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

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theological category of beauty that is a part of the definition of “orthodoxy.” His work is also reminiscent of Pavel Florensky in his approach to truth as antinomic, where heresy is defined as sticking to one part of the truth, so orthodoxy cannot be defined as a monolithic approach to truth. As do Bulgakov and Florensky, so Arjakovsky comes back to the epistemological richness of a symbolic (iconic) understanding of truth and the whole of reality. Therefore, the definition of “orthodoxy” integrates both the immanent and the transcendent, together with the apophatic and cataphatic ways of knowing God. Lastly also his deep struggle for the unity of the church comes out of the integral character of Holy Wisdom that has always been manifested as the unity of all without losing the meaning of individual parts.

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**David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019. Pp. iv + 222. ISBN 978-0-300-24622-3. £20.**

In this book, “more or less the last” (though I hope not), David Bentley Hart advances a tightly argued case for universalism, “that all shall be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4), not as a hope or an aspiration, but the will of God (as that text asserts), a will that will be inexorably fulfilled. If anyone comes in the sights of this pugnaciously argued book, it is not those who uphold what looks like, from the perspective of history, the dominant tradition of the Church, that there are those who will not be saved but consigned to the eternal fires of hell, nor those who have refined this into the

conviction that our ultimate fate is decided by God’s will, which is not (as the pastoral epistle asserts) the salvation of all, but a divided will, consigning some to salvation and others to perdition, and this regardless of the quality of the lives they have lived, but to be traced back to God’s eternal will, “before the foundation of the world”: the doctrine of what is known as *gemina prae-destinatio*, “double (or twin) predestination.”

No, if anyone comes in Hart’s sights it is “the great Hans Urs von Balthasar,” who maintains what is sometimes called “hopeful universalism”—the doctrine that “Christians *may* be allowed to *dare* to hope for the salvation of all,” a view with which Hart professes “very small patience” (66). Several times in the course of this short book, Hart makes it clear that he is not advancing some sort of tentative argument, but setting out an argument to which he is absolutely committed, regarding those who disagree with him as illogical, immoral, or both, whose only excuse could be the weight of traditional teaching, as they perceive it. Nor is his argument that this perception of the dominant tradition of the Church (at least the Western Church) is false—that really this is not what the Church has believed. This *is* really what the Church believed, or thought it believed, but nonetheless such a belief is monstrous. I am not sure what he makes of Ilaria Ramelli’s survey of the tradition of universalism, of *apocatastasis*, *The Christian Doctrine of Apocatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (2013), which seeks to argue that *apocatastasis*—universalism—is not in the least marginal to the Christian tradition, at least in the first millennium, but has some claim to be called the authentic Christian tradition. From his brief reference in an appendix to her work (which now includes a briefer work, covering a longer period, *A Larger Hope? Universal Salvation from Christian Beginnings to Julian of Norwich* (2019), to be followed by a second volume, taking the story from the Reformation to the nineteenth century), Hart seems warmly to

endorse it, but he is not really interested—at least in this book—in a historical argument about what belongs to Christian tradition.

For readers of the book under review, it is perhaps worth mentioning here that, for all the sense Hart gives of being a David battling against the Goliath of Christian tradition, he is by no means alone on the current theological scene in advancing an argument for universalism. It seems to be more or less an article of faith within “Radical Orthodoxy,” and the rehabilitation of the tradition that stems from Origen, taking in its course such luminaries as St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Isaac of Nineveh (whose high regard for Evagrius places him firmly within the “Origenist” tradition, much better preserved in the Syriac world to which Isaac belonged than among the Greeks), and somewhat later Eriugena (whose lonely star has been rising steadily over the last few decades): this rehabilitation of the so-called Origenist tradition is something well under way. The revision of the Origenist tradition began long ago in the monographs and editions of Origen’s works by the Jesuit, Henri Crouzel (1919–2003); it received notable support from Mark Edwards in his *Origen against Plato* (2002); and the textual basis for this revised estimate of Origen is strongly supported by John Behr’s new edition for Oxford Early Christian Texts of his *De Principiis* (2017), the supposed *fons et origo* of Origenist error, especially over *apocatastasis*. I mention this, because Hart’s book is primarily a work of philosophical theology, which touches on the historical issues only tangentially. The reader picking up this book out of interest might not realize, as s/he reads it, that Hart is not on his own in taking on what has for centuries been regarded as the tradition of the Church.

