



The Hope of Salvation for All in the Light of Contemporary Universalism

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Nadzieja zbawienia dla wszystkich w świetle współczesnego uniwersalizmu

STRESZCZENIE

Argumenty współczesnych uniwersalistów, którzy, podobnie jak David B. Hart, podążają za Grzegorzem z Nyssy i innymi Ojcami Kościoła, twierdząc, że wszyscy ludzie zostaną zbawieni, są szczególnie mocne i otwierają możliwość reinterpretacji znaczenia i zakresu tradycyjnej doktryny. Argumenty te biorą pod uwagę obfitość i siłę werwetów uniwersalistycznych w *Nowym Testamencie*, trudności zintegrowania potępienia z ekonomią zbawienia, konstytutywną solidarność między wszystkimi ludźmi oraz fakt, że jeśli ostateczny akt prowadzący do potępienia nie zostanie podjęty w pełnej świadomości i wolności, jego konsekwencje będą niesprawiedliwe, a jeśli będzie podjęty w pełnej świadomości i wolności, to taki akt jest niemożliwy. Siła tych argumentów prowadzi nie tylko do obrony – wraz z Balthasarem – tezy o możliwości i obowiązku posiadania nadziei zbawienia dla wszystkich, ale także do skrajnego prawdopodobieństwa – lecz nie do pewności – urzeczywistnienia się tej nadziei. Na koniec poddane są ocenie konsekwencje duszpasterskie takiego stanowiska.

Słowa kluczowe: uniwersalizm, *apokatastasis*, nadzieja zbawienia dla wszystkich, piekło, zbawienie

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1. A new universalism¹

As a participation in the life of the One who “is love” (1 John 4:8), eternal life, the ultimate end of human life, is a mystery of love, and therefore of freedom. It presupposes the free response of the human being to the gift in which the Living One offers and opens his very self in infinite freedom. Therefore, a person who would die in radical opposition to God’s saving action would suffer endlessly from the irremediable separation from the One who is the ultimate end and sole source of the beatitude to which that

¹ This article takes up and expands on the last part of Jean-Baptiste Lecuit, “La vie éternelle: corporelle, dynamique et universelle? Les débats contemporains et leurs enjeux”, *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, 108/4 (2020): 631-658.

person, like all others, can only aspire. This dreadful eventuality² was not only held as a certainty by the Western Christian tradition, but as the fate of most Adam's descendants, who was supposed to have plunged, through his fault alone, all his descendants into a state that by itself merited the eternal punishment of damnation. It was not until the nineteenth century that the thesis of the great number of the elect germinated and then triumphed³, to the point where it has become obvious to most theologians and believers today that we have "*the obligation to hope for all*", as Balthasar famously claimed.⁴ But it is officially forbidden, within the Catholic Church, to go further and claim that *All Shall Be Saved*, as the American Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart more recently argued⁵, following in the footsteps of several Protestant theologians.⁶ Indeed, it is considered heretical to affirm the universality of salvation, even though it was defended, after Origen, by Gregory of Nyssa and, possibly, Athanasius, the other Cappadocians, and Maximus the Confessor, not to mention other lesser-known theologians.⁷ Can we console ourselves for not believing in it by simply *hoping*, with Balthasar and so many others, that everyone will eventually enter eternal life? No, answer the proponents of two opposite options: those who, like Hart, regard any doubt about universal salvation as a symptom of a poor understanding of God's goodness and human freedom; and those who, like Christophe Kruijen⁸, still dare to defend that it is not even permissible to hope for everyone, given the ordinary magisterium of the Church. If the arguments against the hope of universal salvation are well known (too well known, say the ever-growing number of critics of predestinarianism and

² Gerhard Lohfink, *Am Ende das Nichts? Über Auferstehung und ewiges Leben* (Freiburg im Br.: Herder, 2017), 195 ("*eine furchtbare Möglichkeit*").

³ See Guillaume Cuchet, "Une révolution théologique oubliée. Le triomphe de la thèse du grand nombre des élus dans le discours catholique du XIX^e siècle", *Revue d'histoire du XIX^e siècle* 41/2 (2010): 131-148.

⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"?* with *A Short Discourse on Hell* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 211-221.

⁵ David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved. Heaven, Hell and Universal Salvation*, with a new preface (New Haven/London: YUP, 2019).

⁶ The history and development of contemporary debates on universalism can be followed on Fr Aidan Kimel's website "Eclectic Orthodoxy" (<https://afkimel.wordpress.com/>).

