

Engaging with *666 And All That*

Dear Greg and John,

Thank you for taking the time to write *666 And All That*. I think it's an excellent book and particularly liked the focus on Christian hope. I wholeheartedly agree with 99% of what you have written but as the 1% seems *so* at odds with the rest, I feel compelled to write to you¹. I'd be very interested to hear what you think of the following engagement with your book (don't worry about the appendices unless they are of interest).

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¹ quotes from your book are referenced as "p" then the page number, to reduce repetition

Judgment Day And Eschatological Justice

[Jesus'] teaching overturned all that is false and opposed to God. But this is only a glimpse of his work of overturning evil and establishing justice. The real work is yet to come when ... evil is *destroyed*²... The absence of the 'sea' (Rev 21:1)... is probably an apocalyptic way of describing the end of evil³

Won't the sinners, contained in eternal conscious torment (ECT), still be *opposed* to Him with their thoughts and voices - isn't that allowing more evil, rather than destroying and ending it?

Judgment is about *putting things right*. It is about overthrowing what is wrong with the world [and bringing all things into conformity with that Jesus' teaching⁴] and establishing what is good [and Genesis 2:10-23 goes on to describe that "good" in terms of harmony in the social, spiritual and physical spheres of life⁵]. Judgment is about condemning and punishing wrong, but it is also about remedying those wrongs.⁶

How is ECT right and good? Where is the *remedying* in ECT? How are people in ECT in conformity with Jesus's teaching, aren't they still sinning?

In some ways it is a comfort to know that the agent of future judgment is none other than the One who gave his life so that we might be forgiven.⁷

I think this is of crucial importance; the Cross should inform our understanding of the purpose of the judgment. To put it another way, God is consistent (*God's judgment and compassion are two sides of the one coin*⁸) and so His motivation for going to the Cross is the same motivation for judging - it's because *his creation is so precious to him*.⁹ That in no way contradicts His desire for justice because His justice is completely satisfied on the Cross.

The Lord's threat of judgment... is a kind of pledge to oppressed humanity that the Creator hears their cries for justice and will one day bring his justice to bear on every act of oppression [God will right the wrongs of history¹⁰]. Nor is God's pledge of justice applicable

² p70

³ p175

⁴ p71

⁵ p162

⁶p107, similar to p89, p14 & p70

⁷ p89

⁸ p116

⁹ p82

¹⁰ p184

only to the oppressed amongst God's own people... texts make clear that the Creator hears the cries of the 'alien'¹¹

Can those in ECT really be satisfied with the justice they've received? E.g. won't the non-Christians gassed in the concentration camps be crying out more, right next to the people who gassed them? Your endnote 18¹² reinforces the idea that God's concern includes non-Christian poor - that He's so connected to them that caring-for/neglecting them is compared to caring-for/neglecting Him. Why wouldn't His compassion and connection continue into the next age? Where are all the verses saying God gives up?¹³ I can point to hundreds¹⁴ that say that His *steadfast/unfailing love* endures forever, my favourite being:

For *no one* is cast off by the Lord forever. Though He brings grief, He *will* show compassion, so great is His unfailing love. For He does not willingly bring affliction or grief to *anyone*.¹⁵

We *know* that our behaviour matters, and that injustice and evil ought to be corrected¹⁶... [Sin] is a corruption of our office as those made in the image of God, made to reflect the rule of God in service of him, the creation and each other.¹⁷

I share your desire for justice but think you don't go far enough because simply punishing¹⁸ someone doesn't correct, it just leaves things in a broken and fallen state (George MacDonald articulates this very well¹⁹). Because I think ECT isn't the best biblical interpretation²⁰, I think all evil will be *corrected* through the Spirit completely undoing the *corruption*, giving people new hearts so that they can repent, come to faith in Christ, and serve *Him, the creation and each other*.

Finally, the theme of final judgment should move us to praise God for his justice, a very common biblical theme.²¹

I agree and think the following passage is a helpful example to explore because I think it shows *all the peoples*²² joyfully praising God are the same ones receiving His judgment:

¹¹ p116, supported by p74, p94, p184 & endnote 18 on p197

¹² p197

¹³ Heb 9:27 simply says all men die & face judgment, it doesn't say what happens later on...

¹⁴ Logos Bible Software says God's *steadfast love* occurs 199 times in the ESV OT alone!

¹⁵ Lamentations 3:31-33 (NIV)

¹⁶ p82

¹⁷ p109

¹⁸ just ask anyone who has working in our prison systems.

