature of election. For even as many Augustinians are utterly convinced that God's salvific will cannot be defeated forever and many Arminians are utterly convinced that God at least wills the salvation of all human sinners, so I am equally convinced that both claims are true."

An extensive internet site addressing the issue from an evangelical perspective is [www.tentmaker.org](http://www.tentmaker.org), maintained by **Gary and Michelle Amirault**. They produce and provide books, articles, audio and video material specifically focused on showing that the belief in universal salvation is a Scriptural

teaching. (See page 10)

So, can an evangelical be a universalist? The answer to that question really depends on how one defines "evangelical."

If an "evangelical" is someone who subscribes to the statements of faith of the *National Association of Evangelicals*, and most modern conservative churches and evangelistic organizations, then the answer is definitely "No."

If an "evangelical" is defined as one who believes in the authority of Scripture, the centrality of the gospel message and the classic creedal statements of the Christian faith, then the answer is actually "Yes."

*This article appears on the following website blog: <http://blogs.christianpost.com/engaging-the-culture/2011/06/can-an-evangelical-be-a-universalist-02/>*

**George W. Sarris** holds a BS in Speech from Northwestern University, and Master of Divinity from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. An accomplished actor, narrator and spokesman for radio and television commercials, industrial films, and at trade shows, Mr. Sarris has been a featured speaker on Biblical and family issues at conferences, churches, men's retreats and conventions throughout the US.

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## Conservative, evangelical universalists ... from page 2

On pages 11 and 12 of this newsletter, **Robin Parry**, a conservative Christian theologian, who also writes books under the pseudonym **Gregory MacDonald**, explains why he is an Evangelical Universalist.

His book, *The Evangelical Universalist*, caused quite a stir in parts of the conservative/evangelical world after being published in 2003.

Christian Universalism, whether espoused by "liberals" or "conservatives", is an old, old idea

whose time has come in our 21st century.

Its message is of a loving, caring and faithful God who desires no one to be destroyed but for *all* men and women to be recognized as His beloved children and inheritors of the Kingdom.

*God loves you with an Everlasting Love.*

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## Universal Restorationism undergoing resurgence among evangelicals

This article is adapted from an article on the <http://evangelicaluniversalism.org> website.

Universal Restorationism, more commonly called "Universalism", is the belief that in the end all sentient beings will be holy and happy. This teaching, often referred to as the "Wider Hope", has had many proponents through the ages.

In fact, there are those who argue that it was [the Church's prevailing viewpoint for its first 500 years](#). Whether true or not, it is certain that [many have held this view down through the ages](#), and today the teaching is undergoing a growing resurgence among conservative [bible-believing evangelicals](#). Although no organized denomination of evangelical universalists exists today, we may be found sprinkled throughout the various evangelical denominations, and numerous [Christian Universalist Fellowships](#) and ministries are emerging daily.

Proponents of the "Wider Hope" theology, also called "Universalists" or "Universal Restorationists", included **Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Marcellus of Ancyra, Titus of Bostra, Gregory Nazianzen, Evagrius, Didymus, Diodorus of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Fabius Manus Victorinus, Gregory of Nyssa** and countless others in the ancient church.

Early church father, Basil the Great (AD 329-379) writes, "*The mass of men (Christians) say that there is to be an end of punishment to those who are punished.*" This testimony as to the state of opinion at that time is very illuminating!

During the middle ages we find the Scottish theologian, **John Scotus Eregina**, (c. AD 800-880) and **Johan Tauler** (AD 1300-1361), espousing universalism.

In the 17th through 19th century the Anabaptists of Germany, and many

English clergy and philosophers, such as **Dr. David Hartley**, who wrote the "*Observations on Man*"; **Elhanan Winchester, John Wesley Hanson, Hannah Whitall Smith, and Olympia Brown, Bishop Thomas Newton, Sir George Stonehouse, William Law, John Henderson, James Brown, D.D., Rev. R. Barbauld, Rev. John Brown**, many English Libertarians, **Rev. Theophilus Lindsey, Rev. Joseph Priestly, L.L.D., Rev. John Simpson**, and **Rev. Messrs. Kenrick, Wright, Estlin, Belsham, Carpenter, Aspland, Grundy, Scott, and Fox Harris** were all universalists.