⁷ The essential study, impressive in its scope (890 pages), is Ilaria Ramelli, *The Christian doctrine of Apokatastasis. A critical assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Boston: Brill, Leiden, 2013). See also her more recent book, enriched with new examples but less thorough: *A Larger Hope? Universal Salvation from Christian Beginnings to Julian of Norwich* (Oregon: Cascade Books, Eugene, 2019). Ramelli addressed some of the critics *The Christian doctrine of Apokatastasis* received in "Reply to Professor Michael McClymond", *Theological Studies* 76/4 (2015): 827-835. M. McClymond published a 1325-page book against universalism: *The Devil's Redemption. A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism* (Michigan: Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2018).

⁸ Christophe J. Kruijen, *Peut-on espérer un salut universel? Étude critique d'une opinion théologique contemporaine concernant la damnation* (Paris: Parole et silence, 2017).

Augustinian pessimism), the arguments in favour of universalism must be heard if we want to verify that the contemporary defence of the possibility of hell rests on as solid a foundation as is commonly believed. This defence is no longer based on the demands of divine justice, on the selective nature of predestination, or on scriptural passages traditionally considered probative, but on the possibility, inherent in created freedom, of a definitive refusal of God's grace.⁹ But the arguments of the new universalists are such as to awaken from a possible "dogmatic sleep", anaesthetising the capacity for theological reaction to the atrocity of a definitive perdition, however freely chosen.¹⁰ While it is not open to Catholic theologians to adopt the conclusions of contemporary universalists, they can hear and make heard the force of their arguments, hoping, if not for a revision of official doctrine, at least for *a renewed interpretation of its meaning and scope*. To this end, we will join the latest Balthasar who, in the final lines of the *Epilogue* of his immense trilogy, ventured even further than in *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"*? Not only do we not know whether the damnation of at least one human will be a *fact*, but quite simply whether it is a *possibility*, he dares to assert at the conclusion of his work: "We do not know whether a human freedom can deny to the very end this offer of the Spirit to give it his own true freedom". He even adds a restrictive condition to this uncertain possibility: "If it could do so definitively, then it would be fully conscious in doing so and would be committing the sin against the Holy Spirit, an 'eternal sin' that 'never has forgiveness' (Mk 3:29)".¹¹

2. The power of universalist arguments

Contemporary universalists¹² can rely on predecessors whose orthodoxy has never been questioned, and who seem to be more numerous than

⁹ See Bernard Sesboué, "L'enfer est-il éternel?", *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 87/2 (1999): 189-206, here 198.

¹⁰ I am not considering here the now ultra-minority thesis that the punishments of hell are the eternal punishment imposed by God on guilty people who are caught and wish to escape their fate.

¹¹ Balthasar, *Epilogue* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), *in fine* ("Wir wissen nicht, ob eine menschliche Freiheit sich bis ans Ende dem Angebot des Geistes, ihr die wahre eigene Freiheit zu geben, werweigern kann"). Pascal Ide argues that "the ethical, Christological and Trinitarian device set up [by Balthasar] leaves no possibility of thinking about or even simply representing the existence of hell" (Pascal Ide, "L'espérance d'un enfer vide selon Balthasar. Thème central ou latéral?", *Lateranum* 79/3 (2013): 723-738, here 726).

¹² In addition to the authors cited here, a recent and brilliant defence of universalism can be found in Andrew Hronich, *Once Loved Always Loved. The Logic of Apokatastasis* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2023). See also, among others: John Kronen and Eric Reitan, *God's Final Victory. A Comparative Philosophical Case for Universalism*, Continuum studies in philosophy of religion (London: Continuum, 2011).

a quick recollection of the condemnation of Origenism would suggest. As Ilaria Ramelli states: “It is meaningful that all of the Patristic supporters of apokatastasis were faithful to the Christian church; among them are many saints, such as Pamphilus the martyr, Gregory Nyssen, Gregory Nazianzen, Evagrius (who is a saint for the Orthodox Christians), Isaac of Nineveh, John of Dalyatha, Maximus the Confessor, and many others, including Jerome and Augustine at least for a certain time”¹³