¹⁹ I recommend *Justice* sermon: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/macdonald/unspoken3.viii.html>

²⁰ like annihilationism, I see some *prima facie* support but when shown the biblical metanarrative basis for Evangelical Universalism (see *Appendix 1*), along with reasonable alternative interpretations for opposing passages, I was compelled to adjust my theology.

²¹ p94

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, *your saving power among all nations*. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Let the peoples praise you, O God; *let all the peoples praise you!* The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; let all the ends of the earth fear [revere] him!²³

Metaphors of judgment must not be taken literally, but they most certainly must be taken seriously.²⁴ ... To dismiss, ignore or soften the idea of God's final judgment is to depart from a key element of what Jesus taught²⁵

I take the warnings of God's judgment very seriously:

The critic may reply that a hell that has an exit is not as severe as one with none. Indeed, so perhaps the critic feels that nothing short of eternal conscious torment *with no hope for redemption* amounts to taking hell seriously... But... this is absurd. To suppose that one does not take divine punishment seriously unless one construes it in the most *maximally* awful way possible is just playing games. That is akin to suggesting that the only people who take the dangers of drug-taking seriously are those who suppose that every person who has ever taken drugs will die an inevitable, painful, and lingering death with no hope of deliverance. It is perfectly possible to take hell very seriously without believing that it is as bad as it could possibly be. Clearly one need not construe the consequences of sin or drug taking in a *maximally* bad way to take them seriously. For the universalist, hell is something to be avoided at all costs, just as Jesus warned us. To object by saying, "Well, if hell is not forever, it doesn't really matter if someone has a spell there," is like suggesting that because you will recover from the long and painful illness, it isn't worth taking precautions to avoid it. It is like telling an Old Testament prophet not to bother warning Israel to repent, because God will always restore them after the judgment anyway. The prophet would reply that it is better to avoid the judgment in this first place, and the prophet is surely correct.²⁶

Resurrection And New Creation

All of life will be revived and *empowered by the breath or spirit* of the eternal God²⁷ ... Just as within history God breathed new life into the lifeless body of Christ, so at the end of history he will once again breathe his life-giving Spirit into the whole cosmos²⁸... Paul... means that

²² i.e. *everyone*, when you consider similar passages like Ps 9:7-8, 33:8, 46:10, 1Kings 8:43

²³ Psalm 67 (ESV)

²⁴ p87

²⁵ p88

²⁶ MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist*, 166

the resurrection body will be one fully endowed with God's life-giving Spirit... a body ignited by the Spirit of God²⁹... This new Creation is where our bodily resurrection entails affirming a new creation. We can't have one without the other.³⁰

All - the whole cosmos? If the Spirit is in resurrected non-believers in ECT, doesn't that mean He's working in them?

Isaiah foresees a time when all of the ideals of Eden will be restored [even surpassed³¹]: when people will be in harmony with each other, when humankind will celebrate its God, when creation will prosper unhindered and when evil will be completely undone³²

Revelation describes there being a *Lake of Fire* just outside the gates of the *new Jerusalem*³³. If it's not temporary, don't we end up with something not as good as *Eden* because there will be the ugly sight (smell and sound?) of loved ones in ECT?

²⁷ p17

²⁸ p179

²⁹ p143

³⁰ p176

³¹ p166

³² p168 and supported by Endnote 45, p201

³³ Rev 14:10. 21:8 & 22:15 probably same people. *Gehenna* is near the existing Jerusalem.

Genesis 1 and 2 are also about *eschatology*, about the ways things *will be* when the Creator fulfills his purposes. The contrast between the Ideal of Genesis 1 and 2 and the Fall of Genesis 3 is as much a contrast between God's ultimate intentions for the world and our current experience of it. Put it another way, the picture of Genesis 1 and 2 is, in part, intended to provide *hope* for those [everyone] living in the shadow of Genesis 3: hope that the Creator [powerful, ordered and devoted to his creation³⁴] will restore the Ideal³⁵... How could the God who lovingly fashioned creation and called it all "very good" (Gen 1:31) possibly intend ultimately to discard physicality and replace it with a ghostly netherworld!³⁶... The [Bible is] clear that God the Creator will not abandon his creation [and *his creatures*³⁷]; he will [be *faithful* and *restore*³⁸, *revive*³⁹,] renew it, redeem it, resurrect it. Despite the frailties and frustrations we experience this side of Genesis 3, God will make good on the Ideal of Genesis 1 and 2.⁴⁰... Ultimately, the kingdom is the only true and lasting reality.⁴¹

Indeed, although if some of his creation are abandoned to ECT as their *lasting reality* it would be far worse for them than *a ghostly netherworld!* It also doesn't seem to fit with all the "r" words, nor live up to the *very good Ideal* given in Genesis 1 and 2.