Hart’s argument for universal salvation is set out in four chapters (after a couple of introductory chapters which set out his convictions about the muddled questions to which the notions of hell and damnation are thought to provide answers). These four chapters concern the nature of God

and creation out of nothing; the nature of judgment and biblical eschatology; the nature of the person and the divine image; and the nature of freedom and what is meant by a rational will. First of all: God, his nature, how we know him, and how this is bound up with what Hart calls the moral meaning of *creatio ex nihilo*. Creation, which, as Christians understand it, is out of nothing—Hart does not (and rightly) make a sharp distinction between *creatio ex nihilo* and emanation in its Neoplatonic form—means that all that exists owes its being to God’s love. The idea that the created order might contain something that is radically evil is simply illogical. Not only that, the idea that some beings created by God out of love might be consigned to eternal punishment makes no sense of God’s love. Hart is well aware that defenders of hell—“infernalists,” he calls them—claim that God cannot be regarded as a moral agent among others, just as he cannot be regarded as a being alongside others, but he is outraged at the suggestion that God’s love could be so different from human love that it might just as well be called hatred. Hart is well aware of the traditional Western notion of *analogia entis* (as well as being a translator of the New Testament, he is also one of the translators of the Jesuit theologian Erich Przywara’s formidable tome, *Analogia Entis* [2014]), that is, that the ascription of being and qualities such as goodness to God does not mean that God is a being like us, or that his goodness is like ours, but he rightly remarks that “[t]he golden thread of analogy can stretch across as vast an apophatic abyss as the modal disjunction between infinite and finite or the ontological disproportion between absolute and contingent can open before us; but it cannot span a total antithesis” (88).

Secondly, the nature of judgment and biblical eschatology: this begins setting out the clear support for the salvation of all to be found in the New Testament—twenty-three citations, in Greek and in Hart’s own translation (95–102)—making the

point that doctrine of universal salvation has broad support from the New Testament against the infernalist presumption of the opposite (something that those who argue for the limited extent of atonement often quite overlook). There follows a discussion, less detailed, of the passages alleged to support the notion of eternal hell, not least the Apocalypse, which Hart disarmingly regards as more or less incomprehensible (“an intricate and impenetrable puzzle, one whose key vanished long ago . . .”: 107). More important, it seems to me, is his discussion of the Greek words, commonly translated “eternal,” αἰώνιος and αἰδιος, *aionios* and *aidios*, in which he points out, with Ramelli, that it is *aidios* that properly means eternal, and that is applied to God alone in the Scriptures; *aionios* has a different valence, meaning long-lasting, or belonging to the age (*aion*), this or the one to come—which robs the passages cited in support of the notion of eternal hell or punishment of the meaning required by the infernalists.

The third of these chapters concerns the nature of personhood and being created in the divine image, which contains some of the most moving pages of the book, especially when Hart comes to develop Gregory of Nyssa’s understanding of what it is to be a person, in the divine image: a notion that entails a common humanity, so that we are all bound up with one another and with the fate of each other, part of the divine plan to complete the creation of the human in the divine image by bringing it to fulfilment in Christ, a fulfilment in which all that is evil and negative is overcome by Christ on his Cross, bringing the whole of humanity, together, into the perfection of the image.

The last of the four chapters turns to the question of freedom and the nature of the rational will. For it is freedom that the infernalists often claim to be defending in their holding out the possibility of hell as a corollary of freedom; true freedom must have the possibility to reject finally God’s love, otherwise love constrains, and constraint