Beyond the argument of tradition, insufficient on its own, universalism rests on four types of argument. The first is the abundance and force, outrageously neglected in tradition, especially in the West, of clearly universalist verses within the Johannine and Pauline writings¹⁴, such as 1 Cor. 15:28: “When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to *him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one* [ἵνα ἧ ὁ θεὸς πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν : *that God may be all in all* (KJV)]”¹⁵. This particular verse is, according to Ramelli, “the favourite Biblical quotation of Origen and Gregory Nyssen in favour of apokatastasis; it was used also by Eriugena and by other Patristic authors to support this theory”¹⁶

Regarding Paul, Hart wittily notes:

In every instance in which he names the stakes of our relation to Christ, he describes salvation as rescue from death, not from perpetual torture. I know it is traditional to take ‘death’ here as meaning ‘spiritual death’, which really means not death in any obligingly literal and terminal sense, but instead endless agony in separation from God; but Paul would have had to be something of a cretin not to have made that absolutely clear if that was indeed what he intended his readers to understand.¹⁷

¹³ Ramelli, *The Christian doctrine of Apokatastasis*, 823.

¹⁴ See John 12:32 (“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, *will draw all men* [πάντας] *to myself*”); 1 Cor. 15:22 (“For as in Adam all die, so also *in Christ shall all* [πάντες] *be made alive*”); Rom. 5,18 (“Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to *acquittal and life for all men* [εις πάντας ἀνθρώπους]”); 1Tim. 2:4 (God “*who desires all men* [πάντας ἀνθρώπους] *to be saved*”), 4:10 (“the living God, who is *the Savior of all men* [πάντων ἀνθρώπων], especially of those who believe”); Eph. 1:10 (“a plan for the fulness of time, *to unite all things* [ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα] *in him* [God], things in heaven and things on earth”); Col. 1:20 (“through him *to reconcile to himself all things* [ἀποκαταλλάξει τὰ πάντα], whether on earth or in heaven”); 1John 2:2 (“he is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also *for the sins of the whole world* [περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου]”).

¹⁵ Bible verses are usually cited from the *Ignatius Bible: Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition*, with some rare modifications, and sometimes from the *King James Version* (KJV)

¹⁶ Ramelli, *The Christian doctrine of Apokatastasis*, 819.

¹⁷ Hart, 106.

To the objection that the New Testament speaks of “eternal punishment” (κόλασιν αἰώνιον, Mat. 25:46) or “eternal fire” (τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον, Matt. 18:8, 25:41; πυρὸς αἰώνιου δίκην, Jude 7), Ramelli’s in-depth work leads to the answer that “[t]he adjective αἰώνιος in the Bible never means “eternal” unless it refers to God, who lends it the very notion of absolute eternity. In reference to life and death, it means “belonging to the future world.” It is remarkable that in the Bible only life in the other world is called αἰδίος, that is, “absolutely eternal”; this adjective in the Bible *never* refers to punishment, death, or fire in the other world. These are only called αἰώνια”.¹⁸

The second argument for universalism is the impossibility – or at least the extreme difficulty – to integrate damnation into the economy of salvation: not only can we no longer, as Augustine or Thomas Aquinas did, consider that predestination is selective, so that God can make his justice shine through in the eternal punishment of those he has decided not to elect to eternal life¹⁹, but the definitive loss of one represents a definitive failure of the universal will of salvation (1 Tim. 2:4), the definitive persistence of evil:

Could there then be a final state of things, asks Hart, in which God is all in all while yet there existed rational creatures whose inward worlds consisted in an eternal rejection of and rebellion against God as the sole and consuming and fulfilling end of the rational will’s most essential nature? If this fictive and perverse interiority were to persist into eternity, would God’s victory over every sphere of being really be complete? Or would that small, miserable, residual flicker of Promethean defiance remain forever as the one space in creation from which God has been successfully expelled?²⁰

As the Anglican bishop John A. T. Robinson wrote in 1949: “In a universe of love there can be no heaven which tolerates a chamber of horrors, no hell for any which does not at the same time make it hell for God.

¹⁸ Ramelli, *The Christian doctrine of Apokatastasis*, 26. See also, p. 821: “the theory of eternal damnation is based especially on the understanding of αἰώνιος as ‘eternal’ in scriptural references to otherworldly fire, punishment, and death, which is linguistically untenable”, and Ilaria Ramelli and David Konstan, *Terms for Eternity: Aiōnios and Aīdios in Classical and Christian Texts*, Perspectives on Philosophy and Religious Thought (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2013).