Isaiah tells us that this 'toil' with creation will one day be resolved – not *removed... resolved* by granting blessing where there was curse.⁴²... And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse.⁴³

The Bible describes the curse as universal, so isn't a promise of *blessing where there was curse* also universal? I think the Bible shows things will be *resolved* through the *healing of the nations* – which, in Revelation, are those who aren't yet Christians. The way I understand it is:

What will emerge from the fiery judgment of God, says Peter, is not the ruin of creation [including everyone], but its renewal... Paul ... thought of the new creation as *this world* [including everyone] redeemed... condemned and renewed⁴⁴

³⁴ p164

³⁵ p163

³⁶ p164

³⁷ p165

³⁸ p183

³⁹ p164

⁴⁰ p178, very similar statement on p138, p164 & p175

⁴¹ p180

⁴² p167

⁴³ Endnote 46, p201 from your quote of Revelation 22:1-3

⁴⁴ p177

Peace In The New Era

There is a new era dawning with the arrival of the Messiah, an era marked by 'decency' and, above all, by 'love' [all judgment ceases.⁴⁵]⁴⁶ ... When Christ comes to overthrow injustice, *all* that will remain will be peace, righteousness and love... There will come a day when peace [*justice, love, purity*⁴⁷] will fill the earth so we anticipate that time by fostering harmony in our relationships.⁴⁸

I don't think you're talking about "peace" through suppression⁴⁹ (you're associating it with *righteousness, love, purity* and *harmony in our relationships*), but doesn't that leave no room for ECT (*judgment of indecency, impurity* and *hate*) in the *new era*?

"There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has *passed away*." ... the future of the earth itself is one of renewal and rightness... by the power of the Creator who can make all things new... The earth is his, along with everything in it.⁵⁰

If *the future of the earth (along with everything in it) is renewal and rightness* then doesn't that mean there's no ECT? If ECT occurs, won't there be *crying or pain* in both the new Creation (over lost loved ones) and in ECT?

Literature

Keeping our eyes open to the kind of biblical literature ... should help us to steer clear of falsely literal readings of symbolic passages, or of trying to pin down imagery for clues about dates and times... when, in fact, it was designed instead simply to stimulate our religious imaginations⁵¹ ... The genre of eschatology discussion in the Bible is frequently apocalyptic... We therefore cannot insist on precision about the details⁵²

I agree that most of the texts used to support ECT are in either apocalyptic literature or parables⁵³ - both known for their hyperbole. However, I think eschatology discussion must start with passages that are *didactic, plain prose, straight to the point*⁵⁴, like⁵⁵:

⁴⁵ p171

⁴⁶ p74, similar to p185

⁴⁷ p179

⁴⁸ p74, similar to p179

⁴⁹ p108 quotes Is 11:4-6 wolf will live with the lamb, etc.

⁵⁰ p158-160, very similar to p170

⁵¹ p35, similar to p101

⁵² p49, repeated on p106

⁵³ "images of what the future will be *like*", p28

⁵⁴ p28

[God] through Christ to reconcile to Himself *all* things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross⁵⁶... For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life... as one trespass led to condemnation for *all* men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for *all* men⁵⁷

Gehenna

Even the biblical word 'hell' at its core is a metaphor. The word *gehenna*, translated 'hell' in the New Testament, was originally the name of a valley south of Jerusalem.⁵⁸

Scholars suggest much of the misunderstandings stem from Jerome's Latin translation, which lost some of the nuances of the Greek⁵⁹. I think the KJV (based on it) makes similar oversimplifications (e.g. *Hades*, *Gehenna*, *Tartarus* all being translated *hell*; *aionios* & *aidios* being translated *eternal*). Thankfully modern translations are starting to transliterate *Gehenna* and *Hades*, so hopefully they'll soon do the same with *aionios*.