**James Relly** began to preach Universalism in the city of London about 1750, followed by **Rev. John Murray** in America in 1770. Evangelist **Adolph E. Knoch** and Bible scholar **William Barclay** were universalists, as were many famous Americans, such as **Clara Barton, Florence Nightingale** and **U.S. President Abraham Lincoln**. Although **Karl Barth** never explicitly declared himself a universalist, it is commonly recognized that his theology leads inexorably to universalism as well. There is, indeed, a great cloud of witnesses to the wider hope throughout the history of the church.

Many others, although not expressly universalist, still believed salvation is possible "after" death and that possibly all would be saved. Most notable among these are biblical scholars **F. W. Farrar** and **Arthur Custance**. Still others, although not believing in universalism, believed that salvation might be possible after death. Among these was that great reformer, **Martin Luther**.

It is *evangelical and biblical universalism* that we promote and defend on this website and not the liberal anti-biblical forms of universalism such as that associated with the *Unitarian Universalists* and other general inclusivists.

### Inclusivism versus Exclusivism

For this reason we are not inclusivists but rather exclusivists. This means we believe that everyone is excluded from salvation who has not been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and received justification by faith in Jesus Christ, for there is no other name by which men can be saved.

By this we do not merely mean that we teach that Christ's blood is the only *means* of salvation for all men and that all other paths to salvation are excluded. Many who would affirm this also believe that all men have *already been included* in the benefits of that atonement and therefore all men have already been covered by his atoning blood.

Rather, we mean that personal faith is a *requirement* for salvation and whosoever does not believe is condemned already (John 3:18) and that the wrath of God abides on them. This means we believe that all those dying in a state of unbelief will be subject to God's wrath and condemnation and experience eternal punishment.

Where we differ from other exclusivists is that we believe that ultimately God will draw all men to himself and that the Holy Spirit will eventually regenerate all men, although some will not experience this blessed phenomenon until after they have already been consigned to eternal punishment. This, we believe, was the blessed message that our Lord delivered to the lost in hell when he descended into hell for three days upon the occasion of his death on the cross.

### Eternal Punishment

It might sound strange to read that we believe in eternal punishment. In fact one might wonder how we can confess eternal punishment but still teach universal restorationism. The answer is simple. The punishment of God upon the wicked is (in and of itself) without possibility of culmination. The reason this is so is because *the mind*

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## Universal Restorationism undergoing resurgence ... continued from page 6

set on the flesh is not subject to the Law of God nor indeed can it be (Rom 8:7) Therefore, the most certain basis for the concept of hell's duration being unending in character is that fallen man will *never* stop sinning. Even in hell the wicked continue to hate God and will never receive God on their own and repent. Their situation is indeed hopeless in and of itself considered.

However, nothing in scripture binds God to abandon the lost forever. Although the punishment they undergo would never in itself find culmination, and may therefore properly be designated "everlasting punishment" nevertheless God can, and we believe will, eventually have mercy upon all

undeserving sinners and not only those wicked, spiritually dead sinners and God-haters whom he elects and regenerates in this life and transforms into his loving children. We believe that God will, in his own time, and according to his own good pleasure, redeem the rest of lost humanity as well, when it pleases him to do so. Then every knee shall indeed bow, and every tongue indeed confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Contrary to false charges from our critics, [we do not teach that God forgives sin without the blood of Christ](#). We insist that only through faith in Christ may any be saved. We do not deny that many must first suffer

the pains of hell before they ascend to heaven. We simply deny that the scriptures anywhere teach that God has bound himself to abandon the lost in hell forever and therefore can never regenerate them by the Holy Spirit, that they might repent and receive Christ in hell and then, by the blood of Christ, be transported out of hell and into heaven.