¹⁹ See *Summa Theologiae*, I,23,5, ad. 3: “Among men, God has willed, for some whom he has predestined, to show his goodness in the form of forgiving mercy; and for others whom he repudiates, in the form of punishing justice”. For a critique of this approach, see Jean-Baptiste Lecuit, *Le désir de Dieu pour l’homme. Une réponse au problème de l’indifférence*, Cogitatio Fidei, 303 (Paris: Cerf, 2017), 241 s. and 252 s.

²⁰ Hart, 193. See also Thomas Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014), 171.

He cannot endure *that* – for *that* would be the final mockery of His nature – and He will not”.²¹

The two most impressive universalist arguments concern sociality and freedom. The first stems directly from the corporate dimension of human beings and eternal life: by nature, by creation, they exist only in and through their relationships with other people and the world of which they are a part. “So, if not subsistent relations, writes Hart, we are nonetheless, so long as we are anything at all, subsistences of relationality; each of us is an entire history of attachments and affinities, and none of those attachments and affinities is merely accidental to some more essential self”.²² Furthermore: “As spiritual persons, we are dynamic analogies of the simplicity of the divine life of love, and so belong eternally to that corporate identity that is, for Gregory of Nyssa, at once the ‘Human Being’ of the first creation and also the eternal body of Christ”.²³

This means that the damnation of a single human being would inevitably be experienced as a tragedy, not only by those close to him, but, by progressive extension to those close to him, by all humanity: “I am not I in myself alone, but only in all others. If, then, anyone is in hell, I too am partly in hell”.²⁴

Indeed, how could the mother of a damned son – and, with her, all her brothers and sisters in humanity – enjoy perfect bliss if her son is not only deprived of it, but suffers without interruption or end the greatest misfortune imaginable? “We cannot choose to cease to care for *any* soul”, Hart writes, “without thereby choosing to cease to care for *every* soul to which that particular soul is attached by bonds of love or loyalty, and for every other soul attached to each of these, and, if need be, for every soul that has ever been – if that is what it takes to be perfectly, blissfully indifferent to the damned”²⁵:

[F]inite persons are not self-enclosed individual substances; they are dynamic events of relation to what is other than themselves. And this poses a problem. For me, all attempts to imagine the conditions of God’s Kingdom over against the reality of the eternal torment of those outside its demesne irresistibly summon up a single recurrent image: that of a parent whose beloved child has grown into quite an evil person, but who remains a parent nevertheless and therefore keeps and cherishes countless tender

²¹ John A. T. Robinson, “Universalism – Is it Heretical?”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 2 (1949): 139-155, here 155.

²² Hart, 154.

²³ *Ibidem*, 155.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 157.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 149.

memories of the innocent and delightful being that has now become lost in the labyrinth of that damaged soul.²⁶

As for the argument drawn from the consideration of human freedom (the only one that, in his polemical verve, the ebullient Hart considers worthy of intellectual consideration²⁷), it may be summed up thus: either the last act leading to damnation is not performed with complete lucidity and freedom, and its consequence is disproportionate, even unjust (for it is, at least in part, excused by the lack of one or the other, and could not without injustice be sanctioned by *total* and *eternal* suffering); or it is entirely lucid and free, and it is impossible: a person who knows perfectly well that God is her ultimate Good and only beatitude, and whose freedom is in no way alienated, cannot *freely* choose to refuse him definitively:

if a rational creature – one whose mind is entirely unimpaired and who has the capacity truly to know the substance and the consequences of the choice confronting him or her – is allowed, without coercion from any force extrinsic to his or her nature, to make a choice between a union with God in bliss that will utterly fulfill his or her nature in its deepest yearnings and a separation from God that will result in endless suffering and the total absence of his or her nature's satisfaction, only one truly *free* choice is possible".²⁸

"There is no such thing as perfect freedom in this life, or perfect understanding, and it is sheer nonsense to suggest that we possess limitless or unqualified liberty. Therefore, we are incapable of contracting a limitless or unqualified guilt", Hart writes in this sense.²⁹ Note well that the question posed following Balthasar, to which Hart dares to give an assuredly negative answer, does not concern the freedom to reject God, which no one disputes, but only the freedom to do so *definitively* and *with full knowledge of the facts* (on the assumption that doing so without full knowledge should not result in total and irreparable harm). In defence of the possibility of such a rejection, the argument of the incomprehensibility and obscurity of evil struggles to convince, since it is not merely an evil – however serious one might imagine it – for which a remedy is possible, but a total and *irremediable* evil, *even for God*.³⁰

²⁶ Ibidem, 151.