In short, these biblical images of judgment, whether of fire, darkness, the weeping and gnashing of teeth or *Gehenna* itself, are all metaphors and are not to be taken literally. In fact, it doesn't make any sense to put them all together and say, "There, that's what hell will be like".⁶⁰

I agree but then you seem to contradict that when you say:

"We can know a few things for sure (e.g. it is real, eternal and avoidable)"⁶¹

I agree it's real but why insist it's *literally eternal* rather than just a *rhetorical flourish from Jesus*⁶² meaning "lasting a significant time" (Jonah's *aionios* time in the fish⁶³ is clearly meant to be taken that way, as it turned out to be only 3 days!), especially when the original words associated with punishment probably don't even mean *eternal*⁶⁴? Surely, as you say yourself, *a parable is not a good place from which to extract such a significant theological*

⁵⁵ many more at <http://evangelicaluniversalist.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=1130>

⁵⁶ Colossians 1:20 (ESV)

⁵⁷ Romans 5:10, 18 (ESV)

⁵⁸ p84

⁵⁹ Ramelli & Konstan, *Terms for Eternity*

⁶⁰ p85, similar statements on p83 & p172

⁶¹ p85

⁶² p157

⁶³ Jonah 2:6 (LXX)

⁶⁴ see *Appendix 2*

*idea!*⁶⁵ Also in Calvinism, how is it *avoidable* for the reprobate whose heart cannot choose God, unless God intervenes??

To make matters more difficult for us, most of our images of judgement aren't drawn from the Bible (as they should be). Instead, images and descriptions from movies, art and stories have filled our imaginations since childhood, while throughout history, particular dominating stories or artworks of judgment have often distorted Christian understanding.⁶⁶ ... Dante's impact over hundreds of years on our images of heaven and hell is huge.⁶⁷

I think we should also take a closer look at the common Greek and Pagan imagery was when the NT was written, to make sure we haven't imported anything from them either.

God's Want For Many Being Met

"He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance... our Lord's patience means salvation"... God has a plan that is being fulfilled in his good timing, and it involves the salvation of many, because God does not want anyone to perish.⁶⁸

The Calvinist doctrine of Irresistible Grace says all those that God wants will come to Him. So if God does not want *anyone* to perish, they won't! If you hold a Compatibilistic position (as I do), God still gets everything He wants, He just does so without morally violating anyone's free will. Even if you hold an Open Theistic position, I've been told it's still reasonable to be quite confident that God still saves everyone eventually.

⁶⁵ p148

⁶⁶ p86

⁶⁷ p173

⁶⁸ p76, repeated on p98

Those Who Never Heard The Gospel

It is probably fair to say that most believers at some stage in their lives have wondered long and hard about the fate of the untold billions who have never heard the gospel of Jesus... Are they all, every one of them lost for eternity? This is an acute question, born of compassion and deeply felt by many, including the authors of this book... a question that the Bible doesn't even raise.⁶⁹

I think the Bible does *raise* it⁷⁰, primarily because we are commanded to try to love others even more than ourselves, and that implies we should care about their fates even more than we care about our own. I think the Spirit has given many people the *compassion* you feel because it's something overflowing from His eternal, intertrinitarian nature⁷¹. Given I think God has even more compassion for them than we do and is sovereign, I think He will save them.

After this quote you go on to make it clear you reject Pluralism (as do I), but discuss whether any sort of Inclusivism is acceptable. While I agree with your conclusions, I'd even be ok with complete Exclusivism⁷² - that the only way is unearned, deliberate, conscious faith (with the essential⁷³ help of the Spirit) in Christ's gracious, atoning death & resurrection, because I don't see any deadline on when or where that occurs (although I think the sooner the better!)⁷⁴

We want to be given another chance, an opportunity to go back and fix up our mistakes or do something we left undone.⁷⁵

We both agree someone's salvation in this age isn't based on us fixing *our* mistakes but upon what Christ has done. In just the same way, I see someone's salvation in the next age as only being based on what Christ has done.

We are pointing out that it is his perfect right as the Lord and Saviour of creation to "have mercy on whom he wants to have mercy" (Rom 9:18) and that, should he choose to do so, it would not contradict any principle revealed to us in Scripture.⁷⁶

I agree but would suggest that Paul goes even further:

⁶⁹ p119

⁷⁰ Jews & others on p126-127. Also in 1 Peter 3:19-20, 4:6, Hebrews & Revelation

⁷¹ notice wrath, unlike love, hasn't always existed & therefore *isn't essential* to God's nature

⁷² although like you, I'd still say God's completely free to surprise us

⁷³ I agree with your comment about this on p122

⁷⁴ I think C.S. Lewis also suggests this in *The Great Divorce*, p98-103 & chapter 9

⁷⁵ p59

⁷⁶ p128

For God has consigned *all* to disobedience, that He may have mercy on *all*.⁷⁷

God Deserves The Wholehearted Praise Of Everyone

the central obligation of men and women is a simple, two-part directive: love your Maker and love your neighbour... wholehearted devotion to our Creator and selfless care for our fellow creature... the universal call of the Creator.⁷⁸