Contrary to critical opinion, we hold to the plenary, verbal inspiration of Scripture. [We teach that the Bible alone is the standard for all faith and practice](#). We believe in universal restoration, not in spite of the Scriptures but because of them!

### Evangelical and Charismatic Christian Universalism defined by Wikipedia

From *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia

#### Evangelical Christianity

The type of Christian Universalism that departs the least from orthodox or traditional Christian doctrines is Evangelical (Christian) Universalism, also called Biblical or Trinitarian Universalism.

Evangelical Universalists hold to conservative positions on most theological or doctrinal issues except for the doctrine of hell, in which case they assert universal reconciliation instead of eternal torment. They tend to emphasize the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ for the sins of all humanity as the basis for their Universalism.

In 2006 a mainstream evangelical writer, revealed as **Robin Parry** in 2009, under the pseudonym of "**Gregory MacDonald**" released a book *The Evangelical Universalist*. In 2008 this inspired the creation of a forum, featuring "**Gregory MacDonald**" and **Thomas Talbott**, to discuss Evangelical Universalism and related topics.

From both the book and the forum, it can be seen that Evangelical Universalists often derive a large part of their be-

liefs from Evangelicalism and Reformed theology. Many of them come from an Evangelical Christian background, but they may or may not identify with this movement and seek to remain with it.

Some Evangelical Universalists avoid using the word "Universalism" to describe their beliefs, perhaps because of the negative connotations of this word among conservative Christians. Alternative terms that are in use among Evangelical Universalists include the "Larger Hope" or "Blessed Hope" and the "Victorious Gospel."

#### Charismatic Christianity

Some Christians with a background in the Charismatic movement or Pentecostalism have developed a version of Universalism which could be called Charismatic (Christian) Universalism. Charismatic Universalists usually do not call their theology "Universalism" but commonly refer to their specific beliefs by the terms "Reconciliation" (shorthand for universal reconciliation, the doctrine of apocatastasis) and "Sonship" (shorthand for "Manifest Sonship" which is a variant of the doctrine of theosis).

The term "Feast of Tabernacles" is

used by some Charismatic Universalists as a term for their post-Pentecostal spiritual tradition, reflecting a symbolic interpretation of this Jewish festival as an entrance into a fuller knowledge and relationship with God and understanding of God's plan for humanity.

Charismatic Universalism is marked by its emphasis on theosis; the idea that the return of Christ is a body of perfected human beings who are the "Manifested Sons of God" instead of a literal return of the person of Jesus; the idea that these Sons will reign on the earth and transform all other human beings from sin to perfection during an age that is coming soon (a version of millennialism); and the absolute sovereignty of God, the nonexistence or severe limitation of human free will, and the inevitable triumph of God's plan of universal reconciliation.

Many Charismatic Universalists meet in house churches or do not belong to a church at all. Most of the evidence of Universalism existing as a school of thought within the Charismatic movement is found in a large number of internet-based ministries that are informally networked with one another.

## Book Reviews

### Authors Gulley and Mulholland “undermine Holy Writ”

*If God Is Love: Rediscovering Grace in an Ungracious World* by Phillip Gulley and James Mulholland. Published by HarperOne, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers

#### Reviewed by Blake Murray

I have just finished reading *If God is Love*, a book included in the requirements for being a legally ordained Christian Universalist minister. As such, I will share my finding as to the book and authors at hand. *If God is Love* is co-authored by Phillip Gulley and James Mulholland. Phillip Gulley has been a Quaker pastor for more than twenty-five years. He is the bestselling author of more than fifteen books, including *Front Porch Tales*, *If the Church Were Christian*, the acclaimed *Harmony* series, and *If Grace is True*, and *If God is Love*, which as stated, he co-authored with James Mulholland.

