

book fulfills the advertisement in its subtitle (“A Defense of Theism”) very admirably. To conclude on a somewhat personal note, my first exposure to Lehe’s work was by coming across an article of his on the problem of divine hiddenness, “A Response to the Argument from the Reasonableness of Nonbelief” (*Faith and Philosophy* 21 [2004]: 159–174). I found—and continue to find—that outstanding article to be the best theistic response to this problem in print. I was therefore eager to read *God, Science, and Religious Diversity* upon learning of its recent publication, and the book did not disappoint.

*The Devil’s Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism*, Volumes 1 and 2, by Michael J. McClymond. Baker Academic, 2018. Pp. xxiv + 1325. \$90.00 (hardcover).

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Reviewing Michael McClymond’s 1300-page assault on historic approaches to universal salvation—also known as Universal Reconciliation or Universalism—finds much to acclaim and much to critique. We begin with a summary and commendations.

First, this two-volume tome (with twelve chapters and twelve appendices) is a vigorous achievement fueled by McClymond’s conviction that proposing universal reconciliation with God distracts from God’s future Judgment. For McClymond, Universalism sprouts from a knotty branch of Christianity, or is an invasive species driven by gnostic, esoteric, symbolic, allegorical, speculative, mystical, Kabbalistic, Cabalistic (differentiating Christian modifications of Jewish Kabbalah), and even occult agendas. He analyzes ancient Near Eastern, North African, and European Universalists whom he identifies with two central streams. He casts the first as descendants of ancient Gnosticism and the second as heirs of modern esotericism, hypothesizing parallel rivers in Judaism, Islam, Mormonism, and Zoroastrianism.

McClymond’s program is precise. *The Devil’s Redemption* is not dispassionate social history, ethnography, or a comprehensive record of popular or public opinion. Nor does McClymond document the full range of historic or famous Universalists not formally trained as philosophers or theologians such as Helen Keller, Florence Nightingale, Clara Barton, or Madeleine L’Engle (though he nods to a few of these in one footnote, n1129). Biblical exegesis is not a substantial feature with the exception of two appendices: “Words and Concepts for Time and Eternity” and “Barth



and Bultmann on Romans 5." Nor does McClymond engage heavily with Universalist biblical scholars such as William Barclay, though he interacts briefly with Robin Parry (1960–1964). McClymond's focus is on major philosophers and theologians whom he discerns as advancing Universalist concepts, and to a lesser degree religious leaders who spearheaded Universalist movements.

Chapter 1 explores twentieth and early twenty-first-century Universalism. Chapter 2 looks at some reinforcing pillars. Other reviewers might object to tackling these chronologically later motifs first, but in doing so McClymond sets the stage for the relevance of his work.

Chapters 3 and 4 cover Origen, Origen's disciples, and other ancient Universalists, integrating their censure most notably by Augustine and Aquinas. In contrast to Ilaria Ramelli (*The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* [Brill, 2013]), McClymond characterizes Origen and other Universalists as essentially influenced by Gnostic and Platonic philosophy, not as responsible heirs of the Bible. McClymond notes that thinkers in all three camps held the physical world in contempt and believed in pre-existent souls, for example, suggesting that humans imprisoned in material bodies along with fallen angels would inescapably return to their origin in God.

Chapter 5 investigates Jakob Bohme (1625–1724), a German visionary and "Teutonic philosopher," plus others whom McClymond casts as Bohme's esoteric kin. Bohme believed not in Universalism but a perpetually enduring hell. Still, McClymond argues that Bohme's esoteric philosophy motivates virtually all subsequent Universalism (563). Chapter 6 digresses on Anglo-American Universalists, arranging them loosely according to sectarian affiliation. Chapter 7 looks at German philosophers and theologians such as Kant, Muller, Schleiermacher, Hegel, Schelling, and Tillich. Chapter 8 investigates the Russians Solovyov, Berdyaev, Florovsky, and Bolgokov. Chapter 9 assails Barth's and Moltmann's Universalism, together with Kenotic-Relational theologies.

Chapter 10 turns to twentieth-century Roman Catholics who informed Universalism but were not always Universalists themselves: Teilhard de Chardin, Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Chapter 11 addresses contemporary philosophers Thomas Talbott, Robin Parry, several others, and Universalist clergy who identify with Charismatic, Evangelical, or Liberal Protestant backgrounds. Chapter 12 marshals and synthesizes all prior chapters to defend McClymond's conclusion that Universalism involves "The Eclipse of Grace."