I think there's a strong theme throughout the Bible suggesting God deserves⁷⁹ the wholehearted praise of everyone⁸⁰, indeed everything was created for that purpose⁸¹. Some argue that the praise will be simply acknowledging that God's "the boss" (as demons do), without actually loving Him. However, I think that the non-universalist, Henri Blocher, rightly argues that, "It cannot mean mere outward, hypocritical and forced agreement"⁸². I'd suggest that the Bible means even more than that:

And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men, therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people⁸³... He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Make a *joyful* noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into *joyous song* and sing praises!⁸⁴... Turn to me and be *saved*, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear *allegiance*.'⁸⁵... You shall [future tense] love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.⁸⁶

⁷⁷ Romans 11:32 (ESV) - like 1Cor 15:22, the *alls* are paralleled implying equivalence

⁷⁸ p121

⁷⁹ p110

⁸⁰ e.g. Ps 69:34; 86:9; 145:9-10,14-16, 21; 150:6;

⁸¹ p109

⁸² Blocher, *Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil*, p303

⁸³ Isaiah 29:13-14 (ESV). Quoted by Jesus in Mark 7:6

⁸⁴ Psalm 98:3-4 (ESV)

⁸⁵ Isaiah 45:22-23 (ESV)

⁸⁶ Matt 22:37 (ESV), also quoted on p121

The Importance Of Grace

this theme of the triumph of grace is repeated... In Revelation 22:17 we are invited to drink of the grace of God: “The Spirit and the bride [that is, the church] say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.”

Who are the Spirit and church inviting in? Surely, the only ones left are the non-Christians, the nations, after the day of Judgment?

And just in case we missed the point, the same pledge of grace reappears in... the closing line of the entire Bible... Revelation 22:21: “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen” ... an assurance of God’s grace in Christ: the theme above all themes.⁸⁷

Interestingly the ESV translates it, “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with *all*. Amen.”⁸⁸

God’s capacity for grace far exceeds our capacity for faith, hope and love.⁸⁹... triumphs over our failures⁹⁰... The free gift of mercy through Jesus Christ surpasses our capacity for faithfulness, covers a multitude of our failings and guarantees us everything God has promised. That is why the Bible’s final word is ‘grace’.⁹¹

I would suggest God’s grace is so amazing it even *exceeds* the *failure* to have faith in this life, by eventually granting faith in Jesus (by the Spirit’s help) to all in the next.

Conclusion

I really don’t think you leave enough room for ECT because you paint such an awesome picture of what justice, peace, grace are and what the New Creation will ultimately be like. I certainly don’t think you should tone down the latter but question the former, given there’s an entirely biblical, orthodox⁹², conservative alternative that has been embraced by Christians throughout Church History⁹³, including Sydney Anglicans⁹⁴ today! I don’t expect

⁸⁷ p192-193

⁸⁸ Revelations 22:21 (ESV)

⁸⁹ p190

⁹⁰ p192

⁹¹ p194

⁹² In *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis* Ramelli argues that Origen, Gregory Nyssen, Diodore, Rufinus, initially even Augustine, and others supported apokatastasis in order to *defend orthodoxy*: Origen against Gnosticism, Gregory against neo-Arianism, Diodore, Rufinus and Augustine against Manichaeism, etc.

⁹³ MacDonald, *All Shall Be Well*

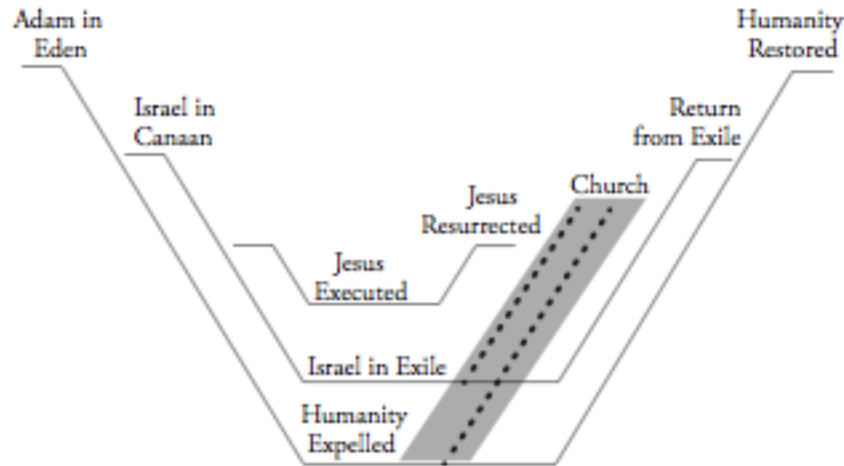
⁹⁴ most aren’t public about it yet but European Anglicans, including ministers, are. Gould, *Journal of Anglican Studies*, explains why it’s a legitimate conservative Anglican position

my letter will instantly change your minds, however I do pray that it's at least given you something to think about and hopefully look into further⁹⁵. Obviously I'm very keen to hear what your responses are but I understand that you are both busy people so that might not be possible.