In their first book, *If Grace is True*, Gulley and Mulholland made the convincing argument that God will save every person. The authors challenge readers to base their actions and reactions on the premise that God does love everyone. (By the way, apparently to avoid confusion, the authors write the book in one voice.) Gulley and Mulholland do present generally well the positive side of the case for Universalism.

They point out the many verses that talk about God’s love for everyone and God’s ultimate triumph. If you do take the Bible seriously, you need to consider these verses. Some examples: Isaiah 25:6-8; 45:22-24; 49:6; Jeremiah 31:33-34; Zephaniah 3:9; Matthew 18:14; Luke 3:6; 15:4; 19:10; John 1:9; 3:17; 12:32, 47; Romans 3:23-24; 5:8, 18; 8:38-39; 11:32; I Corinthians 15:22; Ephesians 1:9-10; 4:6; Philippians 2:10-11; Colossians 1:19-20; I Timothy 1:16; 2:3-4; 4:9-10; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 5:13; 21:25.

They also mention early church leaders who preached Universalism. These include Clement, Origen, Didymus, Diodore, Macrina, Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Jerome, St. Gregory of Nyssa, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret the Blessed, and Peter Chrysologus.

However, from my reading and study of the Holy Writ, Gulley and Mulholland make a few theological blunders (to put it mildly) and those errors turn out to be a poor foundation on which to build *their* view of God. For example, Gulley and Mulholland deny the Divine authority of the entirety of Scripture:

*“If you are unwilling to question the Bible, neither my experiences nor my arguments will carry much weight”.* (Page 49) (At least they got that right!)

*“Weighing Scripture allows for the possibility that some descriptions of God and his behavior are inaccurate”.* (Page 52) (*Upon whose scales will ye measure?*)

With regard to biblical authority, Gulley and Mulholland make use of a popular St. Augustine quotation: “There are very many who though not denying the Holy Scriptures, do not believe in endless torments.” While using that quotation to bolster their position, they flatly deny entire portions of the Bible that in their estimate do not coincide with their Universalist ideas. Perhaps they should spend time in Scripture which will allow them to explain these verses in relation to Universal Salvation.

The end result is a couple of writers who do in fact deny Holy Scriptures, while not believing in endless torments. The authors also argue for a theology based on “feelings and experiences” with God “whispering in my ear.” If all of that isn’t enough, Gulley and Mulholland sidestep the necessity of the deity of Christ, and His sole efficacy in salvation:

*“I believe Jesus had a special relationship with God and an important role in human history, through I’m no longer persuaded this required his divinity. I’m committed to living the way of Jesus, though I no longer insist ‘there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be save”.* (Page 125)

When and at what point has Christianity left the building? When is someone no longer a Christian? Where do we draw the line? One may claim to follow Christ, but if you ignore His deity then you are not following the Christ of the Bible, but a christ of your own imagination.

It’s like someone saying, I don’t believe there is no God but Allah, nor do I believe Mohammed was Allah’s prophet. But I am still a Muslim because I like most of the teachings of Mohammed and want to follow those that I like.

In addition, the authors deny a host of other Christian dogmas:

*“When I became convinced that God would save every person, I tried to hold on to traditional Christian formulas - the trinity, the incarnation, and atonement theology. I wanted to pour this new wine into old wine skins. I quickly realized why Jesus recommended against this: the old wine skins always burst ... My mind enlarged, I had to abandon the formulas I’d been taught, had preached, and had defended”.* (Page 126)

Continued on page 9



It's pretty ridiculous on its face - the authors came to a conclusion using their mind and their feelings and then discarded the Scripture that contradicted their conclusion. This book is not a good representation of Biblical Universalism.

Early in the modern era various Christian traditions emerged emphasizing the importance of personal spiritual experience, of receiving a "revelation" of God within (as opposed to merely believing and accepting the revelation given in Scripture). These traditions included the message of a "New Age of the Spirit" preached by **George Fox** (1624-1691), the founder of the Society of Friends, as well as the mystical or semi-mystical Quietism originating with such French Catholic thinkers as **Madame Guyon** (1648-1717) and **Fenelon** (1651-1715).