McClymond is thoroughly hostile—if unevenly so—to each form of Universalism, though he remains predominantly civil. He does not pretend to be objectively disinterested, aloof, or neutral. His forthrightness from the start is part of what makes him interesting. His scorn for Universalism is evident, plain, out in the open. The ironically titled *The Devil's Redemption* seethes with righteous resolve while staying scholarly in its vocabulary.

A March 11, 2019, *Christianity Today* interview with philosopher Paul Copan expands on McClymond's inspirations for writing. One was a former Bible professor's insistence that the Apostle Paul was a Universalist. Another was a vivid dream that McClymond experienced about a dozen years prior. "I saw God's coming judgment arriving in the form of an overpowering storm; people in the path of the storm were pleasantly chit-chatting when they ought to have been seeking cover. The dream left a lasting impression. It suggested to me that we're unprepared—both inside and outside of the church—for the return of Christ." He sees Universalism as encouraging complacency about God's judgment.

Writers in the public square as well as academia ferociously attack writers like McClymond who emphasize God's wrath, accountability, and hell. These critics allege that such doomsayers are arrogant, backward, hateful, ignorant, intolerant, uneducated, or all of the above. It would be hard to make such charges stick to McClymond. He is obviously motivated by compassion and a fervent attempt to avert suffering. As a scholar-activist or philosophical evangelist, McClymond bids spiritual sleepers to awake. Indeed, my critique is balanced with gratitude for McClymond's immense investment of time and reflection.

Five of my quibbles relate to history. One is ancillary to *Christian Universalism* but has ramifications for the history of thought, interfaith dialogue, comparative philosophy, and theology. McClymond reduces Universalism in Islam to the Great Shayk Ibn Arabi and the Persian poet Rumi. Doing so puts McClymond in tension with, for example, Marco Demichelis (*Salvation and Hell in Classical Islamic Thought: Can Allah Save Us All?* [Bloomsbury Academic, 2018]), which documents Universalist themes drawn from the *Qur'an*, the *Sunnah* (reported teachings and behaviors of the Muslim Prophet Mohammad) and other esteemed classical Muslim sources. Universalism is a minority position in Islam as in Christianity, but restricting its prevalence to these two figures is reductive.

A second issue is McClymond's dismissal of the aforementioned Ilaria Ramelli. Ramelli copiously assembles Universalist rhetoric by early Christians, often grounded in the Bible, and in opposition to what are now labeled heresies of their day. McClymond charges Ramelli with selection bias. "Attentiveness to non-universalists and anti-universalists might have added more color to Ramelli's narrative" (1099, cf. 967). Quite so. Yet McClymond is vulnerable to the same criticism from the opposite direction in characterizing Universalism as principally, if not exclusively, rooted in orthodox Christianity's primal adversary, Gnosticism.

Third, McClymond aims to poison modern Universalist wells by tapping them into Bohme's murky esotericism. Although McClymond impressively connects Universalists such as Solovyov to Bohme, many other Universalists allude more in passing to Bohme or exhibit tenuous parallels. For those eager to explore alternatives, one rejoinder is Robin Parry and Ilaria Ramelli's appendix on the "McClymond Model" in *A Larger*

*Hope? Universal Salvation from The Reformation to the Nineteenth Century* (Cascade, 2019).

Fourth, in this reviewer's estimation, McClymond gives short shrift to Gregory of Nyssa. This giant of Christian Universalism and ancient Christianity, this bishop and saint merits deeper consideration than what McClymond supplies in less than fifteen pages.

Fifth, McClymond argues from two sources and against one that the Anglican Articles of Religion deleted the anti-universalist passage in Article 42 because "almost no one appeared to be advocating Universalism" (80, 402). This deletion could be taken as a consequence of more complex motivations, including those less antagonistic toward Universalism.

In terms of argument, McClymond records recurring false dichotomies. Some of these are expressed by Universalists, while McClymond endorses or quotes others favorably. Examples are contrasting hope for individuals against hope for humanity as a whole (e.g., 24, 1066), hell or purgatory as either punishment or rehabilitating (e.g., 372, 1048), humanity as sinful versus ignorant (91, 804), the idea that everyone is created God's child rather than becoming God's child through Jesus (93, 152), stating that God is not to be trusted if he does not carry through on threats (50, 78, 420, 914), challenging worship of God as unnamable versus infinitely nameable (341, 479), and separating questions about why evil persists with whether evil will pass away (438). McClymond juxtaposes "God who is" with Barth's "God who is for us" (28, 808), and sets assorted understandings of Christ's atonement against each other (521, 522, 841, 849, 908).