Thank you for your time and may God bless you both!
Alex Smith

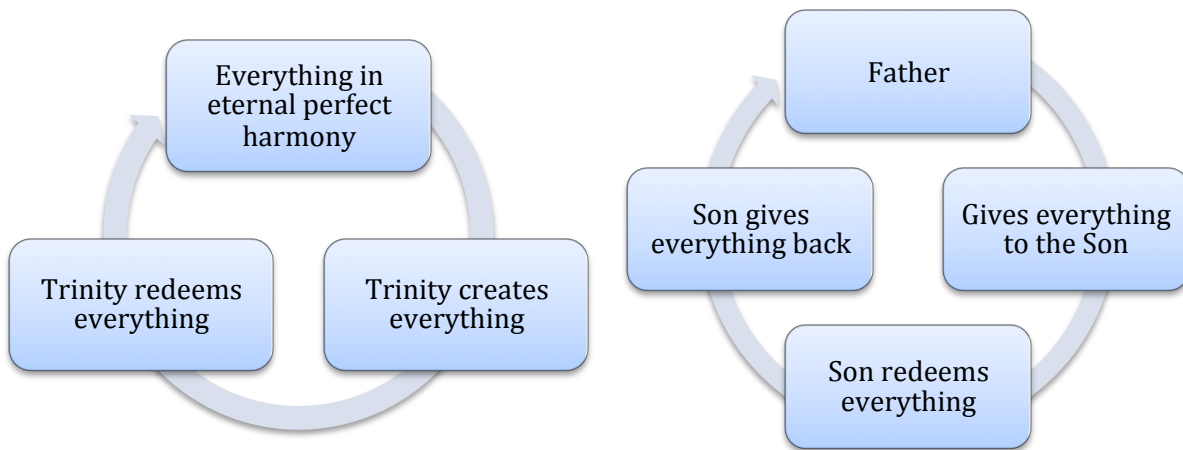
⁹⁵ I highly recommend *The Evangelical Universalist* (There should be a good *Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students* review of it coming out soon)

Appendix 1: Does The Biblical Metanarrative Suggest Universalism?



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It's been suggested it goes even further, that personal, eternal perfect harmony is foundational to all existence, so when the Trinity creates, that must eventually be one of the outcomes (left):



It can also be put another way (right), that given the Son is given everything and everything is created perfect, the Son must give everything back in perfect condition. These ideas come from verses like:

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and *for* him⁹⁷... For from him and through him and *to* him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen⁹⁸... When all things are subjected to Him [in the same way the Son is], then the Son

⁹⁶ MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist*, Diagram 4 (summary of half the book), 105

Himself will also be subjected to Him who put all things in subjection under Him, that God may be *all* in *all* [being the utmost/everything to everyone/everything].⁹⁹

Appendix 2: What About The Words Translated Eternal?

Ramelli noted that in these passages the adjective usually translated as “eternal” is invariably *aiōnios*, a term that may sometimes mean eternal but also bears many other meanings, whereas to indicate eternal life Scripture also employs *aidios*, which always means “eternal” in the strict sense. She also noticed, while studying those Fathers who supported the doctrine of *apocatastasis*, for example Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Didymus, Evagrius, and many others, that this terminological distinction seemed to be consistently preserved: *aidios* refers exclusively to future life and bliss, never to future punishment, fire, and the like. Thus, whereas life and bliss are described as properly eternal, death and punishment are *aiōnia*, that is, pertaining to the next *aion*, but not necessarily strictly eternal.¹⁰⁰

The ambiguity of *aionios* can even be seen in the popular *English Standard Version*, which is known for its consistency and literalness. For example:

the mystery that was kept secret for *long* [*aionios*] ages¹⁰¹... in hope of *eternal* [*aionios*] life... promised before *the ages began* [*aionios*]¹⁰²... in the *ancient* [*aionios*] roads¹⁰³

Furthermore *Logos Bible Software* (the largest & most used Bible software in the world), allows you to look up Greek words online, and there it says *aionios* should be translated *lasting for an age*¹⁰⁴ (even J. I. Packer admits it should be *belonging to the age to come*¹⁰⁵).