The extent to which these individuals had departed from orthodox Christian faith continues to be debated, but what is clear is that while some of their followers affirmed orthodox doctrine, the emphasis on inner revelation led many to seek new revelations that deviated greatly from traditional Christian beliefs. An example of an unorthodox movement in early 1800s America that reflected this trend was the Shakers, a group named for the strange manifestations associated with their worship.

As such, Gulley and Mulholland have come up with

nothing fresh. It appears that God "whispering" in their ear is more of the same "out there", "feel good", "George Fox" so-called religion. Can we continue to claim to be Christian while our thoughts and actions reveal something else? Can an organization claim to be Christian while allowing non-Christian views to run amuck? I added the last one for free!

Gulley and Mulholland even have something to say about contradictions in the Bible. Here is a news flash for them: there are no contradictions in the Greek text. As the Bible was turned into English by "men" who believed strongly in eternal torment, we must not blame them if they translated accordingly. They had no check to keep them from it.

For instance, the revisers of the Chinese Bible changed "that God may be All in all" to "that God may be Lord over all," because, they say the correct rendering teaches the salvation of all, which they deem untrue. As such, Gulley and Mulholland would be well served to do an intense concordant study of the vocabulary of the Hebrew, Chaldee and Greek. This will reveal that each word in these languages (unlike our modern tongues) has one central meaning.

I don't think reading the book was a complete waste of my time (but close). One final observation yields that in this book there is not one bit of material that is new or original. Their conclusions, though, are erroneous and dangerous - they undermine the Holy Writ and for me that is untenable.

## Fear of an everlasting Hell called "spiritual terrorism, abuse"

**Spiritual Terrorism: Spiritual Abuse from the Womb to the Tomb. Boyd C. Purcell. Bloomington, Indiana: Authorhouse, 2008. 484 pages. Paperback. Available on Amazon.com.**

**Reviewed by Mark Bloomer**

The unnecessary fear of everlasting Hell has caused unimaginable suffering throughout the spectrum of human life, from young children to the elderly. The author of *Spiritual Terrorism*, **Boyd C. Purcell**, has earned numerous degrees: B.S. in Comprehensive Social Studies; M.A. in Counseling; M.Div. in Biblical Studies, and a Ph.D. blending Psychology and Theology. He has had forty years of ministry and counseling, including clinical, pastoral, psychiatric hospital, school, substance abuse, and hospice.

In this book Purcell addresses the issue of "spiritual terrorism" with wisdom and compassion. In the first half he presents many examples of what spiritual terrorism and spiritual abuse might look like, and describes in great detail how those he counseled suffered because of their

exposure to the fundamentalist Christian belief in an everlasting Hell.

He goes on to show how he was able to help bring them comfort and peace by explaining to them how that view of eternal Hell is wrong and in contradiction to the truth about God's everlasting love. During the second half of the book Purcell builds a case for Christian Universalism, which is the belief that Christ's gift of redemption will be complete and eventually reach all individuals.

Spiritual terror seems to be a very personal issue to this author. Many of his patients suffered due to unnecessary fear of Hell; a daughter was a victim of spiritual terror, and he lost a pastoral position because he refused to accept the doctrine of unending torture in Hell.

In summary, Boyd Purcell's writing is very straight forward, clear and easy to understand. I recommend this book for anyone who has suffered from spiritual abuse or has known someone who has suffered from spiritual abuse.

# More of the Church world can be won over from Hell fire

By Gary Amirault

Well, **Rob Bell**, author of *Love Wins: Heaven, Hell and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* has stepped over the edge and said it. Love Wins!

Imagine that. From the stir these two simple words are causing one would think **Rob Bell** is spreading a new deadly virus. But this message, Love Wins, has been around since the beginning of creation — actually longer. It was in the mind of God before He said, "Let there be light."

