

Gregory MacDonald (Ed.) *All Will Be Well: Explorations in Universalism and Christian Theology, from Origen to Moltmann*. Eugene, Or.: Cascade, 2011. (xii + 439 pp) [ISBN: 978-1-60608-685-8]

The idea of universalism is one of the defining issues of our day and interest in it has increased tremendously over the last decade. This is due in large measure to Robin Parry (acquisitions editor for Wipf and Stock), who has authored a key work on the topic, *The Evangelical Universalist* (Cascade, 2006), and edited two works, the one under review and an earlier one with Christopher Partridge, *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate* (Paternoster, 2003). With such works as these, and others like Rob Bell's *Love Wins* (Collins, 2011), the topic of universalism has been brought out of the theological cupboard, has been dusted off, and is being re-examined today in the light of contemporary issues and arguments.

In Parry's earlier edited work, *Universal Salvation?* the contributors sought to evaluate and debate the central issues involved in holding universalist positions. Particularly prominent were the contributions and arguments of philosopher Thomas Talbot (*The Inescapable Love of God* [Universal, 1999]). *Universal Salvation?* clearly pointed out a number of competing theories or doctrines of universalism, and brought proponents and opponents together in critical dialogue. In *The Evangelical Universalist*, Parry outlines his own defence of a Christian universalism, which he defines as a 'hopeful dogmatic universalist' (p. 4). If the first volume was intended to put the topic of universalism back on the agenda (which it did), and the second volume was an attempt to establish the Evangelical credentials of such a position (which it did), then this third volume may be seen as an attempt to showcase the historical antecedents of universalism throughout the Christian tradition, to further recommend it to an orthodox, Evangelical audience. As Parry writes in the Introduction, 'It is my hope that, if nothing else, this book can play some small role in bringing into the light a diverse minority-tradition that deserves both more attention and more respect as an authentically Christian attempt at faith seeking understanding' (p. 24). It does!

In a 25 page introduction from Parry, (writing under the pen name of Gregory MacDonald), he attempts to situate universalism somewhere between heresy and dogma, and argues that it is not, and should never be, considered as formally heretical in that no

ecumenical council has ever anathematized it (he defends this position in light of the fifth ecumenical council of 553 which anathematized Origen). Universalism is, rather, a *theologoumenon*—a pious opinion that is consistent with Christian dogmas, they are neither required nor forbidden (pp. 11-12). Parry also shows how universalism appears spontaneously throughout church history, before going on to offer a genealogy of universalism. Parry's account of the 'family lines' of universalism includes a pietistic line (the De Benneville family tree); a Calvinist line (the Relly family tree), of which John Murray is perhaps the most famous advocate (and strangely missing from this collection); and a neo-Platonic family tree (the early church most obviously). Within such family lines are a diverse range of universalisms, many of which are mutually exclusive of the others. The contributors to this volume and the historical figures examined cover a broad sweep of such taxonomy.

Seventeen historical case studies are included in the volume, ranging from Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, through to Schleiermacher, Thomas Erskine, to Jürgen Moltmann. Also included are chapters on P.T. Forsyth and Karl Barth, both of whom denied they were universalists, and yet, in the opinion of many, their respective theologies lead inexorably in that direction. 'This book, however, is not merely a descriptive exercise that outlines what various individual Christian thinkers have thought about universal salvation. Each of our authors was invited to offer some brief assessment of the strengths and/or weaknesses of their subject's theology, and these brief evaluations are offered in order to further stimulate the theological engagement of readers with the issues' (p. 2).