Appendix 3: What About The Rich Man And Lazarus?

After quoting Luke 16:19-31 you state that:

⁹⁷ Colossians 1:16 (ESV)

⁹⁸ Romans 11:36 (ESV)

⁹⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:28 (ESV)

¹⁰⁰ Ramelli & Konstan, *Terms for Eternity*, vii

¹⁰¹ Romans 16:25 (ESV)

¹⁰² Titus 1:2 (ESV)

¹⁰³ Jeremiah 18:15 (ESV). Translated *ancient* a few times, also see Ps 77:5 (ESV) 76:6 (LXX)

¹⁰⁴ [http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?la=greek&l=AI\]W%252FNION](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?la=greek&l=AI]W%252FNION)

¹⁰⁵ Packer, *The Problem of Eternal Punishment*, Crux XXVI.3, September 1990, 23

The obvious punch-line of the parable is that once you are dead *there is no crossing over*¹⁰⁶ from one side to the other.¹⁰⁷

Why? Surely

The parable is more about Jesus and his mission to be the Israel that the Pharisees had failed to be, rather than a discourse on the afterlife.¹⁰⁸

I think the punch-line is the prophetic last verse, which shows that not only have they misunderstood, they would continue too, even when Jesus is resurrected:

He said to them, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone rises from the dead."

But what does the parable tell us specifically about the afterlife? Probably not much... Taking the parable literally would, as a concrete account of life after death, would lead to all sorts of absurdities...¹⁰⁹

If the parable isn't about the afterlife (and that's reinforced by the evidence it's probably a "subversion" of one the Pharisees would've known e.g. *there's an Egyptian parallel, seven Jewish ones, and one from Lucian (Greco-Roman)*¹¹⁰) why would it tell us such a significant thing as *no crossing over*?

Appendix 4: Am I Advocating Medieval Purgatory?

Purgatory posits a place or time in between death and judgment during which one's sins can be 'paid off' or purged by acts of penitence and self-punishment. This idea is associated mainly with medieval Catholicism, but continues to this day and has been a significant part of some Christian understandings of eschatology.¹¹¹

Purgatory isn't just a medieval Catholic idea, Gregory of Nyssa held something similar long before them, and according to Wikipedia¹¹², modern Catholics, Jews, Orthodox, Anglicans,

¹⁰⁶ Gregory of Nyssa says that's because Jesus hadn't yet bridged it with the Cross (see Crawford's *Bridging the Gap*, The Asbury Journal 65/2:55-67. 2010)

¹⁰⁷ p147

¹⁰⁸ Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, according to <http://theologicalscribbles.blogspot.com/2011/05/puzzling-over-lazarus.html>

¹⁰⁹ p148

¹¹⁰ <http://theologicalscribbles.blogspot.com/2011/05/puzzling-over-lazarus.html>. See also Bauckhman, *The Fate of the Dead*, chapter 4

¹¹¹ p59

¹¹² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purgatory>

Lutherans, Methodists, and other Protestants (like Jerry Walls) still do too. Importantly, there's a huge difference between paying for one's sin yourself (i.e. earning salvation) and having it purged out of you by God. James Gould helpfully clarifies¹¹³:

It might seem that belief in purgatory contradicts Anglican teaching. Point 22 in the Thirty Nine Articles says, 'The Romish Doctrine concerning Purgatory... is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture.' While the Reformers had good reason to reject the scandals involving indulgences, pardons, relics and invocations to the saints, it is possible – as Newman argued – to believe in purgatory without accepting 'the Romish doctrine'... since the satisfaction and sanctification views are clearly different.

In the satisfaction theory the purpose of purgatory is to remove guilt by paying for sins which are not repented of before death. The problem with this view is that, according to Scripture, Christ alone makes complete and final satisfaction for sin...

In the sanctification theory that I have defended the purpose of purgatory is not to pay for sin, but is to complete the process of transformation which is necessary for eternal fellowship with God. As Justin Barnard puts it, 'on the satisfaction model, what gets purged through the purgatorial process is the penalty for sin ... By contrast, what gets purged in the sanctification model is the disposition to sin.'

Many Anglicans have abandoned the Reformers' assumption that death in and of itself perfectly sanctifies a person's character. While some avoided the term 'purgatory', Ussher, Newman, Pusey, Maurice, Claude Moss, C.S. Lewis and the Commission on Doctrine all embrace the idea that those who die in a state of grace and favor with God but who are not free of sin and ready for complete union with God need a period of growth in their ability to love.

