



The Christian Universalist

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“Be willing to admit you don’t have a lot of the answers”

“These days, I know that nobody has ‘arrived’ at ultimate truth, because our truth is a consistently deepening journey - an unveiling process during our entire lives - not a destination.

“It’s process that requires living by faith (discovery) not sight (doctrines). To be on the right path you have to be willing to admit you don’t have a lot of the answers, but you are willing to follow the Spirit in a living, progressing, dancing, dynamic relationship.

“To do this I believe it is necessary to leave behind doctrines, dogmas, orthodoxy, institutions, and the traditions of men, which all stagnate and ultimately put faith in man.”

~ **Julie Ferwerda** from her new book *Raising Hell: Christianity’s most controversial doctrine put under fire*.

“Love is the golden thread which runs through all philosophies and religions. All religions reflect the same belief of why we are here.”

- **The Voice From Inner Space**
 by **Marilyn Lindstrom**

“This is My commandment, That you love one another as I have loved you!”
 - **John 15:12**



A walkway over quiet waters at sunset

“... come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!” - **John 4: 13, 14 NRSV**

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The Christian Universalist

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

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

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

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Word of mouth

... with Pat Moauro, Editor

Universalists need to shun “shunning”

*“He drew a circle that shut me out –
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in!”*

- Edwin Markham

When I first read this quatrain “Outwitted” by **Edwin Markham** many years ago, it resonated with me at an intensely deep, personal level. I saw it again recently while reading and editing an article by **Eric Stetson** for this issue of *The Christian Universalist*, starting on page 5. It still resonates with me.

It also likely resonates with anyone who, as Markham writes, has been “shut ... out” and become “a thing to flout.” Examples include anyone who has felt the sting of racial discrimination, bigotry (including gay bashing); and the thoughtless self-righteousness of religious people who blithely “excommunicate”, “disfellowship”, or “shun” former associates simply because the latter disagree with religious teachings.

It’s understandable, perhaps, to be excommunicated or shunned by a religious organization because of serious moral turpitude or criminal activity. Of course, the organization wants to distance itself from such individuals, because of the scandal or serious nature of the offence.

But even in such cases, one wonders WWJD? Yes, indeed, what *would* Jesus do? Based on what the Bible accounts say, I don’t recall ever reading about Jesus “excommunicating” or “shunning” anyone. Instead, he continued to associate with the lowly, the despised and the downtrodden; prostitutes, tax collectors, Samaritans, and others looked down upon and rejected in society during his day.

Shunning is highly questionable (actually, cruel and reprehensible) when a church or organization uses this type of rejection primarily as a political tool, threat or scare tactic to keep other members in line. The more autocratic and controlling



Pat Moauro

the church organization, the more readily and frequently it uses shunning as a way to “protect” its members from being “misled” by “heretics and rebels” and punish dissidents who just happen to have a different view of particular religious doctrines, teachings and practices.

That’s why I love **Edwin Markham’s** four little lines. They’re pure genius and the essence of Christian love. The one who rejects and shuns his spiritual brother or sister “drew a circle that shut me out – Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. But Love and I had the wit to win: We drew a circle that took him in!”

As Universalists – especially Christian Universalists – are we fully aware of the implications of what we claim to believe? Universalism encompasses all people, not just select ones who happen to agree with us. Admittedly, it’s a challenge to stay open to a wide variety of beliefs and interpretations, even within the varied universalist body. However, if we believe that God’s love is so great that *all* – not just some – *all* mankind will eventually be saved how will we continue to view and treat others?

The big question for us as Universalists, or universalists, is: Do we have the wisdom and courage to display God-like love in the face of all opposition - and reject shunning of any kind?

God loves you with an Everlasting Love.cu

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From the Coordinator

... with Rich Koster, Coordinator

Universal salvation = “full and final evolution of universe to ... perfection”

What can the idea of “universal salvation” possibly mean in the context of everything we are learning about the age and the size and the make-up of the universe? Surely by now even **Billy Graham** knows how foolish he was in 1953 to suggest that “the celestial city” must be “up north somewhere”, near the North Pole. (*Peace with God: the Secret of Happiness*, 1953.)

What he and we have learned since then is that all the circling taking place in the far-flung heavens is a small thing compared to the vast onrush of it all toward some as yet indiscernible location way out near the far edge of the expanding universe.

Consider this. It takes the earth just about 365 days to circle the sun, or about one degree each day. But it takes the sun, with the earth and all the rest of our solar system, about 225 million years to complete its orbit around the Milky Way galaxy!

Our galaxy, meanwhile, is itself traveling at a speed of about 1.3 million miles per hour toward “something” that evidently has an awful lot of material “stuff” already. There are some astronomers who call it “The Great Attractor.”

The idea of Universal Salvation was born of the conviction that the Creator of the universe is in the process of making everything new again, and that this means a new and glorious life for all human beings ever born on the earth. (Romans 8:22-23; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Colossians 1:20.)

But where do we put the emphasis? Is the whole creation being made new for the sake of a handful of organisms on a teeny rock orbiting a little star in the Milky Way? Or is the destiny of those organisms simply one side-effect of a total evolution of the universe toward harmony and perfection?

We have to say at least one thing about all the scientists and preachers who keep pushing the idea of “special



Rich Koster



Black hole taken by the Hubble Space Telescope.

creation,” “intelligent design”, and a brief 10,000 years or so as the age of the universe. Once again they are putting us at the center of it all, as though God did, in fact, create this vast expansive cosmos just for our own benefit.