Each is easily harmonized from various perspectives. Hope that each individual will be saved by Jesus is by definition part of hope that Jesus will save all creatures. Hope for each is hope for all. Hell or Purgatory could conceptually involve both punishment and corrective discipline. Humanity suffers from both sin and ignorance. All people can be God's children in one sense and confirm this identity in Christ in another. Why evil exists at all and whether it will come to an end are interwoven inquiries. God can threaten punishment and incorporate mercy into wrath. People can refer to God with many names even if God is not comprehensively defined by any name. God who is, is no less God in being God who is for us. Multiple atonement theories may illumine each other like a kaleidoscope instead of thwarting each other.

Similar objections can be leveled at McClymond for yoking belief in pre-existent souls before bodies to the hope that all creatures return to God. "These teachings are based on shared metaphysical assumptions, they share a common logic and so they stand together or fall together" (338). Proof for this strict conclusion is unclear. A Universalist is not required to believe that people's souls exist before their bodies. McClymond argues more plausibly when qualifying the same conclusion when it is based "on Platonic premises," where pre-existent souls are assumed but in the long run set free from their physical bodies (336).

A third concern is McClymond's indicting Universalism with unsavory associations. Further analysis can explore if or to what degree McClymond succumbs to genetic fallacies, but constant throughout *The Devil's Redemption* are unflattering portrayals of Universalists and linked figures who displayed dubious character or quirky notions that McClymond's audience will receive as absurd, anachronistic, or worthy of ridicule or condemnation. These are at times understated or nuanced, but the implication is that Universalists are disreputable cranks whose feverish delusions must be treated as such. They are "permeated with the paranormal" (23), championed "polygamy . . . and held that God had separately created the black and white races" (91), consorted with deluded women and Hindu seers professed to be hundreds of years old (178, 216, 564, 904, 911), inspired political and Soviet Marxism (270, 700), and may have engaged in the kind of ritualistic sex practices made notorious by *The Da Vinci Code* (233). Moreover, Origen is described as implying that "destruction" really means "salvation" (262) and Russian Universalists are said to have shown affinities with freemasonry (426). Bohme was evidently anti-sexual and anti-female, while some of his followers idealized women and were hyper-sexual (451, 472, 475). Barth delivered anti-Jewish lectures in the Nazi era and equated Judas with John and Peter (775–779). Moltmann is apparently a tritheist, promoting a theology of three gods rather than a three-in-one Trinity (826).

To modify Patriarch Timothy's more diplomatic description of the Muslim prophet Mohammad, to be a Universalist for McClymond is to walk in the path of heresy and to track in distortions of God. *The Devil's Redemption* insinuates that to be a Universalist is to lack integrity, to court and stimulate spiritual malignancies, or all three.

This reviewer was struck by the resemblance of McClymond's arguments against Universalism to atheist quarrels with religion generally. The juicy morsels above recall anti-theist fulminations against religious beliefs by broadcasting the real and imagined flaws of their proponents. McClymond per Marx frames Universalism as "the opiate of the theologians" (1034). One might cheekily add, "And the sigh of the oppressed preacher."

McClymond adapts Freud to diagnose Universalism as wishful thinking (925, 928, 1012, 1064–1065). McClymond also plays Universalists against each other, just as Richard Dawkins does in pronouncing divergent religious claims as mutually refuting. Both state that the bewildering diversity results in incoherent, contradictory wreckage (605, 667, 696, 996, 1001, 1029).

These modes of argument are unconvincing. All theologies and philosophies are articulated by imperfect exemplars. It is not evident that Universalism as such leads to the purportedly bad behavior or eccentricities that some Universalists espouse. McClymond nevertheless highlights some troubling manifestations of Universalism, pitfalls that Universalists are wise to avoid.

Universalism like any religion may function as an opiate, but not necessarily. To adjust Freud, whether someone desires something to be true is independent from whether what is desired will come true. Countless disciplines and traditions have internal and external diversity without insisting that all are therefore erroneous. Disagreement does not mean that all disputing parties are wrong or that the persistence of disagreement somehow refutes every view involved.