²⁷ Ibidem, 171.

²⁸ Ibidem, 179.

²⁹ Ibidem, 38.

³⁰ See Talbott, 178: "I have claimed only that a *certain kind of* harm – that is, harm that omnipotence can neither repair nor compensate for – would outweigh not only the value of freedom

3. The stakes of hope for all

The strength of these arguments leads me to defend, not only, with Balthasar, the possibility and the duty to hope for all, but, beyond the letter, if not the spirit, of his boldest assertions, the *extreme likeliness* of the fulfilment of this hope. However, I would not go so far as to consider it, like David B. Hart, as a *certainty*, an object of theological knowledge. The only Catholic theologian I know of who openly defends the compatibility of universalism with the Catholic faith in a published text is Robert Trent Pomplun of the University of Notre Dame. He writes:

Our common ideas of *poenae aeternae* are not just philosophically incoherent, but philologically suspect. Were any *poena* equal to God's own eternity, it would expiate. Were it equal to God's eternity but somehow rendered incapable of providing expiation, it would no longer be a *poena*. The price we could not pay would be greater than the price God did, and our sin would be greater than His Love. The consummate perspicacity of this argument is the great – and I hope lasting – contribution of [David B. Hart's] *That All Shall Be Saved*.³¹

As for the objection that the prospect of an extremely likely fulfilment of our duty to hope for the salvation of all would have disastrous pastoral consequences, I consider it unfounded. It consists essentially, as Kruijen maintains³² in establishing a causal link between the assertion of the probability – or even the simple possibility – that all will be saved, and

but also the value of any conceivable good that God might bring forth from the misuse of freedom". To the objection that God could have spared us the sufferings of earthly life by creating us directly in the face-to-face happiness supposedly to be obtained by all, Talbott rightly replies that the present life is indispensable to the gradual emergence of our rational and free personality (158, 160, 204). On the argument of the obscurity of evil, see Sesboué, 201. On Satan and demons, see *ibidem*, 202-206.

³¹ Robert Trent Pomplun, "Heat and Light: David Bentley Hart on the Fires of Hell", *Modern Theology*, 37/2 (2021): 523-530, p. 530; see also, *Ibid.*, 529: "The Vulgate translates both *aionios* and *adios* as *aeternum*. Scholastic theologians, however, understood *aeternitas* and the related term *aevum* to translate *aion*. As a result, the meanings of *aeternitas* and *aevum* vary widely in medieval texts. [...] It is perfectly in keeping with the Latin to say that hell's *poenae aeternae* last an *aevum* – or in Greek an *aion* – that is to say, they last a finite eschatological measure that we cannot calculate ourselves" (529). The Jesuit theologian Robert Deinhammer has also supported the universalist view, but on a website rather than in a published text. He wrote: "True faith can never be against reason. The idea that God has set up the world in such a way that all those who erroneously reject his love must suffer endless torment is against reason. It is also a blasphemous idea" (Robert Deinhammer, "Universal Salvation 2.0: A Roman Catholic Reflection", accessed 27 December, 2024, <https://afkimel.wordpress.com/2024/01/10/universal-salvation-2-0-a-roman-catholic-reflection/>).

³² Kruijen, 632.

moral laxity, lack of spiritual vigilance, missionary chill, not to mention an “ideological purification of biblical revelation”.³³ These fears are based on the idea that only the *irremediable* – and therefore “eternal” – character of suffering and perdition can sufficiently motivate the effective search for eternal life, or at least that it motivates it better and more. But who would ever think of justifying not doing good in the present life by the probability that evil will totally disappear after death or at the end of time? Even if this probability became a certainty, who would draw the conclusion that we may refrain from caring for the sick, educating children, helping the unfortunate... and proclaiming and living the Gospel, as if it brought no good for the present life? It is precisely because eternal life begins and deepens *right now*, and is the supreme good, and cures grave spiritual ills, and frees from their consequences, that we must do all that depends on us to welcome it and share it, like Jesus and through him, even if we, like him, lose the esteem of others, our security, and our lives. What we must announce is not the threat of eternal punishment. It is, firstly, the terrible proportion between stubbornness in evil and the pain of purification and repentance – especially for the perpetrators of criminal acts³⁴ – that will be necessary to enter eternal life. Indeed, insofar as the purification necessary to access the vision of God, face to face, has not been completed at the moment of death, it will continue beyond, under the effect of the ultimate encounter with God. Probably no one has better expressed the necessity of this purification and the reasons for its painful but supremely desirable character than John of the Cross in *The Living Flame of Love*:

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ On the point of eschatological reconciliation between perpetrators and victims, see Dirk An-sorge, “Vergebung auf Kosten der Opfer? Umriss einer Theologie der Versöhnung”, *Salzburger Theologische Zeitschrift*, 6 (2002): 36-58: “By calling them by name (cf. Isa 43:1), God enables the victims to become what their executioners have denied them: free subjects. As subjects, however, they are no longer merely uninvolved spectators in a judgement that concerns God and the executioners exclusively. Reinstated in their subjectivity by God, the victims rather take on an irreplaceable task in the act of reconciliation. ‘Reconciliation’ is no longer limited to the relationship between the sinner and God, but expands to an encounter between all people”. See also Magnus Striet, “Streitfall Apokatastasis. Dogmatische Anmerkungen mit einem ökumenischen Seitenblick”, *Theologische Quartalschrift* 184/3 (2004): 185-201, especially p. 199: „there can be no forgiveness for the perpetrators in the divine judgement that bypasses the victims [*an den Opfern vorbei*], in that the dignity of the victims would be violated a second time if the eschatological reconciliation were to take place without their participation”, and p. 200: “the ‘crazy optimism’ that the judgement could succeed, that the perpetrators could regret and ask their victims for forgiveness, but above all that the victims could forgive their tormentors despite what happened and therefore, even if the events are never forgotten, they do not have to define their identity for all eternity, finds support in the fact that it is the ‘judgement of one who was executed’ that will take place”. See also Ottmar Fuchs, *Das Jüngste Gericht. Hoffnung über den Tod hinaus* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2018), 44-47.

When the flame tenderly and lovingly assails the will, hardness is felt beside the tenderness, and dryness beside the love. The will does not feel the love and tenderness of the flame since, because of its contrary hardness and dryness, it is unprepared for this until the love and tenderness of God expel the dryness and hardness and reign within it. Accordingly, this flame was oppressive to the will, making it feel and suffer its own hardness and dryness. [...] This suffering resembles that of purgatory. Just as the spirits suffer purgation there so as to be able to see God through clear vision in the next life, souls in their own way suffer purgation here on earth so as to be able to be transformed in him through love in this life.³⁵

Above all, what we must proclaim is the beauty and goodness of eternal life, which is conformity to Jesus in his blind trust in God and his unreserved love for others and, in this very fact, participation in the Trinitarian life, in a word: divinisation. It is a question of making eternal life desirable for today, by living it and saying it. The perdition we must fear and fight against is above all that which deprives *today* of eternal life. The fact that this motivation seems insufficient to some probably stems from a lack of sense of the beauty and goodness of what is being offered to us now, and the tragedy of being deprived of it. The pastoral and missionary remedy for our earthly hells does not lie in the fear of hell and the images of God that sometimes so seriously distort it. It lies in a proclamation of eternal life which is not limited to the promise of happiness after death in the reunion with loved ones, the disappearance of all suffering and the joy of seeing God, but which is centred on participation in the Trinitarian life through conformation to Jesus and incorporation into the total Christ. There is nothing abstract or falsely mystical about this because it is nothing other than loving as Jesus loved, in the Spirit of childhood and spiritual poverty that united him to God.

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³⁵ John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, I, §23-24, in: John of the Cross, *Collected Works* (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1991), 650-651.

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The Hope of Salvation for All in the Light of Contemporary Universalism

SUMMARY

The arguments of contemporary universalists, who, like David B. Hart, follow Gregory of Nyssa and other Church Fathers in affirming that all human beings will be saved, are particularly powerful and open the possibility of reinterpreting the meaning and scope of traditional doctrine. They take into account the abundance and force of universalist verses in the New Testament, the difficulty of integrating damnation into the economy of salvation, the constitutive solidarity between all human beings, and the fact that if the final act leading to damnation is not carried out in all lucidity and freedom, its consequences are unjust, and if it is entirely lucid and free, it is impossible. The force of these arguments leads to a defence, not only, with Balthasar, of the possibility and the duty to hope for all, but of the extreme probability – and not the certainty – of the realisation of this hope. Finally, the pastoral stakes involved are assessed.

Keywords: universalism, *apokatastasis*, hope for all, hell, salvation