That, it seems to me, is really the key to shaping a universalist faith for the future. In all our thinking and debating, we need as much as possible to get out of this self-deifying man-centered idea that puts us at the center of everything.

We would all do well to read the wonderful works of **Pierre Teilhard de Chardin**. Even that long ago, in the 1930s, this marvelous Jesuit paleontologist declared that it is absurd any more to think that the earth is the only inhabitable planet in the universe, and we are the only living organisms that have risen to the top

of the chart.

Universalism, then, is by its own inherent logic a highly monistic portrait of the nature and destiny of the universe, and we with it. It is all one piece, and every religious and philosophical dualism is a false picture of reality.

The traditional Christian premise is that when we die our bodies remain here as part of the matter that is the “stuff” the universe is made up of, while our souls “go to” another place called “heaven”.

But when we try to locate “heaven” somewhere “beyond” the universe, not only do we run out of any words that make sense, but we also remove ourselves from this universe that itself is moving toward what Teilhard calls the Omega Point when everything there becomes the “divine milieu”, i.e., a universe that has been fully and completely redeemed.

Any other portrait of the future that separates the destiny of human beings from the destiny of the cosmos is therefore a false portrait. Universal salvation can mean nothing less than the full and final evolution of the universe to a condition of material and spiritual perfection.

If the universe is not destined to become whole and perfect, then neither are we. And the “blessed assurance” of faith can only be true if the evolution of the universe gives evidence that we are all indeed going in the same direction. Think about this the next time you lie down in the grass on the top of a hill away from town and look up at The Universe.

*Editor’s note: this article has been adapted from an editorial in **The Universalist Herald**, a quarterly publication of The Universalist Herald, Inc., Seven Springs, North Carolina.*

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Letters to the Editor

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following two letters were addressed to **Rich Koster**, Coordinator of the **CUA**, in response to an article he wrote for the July **Christian Universalist**. The article, *On Doing What Comes Naturally*, was adapted from an editorial **Rich** wrote in the Spring issue of *The Universalist Herald Magazine*, which he edits.

Article called "very dangerous and blaspheming"

My name is Lubanga Lubanga from East London, South Africa. I believe in the ultimate salvation of all mankind, but through one and only way which is by the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation comes by the Blood of Jesus only, and there is no other way. This means that ultimately "every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord". This will not be a forced confession as some believe, but a wilful one as people's eyes are opened to see the Love of who God is.

Having said this, God is a holy God and does not tolerate sin, and this is the bottom line. This is where some of the Universalists are coming short. Most believe that God will turn a blind eye to sin; NO! NO!! NO!!! This is where I differ with you after reading your article, "On doing what comes naturally".

The Author of the Bible is not Paul, Peter, Luke or any of these writers, but God Himself. God just used the hands of men to write. The Bible itself claims to be the "Inspired Word of God". What Paul wrote about in the first chapter of Romans still stands today. Your mistake my brother is to think that God hates Gays or Lesbians; He does not, but He hates what they are doing; that is homosexuality: this is sin my brother, and sin will remain sin.

To be a homosexual is not natural, but demonic. Homosexuals can, and have been delivered from this demonic oppression. I have personally witnessed this, and those that have been delivered have testified about their freedom after deliverance.

Your article, Rich, is very dangerous and blaspheming. It is not the will of Papa God for people to live a homosexual lifestyle; this is a lie from the devil. There is no where in the Bible where God allows same sex relationships; in fact, He calls this abomination. Go and read Leviticus. How can you endorse what God calls abomination? My brother you need to change your mind on this; otherwise you will be accountable for this kind of writing.

When I finish writing my book titled, "Plan of God for the Ages" I will send you a copy. God created all mankind and will save all, as Paul clearly writes in 1Cor. 15:22, but each and every human being will have to be cleansed by the Blood of Jesus from all what Papa God calls sin, and this includes homosexuality. I love you brother, but error is error.

Kind Regards,

Lubanga Lubanga

Do pedophilia and bestiality come naturally?

Rich Koster believes that homosexual acts are not immoral because those committing them are doing "what comes naturally."

How about pedophilia and bestiality, Rich. Do these actions become moral because those doing them do "what comes naturally?"

How about the psychopath that enjoyed inducing fear in a kidnapped, eight-year-old Jewish boy in New York and then murdering and dismembering the child. Should this be accepted because the person did "what comes naturally?"

William (Bill) Bryant

Cross, resurrection considered 'together'

This is **Laurent Trouvé's** response to a question about Jesus and the cross posed to readers of this newsletter. **Laurent Trouvé** lives in Pau in the southwest of France.

For me, there is a problem considering the death of Christ alone without also considering the resurrection. I've always perceived that the two events need to be considered together. The cross takes on new meaning and a new sense through resurrection.

Christ steadfastly proclaimed his message up to death. Knowing the opposition and the threats he had to face, he did not seek to escape the consequences of his predicament. Nor did he compromise or change it in such a way that he could manage to have his life saved.

Jesus' death proves the truth of his teachings, wrote Nietzsche. So, in Christ, there was no accommodation with what was untrue, and for this principled stand he paid with his life.

From a human point of view, it has been said many times that Christ's death (i.e. the innocent sent to his death by the crowd) was a manifestation of evil or sin, however you wish to describe it. The sacrificial theology of the cross poses a problem for me. I discovered this during a discussion with a Muslim friend of mine. Inspired by my former Catholic religious education, I was arguing that Christ's death was a sacrifice, the condition for our salvation.

My friend asked me: "Is there something strong enough that can impeach God to delete your sins?" His question planted a seed and followed me for years. It took root and helped me to realize that God's love could be stronger than human weakness. As unjust as it was, Christ's death could not be a deliberate will of God, for the reign of justice cannot be established on injustice.