Seven additional problems emerge from *The Devil's Redemption*. One is the accusation that Universalism violates God's freedom and power if "some basis in the very nature of God . . . guarantees the universalist outcome" (1002). A Universalist could reply that God freely acts in accord with God's nature and character, not against it. This is a staple understanding of omnipotence in philosophy of religion and is not confined to Universalism.

Second is that Universalism undermines evangelism; third is that it is a disincentive to growth and virtue (350, 358, 811, cf. 552). Indeed, it can be. So too with predestination, but not necessarily. Universalists and Calvinists both conceive of themselves as God's instruments or coworkers, harvesters in God's field accomplishing God's purposes. Progress in virtue or sanctification prepares people for eternity in both Calvinism and Universalism. Universalism, however, promises final success in all of these endeavors. With the exception of "Ultra Universalism" that denies anyone experiences hell, Universalists who believe in hell are rightly motivated to help people avoid it, even as they contend that hell itself eventually passes away.

Fourth is that McClymond chastises Universalists who withhold their Universalist hope from the masses due to the very hesitations outlined in the preceding paragraph (120, 411, 513, 561–562, 736, cf. 920–921). Such Universalists riposte that the immature need milk, not solid food (1 Corinthians 3:2). Jesus temporarily instructed his disciples "not to tell anyone he was the Christ" because it was not the right time (Matthew 16:20, Luke 9:18–21, cf. Mark 8:27–30). If Universalism were true, one angle could be that God reveals it to some but not to others according to God's good pleasure and timing. There could be a time to preach Universalism and a time to teach more fundamental matters. If God for a time "hides" things even from angels (1 Peter 1:12) why must God reveal all mysteries to all creatures at all times?

Fifth, McClymond reproaches Hans Urs von Balthasar for inconsistency in arguing that we are obligated to hope for all people's salvation while remaining tentative about whether God will finally save all people (919, 925–926). In reply, an honorable person may be "obligated" to yearn and work for the best for others without being certain that the best as she conceives it will actually occur. McClymond also faults von Balthasar for being disingenuous, declaring that von Balthasar does not merely "hope" for Universal salvation but asserts it as fact based on the premises of his argument. In defense of von Balthasar, it is feasible to compose the strongest



argument for what one hopes to be true without presuming that it will be realized precisely as expected. In a comparable way, it is credible to detect weaknesses in certain arguments against Universalism, as detailed in this review, without adhering to Universalism itself.

Sixth regards McClymond's verdict on Universalism as "The Eclipse of Grace." This springs largely from the above debate about whether God's nature or character in Universalism eliminates God's freedom to act graciously. We will not repeat it here. A second component is a split between nature and grace that is a staple in Reformed Theology. This also will not be debated here. Even so, Universalists could counter McClymond by saying that every good and perfect gift, including existence itself, is grace. They might then ask how God's grace and love are maximally manifested. Is it through perpetual suffering or annihilation of some creatures, or through their potential and ultimately actual repentance, transformation, and redemption?

Seventh is McClymond's treatment of "words and concepts for time and eternity," a clash between Universalists and Annihilationists on the one hand, and those who insist on a perpetually enduring hell on the other. Key to the Universalist position is how eternal and correlated words are best translated in the Bible, for example, whether "eternal" properly refers to endless duration or to the "age to come," or conveys other senses. McClymond's thesis is friendliest to the first option, but he concedes some ambiguities (1141–1156). The Universalist must further face St. Augustine's dual interpretation of Matthew 25. Augustine and Severus of Antioch, who McClymond cites approvingly, argue that if heaven is ongoing, so is hell (357–358, 1148, 1155). One response for the Universalist is that if hell in the age to come is utterly unlike heaven, it need not mirror heaven in this way or any other. Hell as opposed to heaven could end, while heaven will be endless. Ensuing discussion surrounding such terms will be intriguing.

Despite weaknesses and areas of contention, McClymond is a polymath with whom Universalism must reckon. Though he protests too much, *The Devil's Redemption* is an excellent adversarial scrutiny of historic and philosophical Universalism (415). It is a service to the guild, the Church, and by extension to scholars and philosophers of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Mormonism, and Zoroastrianism who will benefit from considering McClymond's analysis.