The only reason these two words are hurting the ears and eyes of the Church world is because it has still not come out of the Dark Ages. The Protestant Church slightly opened the door to Light 500 years ago, but it has not yet left its cave to step into the kingdom of God and its righteousness.

Universalism was the Light of the early Christians for over 500 years. Then a combination of men, primarily **Jerome, Augustine, Constantine** and **Justinian** closed the door to the Holy Spirit and replaced God's Spirit with the "traditions of men which make the word of God of no effect." - Matthew 15:6-9

Over the last 1,600 years or so, those who had enough Holy Spirit and boldness in them to say, "Love Wins" were usually killed and had their writings burned. Even during the Protestant Reformation, those who yelled, "Love Wins" were killed or exiled by every "orthodox" church, whether Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist or whatever.

Today, they can't kill you. But I have little doubt that should the state authorize the burning and beheading of heretics, that the faggots would burn once again, even in Evangelical America.

The last main church player to declared "Love Wins" was **Carlton Pearson**. He soared so high in the right circles that he was invited to the White House. But when Pearson opened his



Gary Amirault

mouth and declared what he called "The Doctrine of Inclusion," that is, the salvation of all mankind (universalism) the church came at him with everything they could throw at him that was legal.

Carlton lost his church of several thousand, his position on the board of directors of Oral Roberts University, recording contracts and church platforms he once shared with the big names of christendom became closed to him. While the church as a whole gave Pearson a thrashing, the secular media was rather nice to Pearson.

It seems **Rob Bell** will probably meet the same fate. The secular media is being used by HarperOne, the publisher of *Love Wins*, to generate quite a stir.

They will side with **Rob Bell** on this issue. What remains to be seen is how much of the Church world, **Rob Bell** can win over. I think he may be able to win more Christians over into leaving Hell and entering the kingdom of God than those who have previously tried in recent times.

There have many hundreds of books, DVDs, YouTube presentations, and web sites that have popped up in recent years declaring Love Wins.

*Tentmaker Ministries* has been screaming it for over 20 years. The tide is turning. How much the tide will turn after **Rob Bell's** book *Love Wins* comes out remains to be seen. But the message of the Victorious Gospel of Jesus Christ will continue to be preached as long as there is a single soul still locked up in their carnal mind.

God's Love is the light that will light up the world, every single soul who ever lived and ever will live. The Truth is Love Wins for everyone.

Hell is empty. To see how empty visit <http://www.tentmaker.org> <http://www.lovewins.us>

**Gary Amirault** is founder of *Tentmaker Ministries of Hermann, MO*.

## Quotations about the Bible

*The foibles, inconsistencies and humanness (of the Bible) all the more show us that the letter of the Scripture is not to be enthroned as an idol to be worshipped of itself. The letter will always kill. It is the spirit which God has breathed into his holy instrument, the spirit of his high Logos, this Word, that transmits its life to all those who obey it.* — **Michael Phillips**

*The longer you read the Bible, the more you will like it; it will grow sweeter and sweeter; and the more you get into the spirit of it, the more you will get into the spirit of Christ.* — **Romaine**

*No man ever believes that the Bible means what it says: He is always convinced that it says what he means.* — **George Bernard Shaw**

*The Holy Book of the living God suffers more from its exponents today than from its opponents.* — **Leonard Ravenhill**

# Author explains why he is an Evangelical Universalist

**By Robin Parry (a.k.a Gregory MacDonald)**

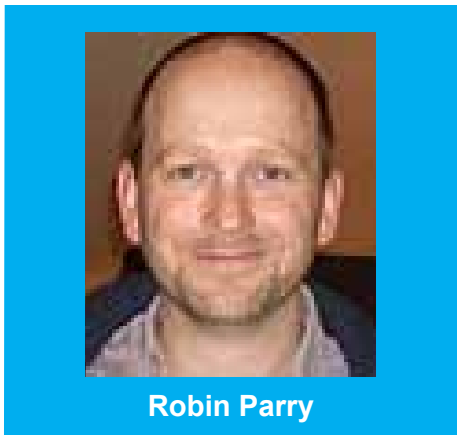
About 2002 or 2003 I wrote a book called *The Evangelical Universalist*. It was not intended for publication; it was simply a way of helping me think through some issues.