I'd rather consider the crucifixion as a catharsis, the manifestation of human violence that can help to remove violence from the human heart. How? The shock it provoked in consciences would reveal what our souls need to get rid of ("the note worthy example", as a reader in the

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Globalization, Universalism, and the future of religion

The following article is an edited version of a sermon that **Eric Stetson**, co-founder of the **CUA**, preached at Universalist National Memorial Church in Washington D.C., on May 22, 2011. He also posted his complete sermon on his blog, www.ericstetson.com

By Eric Stetson

Throughout history, there has been an ongoing clash of vision and struggle of will between, on the one hand, those who have called people to look beyond the boundaries of tribe, nation, race, religion, and other divisions within humanity, seeking to unite human beings in ever larger and more diverse societies, political and spiritual, through the recognition of the essential oneness of human nature and potential to overcome the challenges presented by our differences; and on the other hand, those who have pointed to these very differences as evidence that the division of humankind is a fixed and insurmountable feature of the natural order of life in this world — perhaps even ordained by a Higher Power who wishes to separate the chosen from the common, or the saved from the condemned.

Broadly speaking, one of these views may be called Universalism, for it is concerned with the goal of unity in human universals; and the other — which has gone by various names in vari-

Cross, resurrection

... continued from page 3

May issue of *The Christian Universalist* wrote), and the wish to redirect our lives in the way Christ taught us.

It's here that resurrection assumes major importance. "If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain," Paul wrote at 1Cor. 15:14. God raised Christ from death as the evidence that evil should not have the last word in human history, and as the sign that He would not resign to allow harm to be so strong that we could not overcome it.

God bless you,
Laurent Trouvé



Eric Stetson

ous contexts, such as tribalism, nationalism, ethnocentrism, segregationism, creedalism or theocracy — may be fairly called Separatism, because it seeks to separate people into groups of different perceived value, either in competition against each other for supremacy or locked into some sort of caste system, or to enforce or reinforce already existing separations and stratifications.

For most of human history, Universalism has been a visionary impulse, and one that was impossible to realize fully. It was the dream of the most advanced and enlightened thinkers in all civilizations — and mocked by many as a utopian fantasy, never to be manifested in reality.

Nevertheless, Universalism has made a steady march toward victory in both the spiritual and political realms. From the first preachers of monotheism who subsumed the pantheon of local and national deities into the triumphant idea of only one divine Creator and Ruler of all, whose synagogues, churches, and mosques have spread to nearly every corner of the earth; to the ambitious kings, presidents, diplomats, and philanthropists who created ever larger empires of territory and resources, culminating in the establishment of global institutions such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and others too numerous to mention; — our gods have gotten bigger and the horizons of our organized life have expanded, ultimately to embrace the whole world.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Earth Charter, and the Earth Constitution are documents written in recent decades which seek to provide philosophical underpinnings and practical frameworks for benevolent and just relationships between individuals, communities, governments, and the planet itself in an all-embracing world civilization.

Seeking to make a fresh contribution to the advancing Universalist ethos of our time, several colleagues and I founded the **Center for Human Conscience** earlier this year. The first project sponsored by this new organization will be to create a Common Canon of the most significant knowledge, cultural creations, and historical figures of all the world.

As the Charter of the **Center for Human Conscience** observes, "familiarity with the greatest achievements in every field and the best contributions of every culture to humanity is an antidote to prejudice and shortsightedness and the foundation of broad-mindedness, holistic thinking, mutual understanding and peace."

The Common Canon will be edited by a carefully selected group of several dozen scholars and leaders of thought from a wide variety of backgrounds and fields. It will be made available as a wiki on the internet, subject to periodic revision, and will be used to create interdisciplinary social studies curricula for all ages, which can be used in educational institutions throughout the world — fostering a universal high culture without nationalistic, ethnocentric, materialistic, creedalistic, sectarian, or other types of biases, and accessible to all.

The last century's revolutionary advances in transportation (such as the airplane and space travel) and communication (the telegraph, telephone, radio, television, and especially the internet) have made it possible, for the first time in human history, for people to have a

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truly global consciousness and way of life. The whole world and its people are interconnected as never before — and increasingly aware of it.

At its root, Universalism is the recognition of “the inherent worth and dignity of every person,” as expressed so clearly and succinctly today in the **Unitarian Universalist Association’s** statement of principles. Through the centuries, this basic idea has been expressed in different ways, its implications explored and expounded by numerous thinkers. Some Universalist visionaries have emphasized the redeeming love of God for all individuals, while others have seen the broader implications of a God of love, justice, and mercy, for the ideal order of human society.

In poetry that has echoed down the ages, the ancient Jewish prophet Isaiah dreamed of a world where peace will reign:

“They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.” - (Isaiah 2:4)

From the dawn of Christianity, the **Christian Universalists** have believed that no soul is forever lost, no matter their beliefs, mistakes, or affiliations, but all are redeemed according to the plan of a benevolent Deity — a God who, like a loving Father, may correct us but will never disown any of His children.

In the third century, before Universalism was banned by the Church as a heresy, **Saint Clement of Alexandria** wrote that “all things are ordered both universally and in particular by the Lord of the universe with a view to the salvation of the universe. But needful corrections, by the goodness of the great, overseeing judge... compel even those who have become more callous to repent.”