He goes on to explain why gradual sanctification in 'purgatory' makes much more sense theologically than being made instantly perfect. Anyway, the whole article is really worth reading, particularly if you're an Anglican.

I think this also relates to your discussion of Christians experiencing 'reverberations' - "escaping through the flames."¹¹⁴

The experience will not be lasting – how could it in a perfect new creation! – but it will be serious.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Gould, *Journal of Anglican Studies*, 198

¹¹⁴ p185-187

¹¹⁵ p187

Appendix 5: Christians Delighting In Non-Christians Suffering?

How many people have been put off Christianity by hearing sermons that appeared to delight in the condemnation of the non-Christians? Frankly we have both winced more than once as we listened to some fresh-faced preacher speak of God's punishment of the ungodly the way we might speak of Australia's 5-0 white-wash of the English in the 2007 Ashes series.¹¹⁶

I share this concern, especially after I read a fairly recent *Reformed Theological Seminary* thesis¹¹⁷ that suggests it's always been part of Calvinism (e.g. Jonathan Edwards) and indeed should still be?! It's also very odd that in the new Creation in order to imitate God we will need to un-love & un-forgive people when we discover He doesn't love or forgive them.

Appendix 5: Is ECT Really Proportional Justice?

God will judge the world on the basis of human behaviour, in other words, 'according to deeds'. ... God's judgment is not one-size-fits-all¹¹⁸

I agree, however I think ECT wouldn't be proportional because maths tells us that infinity times anything is infinity. To use Luke 12:47-48 language, everyone would end up receiving an infinite number of blows regardless of how many blows they received each day.

Appendix 6: Does God Really Care?

Since we know that God will bring justice for all when he appears as our Judge, we should now be striving to be like him, to act justly, to care for the people that our Judge cares for, to make sure we are loving our neighbour as he commands.¹¹⁹

I've been told you're both Calvinists so I struggle to see why you think the Judge really cares for those He chose not to save? If He doesn't really care for everyone but you try to, then aren't you striving to do something He doesn't do? But if you said God always has, and always will, loved everyone deeply and effectively (not just in words, or rain, but in saving), then when we try to love everyone, we are actually striving to be just like Him. Also if the

¹¹⁶ p87

¹¹⁷ http://www.rts.edu/Site/Virtual/Resources/Student_Theses/Johnson-Seeing_Hell.pdf

¹¹⁸ p90-92

¹¹⁹ p20

right response to justice is to be loving, doesn't that mean they are interrelated; that justice is loving, and being loving is just?

This act of judgment weighs heavily on God, because his creation is so precious to him.¹²⁰

It would weigh far less if there were a positive outcome to the judgment (I believe that's well within God's power to achieve).

Appendix 7: Why Bother Discussing This Topic?

Alex, do you think you might be getting a little over-eager, if not one-track-minded, on this topic??¹²¹

Possibly 😊 however when I concluded that ECT was a misunderstanding of the Bible, I felt compelled to air that because:

1. There are many, at least in my circles, who promote ECT as central to the Gospel, whereas studies¹²² have shown that ECT is in the top 10 reasons¹²³ people reject it.
2. I've found many people find the discussion worthwhile, sometimes even life-changing¹²⁴.
3. I've found EU gives greater joy and hope for the future so practically it helps us to better encourage those who have lost non-Christian loved ones.
4. Believing God persistently and deeply loves, forgives and is reconciled to everyone, encourages us to try to imitate that unbounded, sacrificial love, and not fall into an "us vs. them" mentality. When we pray for strength to do this, we are more optimistic God will help because we believe it's in His will for everyone.
5. You say *Eschatology and ethics are intertwined*¹²⁵ so the former must be important.
6. By making a public stand, it has allowed me to encourage Christians, who have been rejected/hurt by other Christians over this topic¹²⁶, not to give up on Christianity.
7. Last but not least, I think universal restoration is more hallowing to God's name.

¹²⁰ p82

¹²¹ John, <https://www.facebook.com/john.dickson.9406417/posts/10151931750239447>

¹²² *Australian Communities Report 2012* by Olive Tree & McCrindle Research

¹²³ I do try to address the other reasons but given my limited time and energy unfortunately I can't study all of them well enough to be able to publicly engage with them.

¹²⁴ for what it's worth, I now read, pray and serve more

¹²⁵ p184

¹²⁶ I run an online EU discussion forum and have heard hundreds of accounts of people being completely rejected by churches, friends, family and even spouses because of EU!

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