Anyway, I was advised by a friend to send it to a publisher for review with possible publication in mind. So I sent it to Wipf and Stock who accepted it in their Cascade list and published it in 2006. SPCK then picked it up (not knowing who I was) and published a UK edition in 2008.

But why remain anonymous?  
 - Not because I was embarrassed about my views (I would have loved to be more open about them).  
 - Not because I feared losing my job. I kept my identity secret in the first instance to protect my employer. Sadly there are some Christians out there who would not be at all happy to know that the Editorial Director for Paternoster is a believer in universal restoration.

For the most part this is simply because they do not understand the position that I hold. They imagine that if I am a universalist I must believe propositions such as the following  
 - that all roads lead to God (Jesus is a way but not the way)  
 - that it does not matter how we live as we shall all be saved anyway  
 - that we must choose the parts of the Bible that we like and reject the parts that we do not.  
 - There is no Hell - etc, etc.

Of course, I don't believe any of those things. I am a relatively conservative evangelical Christian who seeks to found his theology on Scripture. I believe that salvation is in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone. But the problem is that it takes a while to explain the



Robin Parry

view that I hold and it is easier to rush to judgment. I noticed this the other day in an old online article in Christianity Today about people it called "evangelical universalists".

## **Universalism, pluralism confused**

In fact the people in question were pluralists that attended evangelical churches. This confusion of universalism with pluralism is sadly common (even though a little reflection would show that universalism and pluralism address totally different questions).

When many evangelicals hear the word "universalist" in one ear, they hear the word "heretic" in the other. So I am starting on the backfoot. All the traditionalist has to do to prove (to their satisfaction) that I am unevangelical is quote a verse about Hell. Case closed. The Bible says it, they believe it, that settles it. For me to make my case requires a lot more work to overcome prejudices and misunderstandings. Anyway, I digress...

So to avoid unnecessary difficulties for my employer I kept my real name out of it until enough people had read the book to say, "Well, he may not be correct but his view is not unChristian". In fact, some might even say, "Goodness gracious me! The boy's right!" (which, of course, I am :-)) (As an aside, it has always been

my policy not to use Paternoster as a vehicle for the promotion of my own ideas. Consequently I have not used it, nor will I use it, to promote universalism. I have worked for Paternoster for eight years now and have been a universalist the whole time so I hope that my track record will calm any fears on this front.

We willingly publish books defending annihilation and eternal conscious torment - in fact we publish both. Paternoster publishes within the bounds of broadly evangelical Christianity and does not have party lines on pet topics). My other reason for anonymity was that one of my books, *Worshipping Trinity*, is a more important book than *TEU* and I am keen not to undermine its important message. I am pleased that it has been having a positive impact on various churches.

Sadly, I know that there are people out there who would avoid that book like the plague if they thought it was written by a so-called "heretic". Everything I ever wrote or said would be untouchable. I do not care about that as far as my reputation goes (what reputation? not much to lose, eh?) but I do care if it stops churches hearing a word of the Lord that they need to hear (and I do believe *Worshipping Trinity* is a word of the Lord).

So why confess my identity now? It was always my intention to reveal who I was when it seemed right. When the church might understand universalism enough to accept it as a Christian position (even if not the only one or even the right one). We're not there yet but we are closer than we were a few years back, so I thought, "It's going to come out some time - better to reveal my identity myself than be 'exposed'".