Nearly two thousand years ago, Saint Paul envisioned an inclusive faith uniting the world and breaking down the barriers and inequalities between different types of people, writing in his Epistle

to the Galatians that *“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:28).*

A century and a half ago, the Baha’i faith arose as a progressive offshoot of Islam and expressed the Universalist belief that God is one, Man is one, and all the religions are one.



Graphic designed by Michael Just of Santa Barbara, CA.

Universalism is the spiritual underpinning of a global mindset, lifestyle, and social order. It is the humane face of globalization — and without it, globalization tends to produce many injustices and much needless suffering as old divisions crumble away. In a rapidly globalizing world — a world in which secular materialism is on the rise, as people reject the limitations imposed by old religions and value systems — the tempering influence of a universal, humanistic spiritual and social vision is essential, lest otherwise human beings may be treated as mere commodities to be exploited or consumed in a brutally efficient world economy.

It is therefore providential, and indeed natural and to be expected, that Universalism should become a major spiritual movement of the 21st century — and with the growing ranks of the “spiritual but not religious,” the “new age,” and the decline of belief in hell and rise of

ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism, it is evident that Universalism’s rapid ascent or revival is already occurring.

The triumph of Universalism, however, presents a major challenge for religion, which has traditionally been based on the Separatist mindset of dividing humanity into the chosen and the common, the saved and the damned, or the enlightened and those who abide in darkness.

If religion is no longer about getting people to accept creeds, perform rituals, and obey clergy in order to avoid being condemned by God, what is its purpose? Inspiring individuals to live a better life. Inspiring society to order its affairs according to a higher vision. And providing face-to-face communities in which people may help each other help themselves and their world.

Religious congregations such as churches should focus on these purposes in order to remain relevant and gain the participation of a new generation, in this nascent era of globalization.

Universalism is the religion that offers all the people of the world the cooling waters of reconciliation to put out the fires that so often consume our hearts with anger and distrust toward our fellow man. It is the faith that mocks no one’s God, rather enlarges Him.

It is the spiritual vision of unity in diversity, and the movement that ever seeks to draw a larger and more inclusive circle of fellowship, that the contributions and potential of no man or woman be wasted or scorned.

As **Edwin Markham** so eloquently put it in a poem called “*Outwitted*”:

“He drew a circle that shut me out — Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. But Love and I had the wit to win: We drew a circle that took him in!”

Love wins, and Universalism in the end shall outwit all the forces of Separatism.

Believers in eternal damnation sometimes use dishonest tactics

By David Spatz

Recently I had a conversation with a believer in eternal damnation who almost immediately brought up Hitler and Stalin. I wonder why they do this? It seems to be an effort to show how universal salvation is somehow unacceptable, or to show that everlasting punishment may be appropriate for some people.

The tactic seems to be to trap you into admitting that if everlasting punishment is acceptable for Hitler or Stalin, the door is open for anyone else. "Of course, eternal torture is not acceptable for anyone," the argument continues, "but we cannot let the focus remain on such people as Hitler. We say God will deal with him appropriately, and then move on."

Hitler argument a red herring

This is really a dishonest tactic for the believer in eternal torment to use, but it is intended to win an argument. These folks don't go around converting the Hitlers of the world to save them from this fate; rather, they believe ALL people who do not believe as they do are going to hell forever. The Hitler argument is a red herring, an effort to distract you from the real issue.

What believers in eternal hellfire really believe is that all the people Hitler and Stalin are responsible for murdering are all going to the same place, forever! They believe that people living on the same block as us, in the same neighborhood, are ALL destined for everlasting torture unless they believe certain things about Jesus in this lifetime.

Preachers sometimes put a spin on Romans 6:23, which reads in the NRSV translation: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Some preachers will say this means "spiritual" death, and that you "have to reach out and take the free gift," or you're not saved. But the plain meaning of the first half of this sentence is this:



David Spatz

we all die! Every one of us.

If Paul wanted to put "spiritual" in front of death, he certainly could have, but he didn't. Physical death is the destiny for all human beings. However, even if one wants to interpret this as "spiritual" death (and this may be correct), this does not mean that a spiritually dead person cannot then become a spiritually alive person by the transforming power of God! This also is not limited to this lifetime.

God can do as he pleases with his creation and the idea that any chance for spiritual growth, any chance for repentance, or any change is impossible after death is simply absurd. It is clearly shown to be otherwise in the Bible. 1 Peter 3 and 4 contain narrative accounts of Jesus' activities after death that should remove all doubt as to whether postmortem changes or repentance are possible.

Then we have the idea of a "free gift." This is true grace, my friends: a free gift. To illustrate this, Paul contrasts Adam and Christ at Romans 5:15: "But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many."

Here Paul uses "the many," in a clear parallel comparison to those ("the many") who died as a result of Adam's sin. This usage of "many" may be explained in that all people had yet to be

born and Paul was using the past tense. Additionally, "Adam," is used to create an argument here, but since the Hebrew can refer to humans in general, one may interpret this as the disobedience of human beings, in general.

Either way, the two groups refer to all people up to that point as "the many." Verse 18 is clearer and more all-encompassing with respect to time and so more clearly includes future events: "Therefore, just as one trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all."

In other words, the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life! For all people! Not just a few, but the many, multitudes, ALL! Almost invariably, the hell-believing preachers are forced to add to what the Bible teaches by saying "but you have to take the free gift ... you have to reach out and take it, and you can do that today, by coming forward and publicly accepting Christ as Savior," or something to that effect.

My friends, there are no conditions like that here. Christ said "It is finished!" He has defeated the powers of sin and death and there will be justification and life for ALL! The free gift is yours, mine, everybody's, because God is love and God is awesome!