removes freedom. Hart is again at his most convincing and eloquent here. He draws on St. Maximos, without going into the off-putting detail of difficult texts and vexing interpretations that a Maximos scholar might invoke. For Maximos, and I think for most thinkers until relatively modern times, the point of the will is to search for and pursue the good: we act because we think we are doing good; we fail to do good because we mistake the good and choose under the appearance of the good something that is evil. This idea, often dubbed the Socratic idea that knowledge is virtue, is much more robust than is often allowed, as Hart demonstrates. Good and evil are not options that the rational will chooses; there is dynamism bound up with our orientation towards the good that we possess in virtue of being created in the image of God. The idea that a rational will might ultimately reject God, the source of good, makes no sense. Here I found myself wanting to follow Hart, but nonetheless wondering. The hard logic of Hart’s position is inexorable; but so, by their lights, is the hard logic of the Thomist or even the Calvinist. And my hesitation owes something to my flinching a bit at Hart’s characterization of Balthasar’s position of “hopeful universalism,” as being in some way “lily-livered” (not that Hart uses exactly that language). In one of the nooks and crannies of his vast *œuvre*, Balthasar remarks that “[i]n the official theology of the West, at the latest since Augustine, an unlimited hope is hindered by the certitude that a certain number of humans will be damned, and, in a yet more fateful way, by a doctrine of double predestination erected into a system,” and he goes on:

But it is significant that, since the middle ages and up to the modern period, a whole procession of holy women [tout un cortège de saintes femmes] has silently protested against this masculine theology, and strengthened by the boldness of their hearts and by direct access to the mystery of salvation, they

have known a hope without limit. To limit ourselves to the greatest names, let us mention Hildegard, Gertrude, Mechthilde of Hackeborn, Mechthilde of Magdeburg, Lady Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Sienna, to which one could doubtless add Catherine of Genoa, Mary of the Incarnation, and even Mme. Guyon. But the theology of the women has never been taken seriously or integrated by the “guild” . . . (‘Actualité de Lisieux,’ in *Thérèse de Lisieux: Conférences de Centenaire, 1873–1973*, special number of *Nouvelles*, no. 2 (1973), 107–23, here 120–21)

Balthasar’s point about the “*espérance sans limite*,” embraced by these “*saintes femmes*,” relates to the limitations of the “*théologie masculine*” that has dominated the public teaching of the Church for two millennia. I spoke earlier of Hart presenting himself (by implication, not explicitly) as a David fighting the Goliath of the accumulated tradition of the Church, but David the shepherd-boy rejected the armor offered by Saul and faced the giant with a sling and a pebble. Hart employs the full intellectual armory of the tradition of Western theology: his arguments do not explore, they are intended to compel. Balthasar, it seems to me, shrinks from such arguments, because the “*espérance sans limite*,” that he wishes to embrace along with the holy women he mentions, is rooted in an experience that does not seek to enter the rational—oh so rational—discourse of Western (and, to be fair, much Eastern) theology.

I cannot, and do not want to, question the conclusion that Hart advances. But something in me wonders if he is not defending his position with weapons that have no business here.

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**Robin Whelan. *Being Christian in Vandal Africa: The Politics of Orthodoxy in the Post-Imperial West*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018. xvi + 301 pp.**

Augustine died in 430 while the Vandals were besieging Hippo. This coincidence, as well as the fact that of all extant Vandal-era texts, Victor of Vita’s *History* has exercised great influence over modern readers, crystallized the idea that the break between Roman and Vandal rule in North Africa was sharp and brutal. Recent English-language studies on Vandal Africa, however, including work by J. P. Conant, A. H. Merrills, and R. Miles, have challenged that assumption, and Robin Whelan’s superb contribution to the conversation rewards the reader with a vision of Vandalic Christian Africa that is more *déjà vu* than departure. Despite a hegemonic shift in Africa and the new court’s affirmation of Homoian Christianity (called *Arian* by its enemies) over Nicene Christianity (*Catholic* as self-styled by the Nicenes), the bishops proceeded in ways remarkably similar to predecessors living under Roman rule.

Whelan removes the Nicene and Homoian churches from their overdetermined (and strictly rhetorical) dependence on Vandal kings and ethnic identity: Homoian bishops were not obliging extensions of the court, nor were they necessarily of *Vandal* or “barbarian” origin, just as Nicene bishops were not exclusively identifiable as *Roman*. Once Whelan extricates churches from false ethnic and royal entanglements, he concludes that the ferocious competition between them was born from commonality, not difference. The most famous Nicene bishops from the Vandal era, Quodvultdeus, bishop of Carthage, and Fulgentius of Ruspe, fretted that believers could not easily tell the two churches apart. Nicene and Homoian churches competed for and claimed the same honors: who had the greater number of bishops; who was more faithful to the legacy of Cyprian; who understood scripture better;