*Continued on page 12*

## Author explains why he is an Evangelical Universalist ... continued from page 11

Of course, it may be too early. People may now avoid me, or stop inviting me to preach, or stop reading my books and Bible notes, or advise others to avoid me as dangerous, etc, etc. Well, so be it. God will have to look after me.

So let me conclude with the words I ended the book with:

“Let me ask you to hold in your mind traditional Christian visions of the future, in which many, perhaps the majority of humanity, are excluded from salvation forever. Alongside that hold the universalist vision, in which God achieves his loving purpose of redeeming the whole creation. Which vision has

the strongest view of divine love? Which story has the most powerful narrative of God’s victory over evil? Which picture lifts the atoning efficacy of the cross of Christ to the greatest heights? Which perspective best emphasizes the triumph of grace over sin? Which view most inspires worship and love of God bringing him honor and glory? Which has the most satisfactory understanding of divine wrath? Which narrative inspires hope in the human spirit? To my mind the answer to all these questions is clear, and that is why I am a Christian universalist.”

Posted by **Robin Parry** on his blog at <http://theologicalscribbles.blogspot.com/2009/08/i-am-evangelical-universalist.html>

**Robin Parry** is a Christian theologian best known for editing and writing (both under his real name and under the pseudonym **Gregory MacDonald** - revealed in 2009) books such as *The Current Debate*, *Worshipping Trinity* and *The Evangelical Universalist*. The latter has been his most controversial work, given that Christian Universalism is still widely regarded as incompatible with Evangelicalism. He is an editor for Wipf and Stock — a U.S.-based theological publisher.

## Thomas Talbott says orthodox Christian theology “riddled with logical impossibilities”

**Thomas Talbott**, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon, and the author of *The Inescapable Love of God*, comes from an evangelical background.

After 34 years of teaching philosophy at Willamette University, he retired from full-time teaching in 2006. His principal area of interest and the area in which he has done most of his own writing is philosophy of religion - which overlaps with metaphysics, moral philosophy, philosophy of mind, and virtually every other area of philosophy.

“I grew up in an exceptionally loving family, on the one hand, and in an exceptionally rigid fundamentalist church, on the other,” he writes on his website, [www.willamette.edu/~ttalbott/](http://www.willamette.edu/~ttalbott/).

“I also graduated from a conservative Christian high school in which I acquired several lifelong friendships with some of the most intriguing personalities that I have ever encountered in any context. My high school days and the enduring friendships that I made at that time are in many ways

the most cherished part of my life.

“But as I continued to examine my religious heritage, first as an undergraduate, then as a seminary student, and finally as a graduate student in philosophy, I reluctantly came to the following conclusion: What often passes for orthodox Christian theology is riddled with logical impossibilities. Worse yet, the Western theological tradition, insofar as it reflects the thought of **St. Augustine** and **Calvin**, has too often twisted the New Testament message of love, forgiveness, and hope into a message of fear and condemnation.

“I explain all of this in my book, *The Inescapable Love of God*, and you can learn more about the book at my companion website by clicking on [www.thomastalbott.com](http://www.thomastalbott.com). I also interact with other scholars on these matters in two additional books: *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate*, which is edited by **Robin Parry** and **Christopher Partridge**; and *Perspectives on Election*, which is edited by **Chad Brand**. In all of these writings as well

as in other journal articles, book chapters, and an entry on universalism in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (**Jerry Walls**, editor), my aim has been to call attention to a minority Christian tradition, one that presents a stunning and utterly consistent vision of God’s all-inclusive, all pervasive, and inexorable love.

“I believe I can say without egotism that my book sets forth, however inadequately, a powerful and glorious vision of divine love, one that many Christians who share my evangelical heritage have never encountered before.

“And the reason I can make such a grand claim without egotism is that the vision of which I speak in no way originated with me. It goes back to some of the earliest church fathers, indeed to St. Paul himself, but the organized Christian Church has tried desperately to suppress it for over 1,500 years. And in particular, the Evangelical Christian publishing houses of our day by and large want nothing to do with it”.