Jesus' answer to the disciples' question in Mark 10:26: "who then can be saved?" was cryptic, but encouraging and unlimited in its scope when he answered: "...With God ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE." According to 1 Timothy 2:4 God wills all mankind to be saved. Almighty God, "Thy will be done!"

God bless,

David

David Spatz is a Christian Universalist minister, CUA Board member and blogger. He can be reached at daspatz@gmail.com.



roasted by reviewers of Julie Ferwerda book

The following are reviews of Julie Ferwerda's new book, *Raising Hell: Christianity's Most Controversial Doctrine Put Under Fire* (Kindle Edition). The hard copy print edition was released July 15. These reviews are from customers of Amazon, which is selling the book in both Kindle Edition and hard copy.

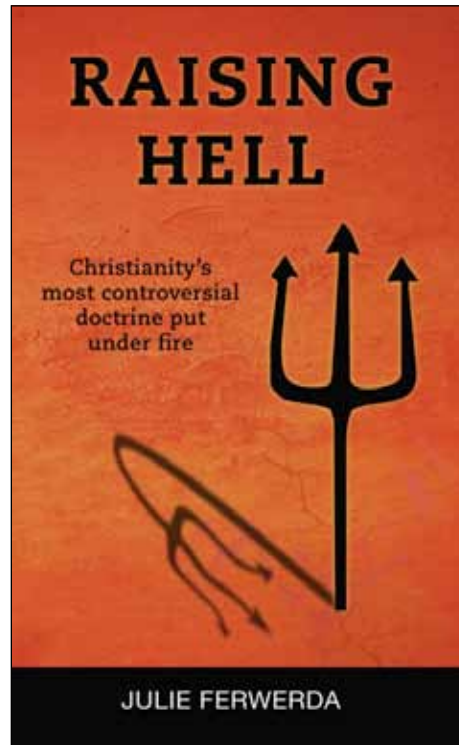
By Elizabeth Jones

It was almost eight years ago when I first came across Julie Ferwerda's book "The Perfect Fit." Since then I've eagerly awaited the releases of both "One Million Arrows" and now "Raising Hell." In each book, Julie's writing has meshed on an emotional and spiritual level with what I was walking through at the time. I say that to preface this review with the truth that it's not entirely unbiased. I'm a fan of Julie's writing and theological style.

No doubt, the doctrine of eternal torment is one that brings out strong emotions in both proponents as well as those who see (or are beginning to see) that there are probably glaring inconsistencies between what the church, as an institution, teaches today and what the Hebrew Scriptures and early leaders of the Jesus movement (I hesitate to call them Christian) experienced and shared. Even within the early, formalized Christian church (which was "Catholic" of course) there was no consensus on eternal torment...heck, study theology only briefly and you'll see there was pretty much consensus on nothing!

In that vein of discovery, I'd like to encourage people who are thinking about reading this book but may be nervous about "heretical" writings or what your pastor or even friend may say about the subject matter.

"*Raising Hell*" is an interesting, informative, and enlightening read that lays the groundwork for a great deal of questioning - something that I think should be encouraged rather than



discouraged as we seek the truth about God, life, love, and the future we ALL share. In my opinion, Part Two "Love Does Not Fail" is a great starting point if you're interested in seeing the heart of the idea of Christian Universalism or Universal Reconciliation.

My own heart was moved as I read Julie's stories about the connections between parental love and the love of our Creator. As I continue down my own path of discovery, I find these connections bring me closer to an understanding of life's purpose and the beautiful, awe-inspiring, absolutely mind-blowing love God has for all of us. Every one.

So, if you're thinking about this book and reading these reviews, I encourage you to take the leap. This is Good News for everybody

By Chris PhysLuca

It was truly a joy to read Mrs. Ferwerda's book, *Raising Hell: Christianity's Most Controversial Doctrine Put Under Fire!* The combination of anecdotes from Mrs. Ferwerda's life journey coupled with the Hebrew perspectives and translation analysis of verses from the Greek text of the New Testament is

riveting, inspiring, introspective, and at times humorous.

I found the historical allusions in the framework of early Church history refreshing and intriguing, indeed! Overall, the ability of the author to set the stage for questioning one's belief system as presented from an early age and perpetuated throughout adulthood by mainstream Christianity is indeed a very much appreciated approach that invites the reader to investigate for himself/herself so as to search out for truth.

The journey on which this author has embarked is one worth taking in one's own life by searching the Scriptures and historical records, for our God has given us a mind to use as well to discern all matters concerning His creation.

So, if you're looking for a book that challenges your views of the Bible, and has a set of data to support the view of universal salvation, as taught by the early Church, you are in for a treat, indeed!

By Emerald Gardevoir

If case you haven't heard, Julie Ferwerda, Christian author, bible teacher, and orphan advocate, has a great new book out! "*Raising Hell*" is a phenomenal, out-of-the-box read.

Her book deals with an important issue that has recently become a hot topic in the evangelical church: the traditional view of hell. The author's case may prove controversial (thus the name!) and hard to digest for many Christians, fed from birth the notion that only those who profess faith in Jesus Christ in this life will be "saved" from the eternal, fiery pit of hell.

However, the author's presentation is very persuasive and convincing in her belief that not only is this doctrine harmful, but it is the antithesis of God's plan for eternity. To say that some will be condemned to Hell for eternity is to suggest that a person's sin or willingness to reject God will ultimately prove more powerful than God's love, which Julie seems to refute easily with

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plenty of solid evidence. Therefore, the larger picture and overall 'feel' of this book becomes the extravagant love of God and how it changes everything and will be KEY in ushering in the Kingdom of God on earth. Julie's book is revolutionary and sure to one day be a classic.