For the most part the essays in this volume are erudite, concise, and stimulating. Tom Gregg opens the case studies with a survey of Origen's *apokatastasis*, showing especially how it is Trinitarian, and importantly, how his version of universalism does not undermine concerns with particularity. In the process Origen's doctrines of the pre-existence of souls, and Christ's *epinoiai* (titles) are dealt with in simple yet careful ways. Gregg is also able to show how Origen's work has inherent tensions within it, and how this may be accounted for, not least due to pastoral considerations. For instance, we read, that 'for pastoral reasons...he is prepared at times to point towards a limited salvation reserved only for believers...' (p. 44). Following Gregg, Baptist theologian Steve

Harmon examines Gregory of Nyssa's 'hopeful universalism,' something Harmon shares with Gregory, and shows how his version includes the biblical themes of judgement and the purifying role that punishment has in his theology. As with Origen, Gregory of Nyssa's hopeful eschatology is couched with pastoral reservations. As Harmon reminds us, 'In this connection there is much wisdom in the words of the nineteenth-century German pietist Christian Gottlieb Barth: 'Anyone who does not believe in the universal restoration is an ox, but anyone who teaches it is an ass'' (p. 63). As a summation of 'hopeful universalism' Harmon shares with us the following: 'As I sometimes tell my students, 'I will not be surprised if I discover in the resurrection that the God revealed in Jesus Christ has saved all people, but in the meantime we should not count on that'' (p. 63).

Parry's own chapter in the book examines the Universal Baptist position espoused by Elhanan Winchester (1751-1797), by all accounts a rather eccentric pastor, but one whose theology sat between Calvinism and Arminianism. Winchester argued for the reality of Hell but that it was a refining purgation and judgement that, after a very long time, would remedy the sins of all and allow them entry into eternal bliss. He based his theology not upon sentiment but upon an intense theology of union with Christ.

Other chapters canvass the universalisms of Schleiermacher (Murray Rae), P.T. Forsyth (Jason Goroncy), Sergius Bulgakov (Paul Gavriluk), Karl Barth (Oliver Crisp), J.A.T. Robinson (Trevor Hart), and Hans Urs von Balthasar (Edward Oakes), to name a few. This is an impressive line-up of contributors and each of the essays rewards the reader with accurate information and considered analysis.

Robin Parry wrote under the pseudonym 'Gregory MacDonald' in his monograph *The Evangelical Universalist*, to protect the reputation of his then employer, Paternoster. Now that he is no longer with Paternoster his identity has been revealed, however, he retained the name for *All Will Be Well* to make the connection in people's minds between the two books. Gregory MacDonald is a combination of Gregory of Nyssa and George MacDonald, two prominent universalists from history that Parry is obviously indebted to. As editor of this book Parry has done an outstanding job and the collection achieves what it sets out to do. From now on if one wants to reject a doctrine of universalism they will have to be very specific about what universalism it is they are actually rejecting, and

will have to deal honestly and explicitly with the biblical, theological, and pastoral issues surrounding such a universalism. Any work which enables the Christianity community to be more honest and more discerning is surely to be welcomed.

Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2006. (581pp.) [ISBN 0830825711]

This volume is a culmination of Chris Wright's long standing work in the matrix of mission studies, biblical studies and hermeneutics. Having already appreciated his work on Old Testament ethics in *Living as the People of God*, his exposition of the justice dimensions of the book of Deuteronomy in the NIBCommentary series, and his contribution to hermeneutics and mission in various shorter occasional pieces, I approached this volume with some anticipation. And I was not disappointed.

I feel comfortable with this book. I know what it's about and so I like it. By that I do not mean that it is bland and unchallenging; nor do I mean that I have already thought the thoughts of the author. What I am saying is that this book connects with my own struggles and questions about the nature and purpose of the Old Testament, and the connection between mission and Scripture. It opens up paths in directions that instinctively I want to be going in, but which I either could not have found on my own or would have taken much longer to find without this guide.

To my mind the key strength of this book is the way it demonstrates the missional nature of God, and that that nature is founded in the witness of the Old Testament. It does so in a manner that transcends the usual approach to studies on mission in the Old Testament. Such approaches generally amount to one of two things. On one hand, they may simply reject the notion of the Old Testament having much to say about mission at all, as is characteristic of the work of Schnabel, or they may treat it as a short prologue (some prologue) to the main thing, which is the New Testament and the age of the church; such is the approach of the otherwise enduringly excellent work of David Bosch. On the other hand, the attempt to find mission in the Old Testament may be little more than ingenious exegesis of the material in the service