Although there are many other books on this topic in the market today, I think I have found THE one to "come out of the closet" with my family, so to speak.

I trust Julie's message, through her book, as the way I will present this belief to my family, which will be quite a big step considering my background. You see, I was raised as a preacher's daughter in a typical evangelical, conservative theological environment where questioning wasn't encouraged.

My childhood was filled with lots of confusion. There was something unsettling that always stirred deep in my soul that told me that there just HAD to be more to all of this. I could not quite pinpoint the hows and whys at the time, but the "good news" of Christianity that I was taught was something that I didn't want to share and even found revolting at times.

It wasn't until well into adulthood that I came across and began studying the doctrine of God's unfailing love for All. The pieces started to fit together for me and I made my peace, no wait ... I fell in love with God.

Julie explores this idea more thoroughly and completely than any book I've read on the topic - she leaves almost no stone unturned. Her book offers an abundance of relevant scriptural analysis, some church history and early thought, plain ole common sense logic, and much, much more. If this sounds boring, tedious or only for the theologically trained, you're getting the wrong picture. Her book is fun, well-written, simple, and easy to read - every single chapter held my interest and its readability is excellent. Then, there is the passion she evokes! Julie's book is sprinkled with biographical vignettes from her own spiritual pilgrimages which

beautifully shows you her heart and the long journey that has brought her here. The personal flavor she injects makes the book "come alive" and pulls it out of religious, overly-theological mediocrity.

One section that makes this book stand out is the complete "know-how" that Julie passes on to her reader for their own personal studies. She, in essence, is saying, "Don't take MY word on it - see for yourself". And she starts you on the greatest adventure of your life. This book lets you discover for yourself. BUT, don't let that section intimidate you and make you feel that you'll have to do lots of homework or additional studies to be able to understand.

Even if you NEVER get a chance to read another book on this topic or study this further, the knowledge and insights of this book are plentiful to yield heart changing results.

If you've had your curiosity peaked from all of the "hoopla" surrounding **Rob Bell's** book, "**Love Wins**", the new book, "**Raising Hell**", by **Julie Ferwerda** is for you. I've read both and they are equally fantastic and highly recommended. Though these two books are quite different, the overall theme is the same: that love wins in the end, and not hell.

By Ken Eckerty
savior-of-all.com

"Raising Hell" is a must read for all those who have serious questions concerning the image of God as presented by the church in its "turn or burn" theology that has all but dominated Christian teaching since the days of St. Augustine. If you are not afraid to think "outside the box" and ask questions that will both challenge your faith and prepare you for the "best news" of your Christian life, then this book is for you.

Julie writes with both grace and conviction as she presents a historical and biblically-sound analysis of the doctrine of "hell" as taught by the church for the last 1500 years. As I read her

book, I was impressed by her ability to present a difficult subject in an easily understandable way without compromising the systematic approach necessary to tackle such a topic. This is a rare find in Christian writers. Julie clearly has the gift of teaching but delivers the material in a loving and graceful manner. I think of the apostle Paul when he says to "speak the truth in love" which mandate she has clearly followed in the writing of this book.

"**Raising hell**" is:

1. a book that has substance. This is a not a book of fluff. It is well referenced from both the perspective of church history and the holy scriptures. In addressing the question on whether the concept of "hell" is taught in the Bible, a basic understanding of both biblical Hebrew and Greek is necessary in order for us to begin to unlock the truth, and Julie does a superb job in giving us the tools necessary to aid our search. She presents her evidence clearly and systematically taking care to answer any objection the skeptic or cynic might have. Her discussion of Old Testament covenants and feasts are particularly enlightening in showing us the consistency of God's Word from Genesis to Revelation as it relates to "The Story" as she describes it. I was VERY pleased to see her tackle the widely accepted teaching of the "immortality of the soul" as it is one of the biggest reasons the church has been led to believe "the lie." Additionally, her research of church history is both accurate and clear in showing us that the concept of "eternal hell" was not always the predominant view of the church.

2. a book that is practical. This is not a lofty treatise meant only for the "intellectually gifted." Julie shows us how she arrived at her conclusions and reveals the methodologies and reasonings used in order that we may "prove all things" ourselves. Truth is meant to be shared and she equips the saints with all the tools nec-

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Universalism more than just universal salvation

By Logan Geen

Universalism, especially in its Christian form, has often been simplified down to the belief that there is no eternal hell, and that, eventually, every person is "saved". Yet, it has always seemed to me that Universalism is more, must be more, than simply the belief that everyone "goes to Heaven".

That idea isn't wrong of course ... it is arguably the core, the heart, of Universalism. But it likewise seems to me that Universalism is an entirely different worldview, an entirely different paradigm, even an entirely different approach to the very religion of Christianity. The Universalist path takes seriously the definition of Gospel as "Good News", while simultaneously approaching the quest for Universal Truth with an open mind

There are many Christian Universalists, including such dominant groups as **Tentmaker**, that consider themselves traditionally Christian in every way save for the salvation issue.

Strange as it may seem there are many conservative, fundamentalist Christians who could pass for **Jerry Falwell** in terms of their theology, yet still believe in universal reconciliation.

Within the confines of the Roman Catholic Church there are individuals who believe in universal reconciliation, and yet still believe in the supremacy of the Church and the authority of its teachings. Clearly universalism and orthodox Christianity are not mutually exclusive.

Liberal Universalism makes orthodox-Universalists "nervous"

What makes many of the orthodox-Universalist believers nervous is what they see in many of the more liberal corners of Universalism. These include churches obsessed with liberal politics and consumed by the social Gospel, New Age/New Thought churches that adopt quasi-spiritual practices and a touchy-feely "pop-mysticism" that is self-ish to the core.

Liberal religion clearly has its dangers, and there are plenty of examples in its ranks to make anyone shudder. I will



Logan Geen

note that my own perspective certainly comes from a more liberal approach to spirituality. At one time I considered myself a Unitarian and rejected outright doctrines such as the Trinity; today I accept whole-heartedly the orthodox creeds (though my views on the Atonement might still make some Christians nervous). Nonetheless, my faith in universal salvation has remained constant through my journey, showing that it transcends the distinction between liberal and orthodox Christianity.

Need to embrace common truths of all religions

Where I remain liberal, in a sense, is that at the end of the day I believe that a true Universalist religion must embrace the common truths of all religions. From Hinduism and Judaism we can learn of

a spiritual world view that exists sans eternal damnation; from Mahayana Buddhism we learn the example of the Bodhisattva who refuses Enlightenment until all sentient beings can accompany him; and from Islam we learn that Allah is so merciful even Satan expects to receive mercy on the Day of Judgment.

My heart leapt when I discovered the website of the **CUA**, and I read the seven principles of this great organization. At once I realized I was "home". The seven principles established a different vision of Christianity, a Christian Universalism that I found utterly compatible with the insights of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Sufism, and so forth.

This was a complete, comprehensive, alternative vision of religion, a real progressive Christianity that was far more fulfilling than the progressive Christianity that was more focused on tackling liberal social issues.

This, indeed, was a religion that I agreed with in virtually everything.

Logan Geen is a CUA Board member, serving as Chair of the Ordination Committee. He is also a first year law student at the University at Buffalo Law School; a member of Spiritus Christi; and a Christian Universalist blogger. He can be reached at lcgeen@yahoo.com.

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essary to share the Good News with others.

3. a book that has heart. Julie writes with humility in her admission that she does not have all the answers. She shares her own struggles with the subject from both a personal and parental perspective. As in her previous books, she is not afraid to admit her frailties and speaks from her own experiences. As a parent herself, she paints a beautiful picture of the heart of "the heavenly Parent" and we come away with a new and fresh view of God's love for all His children - both good and bad.

4. a book that gives life. This is by far the greatest gift she gives to

us for she presents the work of our Savior in a way that the modern church simply does not understand. Christ came to give us "life and that more abundantly" and "Raising Hell" does not disappoint in bringing us the "Good News" that Christ's life is not simply for a "select few."

In conclusion, I can heartily recommend "Raising Hell" as one of the best books I have read on the subject. Julie leaves no stone unturned in her search to find the truth! It is well-researched, convincing, and gracefully communicated. Be prepared to have your faith challenged, your paradigms shattered, and your heart filled with joy and wonderment at the vastness of God's great love!

'You can't be a true Christian without being a universalist'

By Stephen Davidson

It seems that there are many people these days who are accepting the principle of universalism. Most of them are Christians first and Universalists second. In other words, they were Christians *before* they accepted the belief in universal salvation.

Before they believed in a Christ who brought universal salvation, they believed in a Christ who *didn't*. And there are, of course, *still* many Christians who believe in a Christ who *did not* take all sin upon himself, but only some; who *did not* die for everyone, but only for some; who *did not* bring salvation for all, but only for some.

I, on the other hand, was a Universalist first and became a Christian afterward. For many, many years, I have been unable to believe in a just and loving God who would abandon any of His children to eternal damnation, whether that meant an eternity of punishment, of being separate from God, or even just of non-existence.

Nothing my son could *possibly* do would make me punish him forever. No action of his in this *finite* universe could possibly be worthy of *infinite* punishment. Could God be a worse father than I am? Could God love any of His children any less than I love mine?

So, whenever I would hear a Christian minister, pastor, or missionary speak of an eternity in hell, *they lost me*. I *knew* that God would not abandon any of His children to an eternity of suffering, so I *knew* that their news was *false*. For several decades, then, I was already a universalist, without being a Christian. I had already accepted an infinitely loving God but had not accepted Jesus Christ, because all those who tried to bring me to him told me about a Christ who only saved *some* people, who only died for *some* people, and who only took upon himself the sins of *some* people. And since I already believed in the 100 per-cent-God, I saw no

point in believing in the 2/1000ths-of-a-per-cent Christ!

That changed for me when I realized that they were *wrong about Christ*: He did not die to save *this* denomination but not *that* denomination, to redeem those who believed *this* dogma but not *that* dogma, to ransom those who had committed *these* sins but not *those* sins. What kind of a Christ would that be? Christ was not so small, so mediocre, so *useless* as they would have had me believe.

No, Jesus Christ is the Real Thing! Jesus of Nazareth was *the* Christ, the real deal, *the* guy: God, born as man! And when I realized that, in fact, Jesus Christ was the sin-offering of *all* the world, that He took *all* of the sins of the world unto Himself, that He died on the cross for *all* of mankind, and that He saved *all* of us from our sins, *then* I

became a Christian.

I am a Christian *Universalist* because I do not believe that you can be a true Christian *without being a universalist*. That would mean accepting a Christ who was not truly the *savior of the world*, but only a dim reflection of one.

I cannot be a non-universalist Christian, because I cannot believe in a partial Christ, a 2/1000ths-of-a-percent-Christ. Christ is either 100 per cent, or he's 0 per cent.

Because I have accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the true Christ, son of God and savior of the world, I *must* be a Universalist Christian. If I were not a *Universalist* Christian, then I would be accepting *someone else*.

Stephen Davidson is currently studying the **CUA** ordination course and hopes to be ordained as a **CUA** minister within two years.

Pastor's prayer prompts positive public reaction

It seems prayer still upsets some people. When **Reverend Joe Wright** was asked to open the new session of the Kansas Senate, everyone was expecting the usual generalities, but this is what they heard:

Heavenly Father,

We come before you today to ask your forgiveness and to seek your direction and guidance. We know Your Word says, 'Woe to those who call evil good'. But that is exactly what we have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and reversed our values. We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery. We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare. We have killed our unborn and called it choice. We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable. We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self esteem. We have abused power and called it politics. We have coveted our neighbour's possessions and called it ambition. We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of speech and expression. We have ridiculed the time honoured values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment. Search us, Oh God, and know our hearts today; cleanse us from every sin and set us free. Amen!

The response was immediate. A number of legislators walked out during the prayer in protest. In six weeks, Central Christian Church, where **Reverend Wright** is pastor, logged more than 5,000 phone calls. Only 47 of those calls responded negatively. The church is now receiving requests for copies of this prayer from India, Africa and Korea. Commentator **Paul Harvey** aired this prayer on his radio program, *The Rest of the Story*, and received a larger response to this program than any other he has ever aired. With the Lord's help, may this prayer sweep over our nation and wholeheartedly become our desire so that we again can be called "one Nation under God".

Wrong funeral, right place, right person

Consumed by my loss, I didn't notice the hardness of the pew where I sat. I was at the funeral of my dearest friend - my mother. She finally had lost her long battle with cancer. The hurt was so intense; I found it hard to breathe at times.

Always supportive, Mother clapped loudest at my school plays, held box of tissues while listening to my first heartbreak, comforted me at my father's death, encouraged me in college, and prayed for me my entire life. When mother's illness was diagnosed, my sister had a new baby and my brother had recently married his childhood sweetheart, so it fell on me, the 27-year-old middle female child without entanglements, to take care of her.

"What now, Lord?" I asked sitting in church. My life stretched out before me as an empty abyss.

My brother sat stoically with his face toward the cross while clutching his wife's hand. My sister sat slumped against her husband's shoulder, his arms around her as she cradled their child. All so deeply grieving, no one noticed I sat alone.

My place had been with our mother, preparing her meals, helping her walk, taking her to the doctor, seeing to her medication, reading the Bible together. Now she was with the Lord. My work was finished, and I was alone. I heard a door open and slam shut at the back of the church. Quick footsteps hurried along the carpeted floor.

An exasperated young man looked around briefly and then sat next to me. He folded his hands and placed them on his lap. His eyes were brimming with tears. He began to sniffle. "I'm late," he explained, though no explanation was necessary.

After several eulogies, he leaned over and commented, "Why do they keep calling Mary by the name of 'Margaret?'"

"Because, that was her name, Margaret. Never Mary, no one called her 'Mary,' I whispered. I wondered why this person couldn't have sat on the other side of the church. He interrupted my grieving with his

tears and fidgeting. Who was this stranger anyway?

"No, that isn't correct," he insisted, as several people glanced over at us whispering, "her name is Mary, Mary Peters."

"That isn't who this is."

"Isn't this the Lutheran church?"

"No, the Lutheran church is across the street."

"Oh."

"I believe you're at the wrong funeral, Sir."

The solemnness of the occasion mixed with the realization of the man's mistake bubbled up inside me and came out as laughter. I cupped my hands over my face, hoping it would be interpreted as sobs. The creaking pew gave me away. Sharp looks from other mourners only made the situation seem more hilarious. I peeked at the bewildered, misguided man seated beside me. He was laughing too, as he glanced around, deciding it was too late for an uneventful exit.

I imagined Mother laughing. At the final "Amen," we darted out a door and into the parking lot.

"I do believe we'll be the talk of the town," he smiled.

He said his name was Rick and since he had missed his aunt's funeral, asked me out for a cup of coffee.

That afternoon began a lifelong journey for me with this man who attended the wrong funeral, but was in the right place. A year after our meeting, we were married at a country church where he was the assistant pastor. This time we both arrived at the same church, right on time.

In my time of sorrow, God gave me laughter. In place of loneliness, God gave me love. This past June, we celebrated our twenty-second wedding anniversary. Whenever anyone asks us how we met, Rick tells them, "Her mother and my Aunt Mary introduced us, and it's truly a match made in heaven."

Remember, God doesn't make mistakes. He puts us where we are supposed to be.

Anonymous item found on the Internet.

Ranting "Christian" driver

The light turned yellow just in front of him. He did the right thing, stopping at the crosswalk, even though he could have beaten the red light by accelerating through the intersection.

The tailgating woman was furious and honked her horn, screaming in frustration, because she missed her chance to get through the intersection and, at the same time, dropping her cell phone and makeup. While she was still in mid-rant, she heard a tap on her window and looked up into the face of a very serious police officer.

The officer ordered her to exit her car with her hands up. He took her to the police station where she was searched, fingerprinted, photographed, and placed in a holding cell. After a couple of hours, a policeman approached the cell and opened the door. The tailgating woman was escorted back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with her personal effects.

He said, "I'm very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, flipping off the guy in front of you and cussing a blue streak at him. I noticed the **"What Would Jesus Do"** bumper sticker, the **"Choose Life"** licence plate holder, the **"Follow Me to Sunday School"** bumper sticker, and the chrome-plated **Christian fish emblem** on the trunk, so naturally I assumed you had stolen the car."