

experience of faith in its intellectual, affective and social aspects – is an urgent one.

VIVIAN BOLAND OP

**THAT ALL SHALL BE SAVED: HEAVEN, HELL, AND UNIVERSAL SALVATION**  
by David Bentley Hart, *Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2019,*  
pp. 222, £20.00, hbk

In this short book David Bentley Hart, ‘an Eastern Orthodox scholar of religion and a philosopher, writer, and cultural commentator’, argues stridently in favour of universal salvation. He concludes not merely that this is one possibility among others, or that Christians may legitimately hope for this outcome, but that as a matter of fact, even of necessity, ‘all shall be saved’. Despite a pronounced tendency in modern theology towards some version of universalism, Hart presents himself as fighting a battle, even a hopeless battle, against a majority who support ‘infernalisism’. While infernalists conceive of hell as unceasing, Hart endorses a hell that will eventually come to an end, where punishment is always restorative. While infernalism is presumably in the majority in Eastern Orthodoxy, Hart focuses his assault firmly on the West: his chief adversaries are Calvinists, evangelicals who have become conservative Catholics, and Thomists. Hart refuses the moderation of academic caution: though in the minority, he is simply right, and his opponents are not to be treated lightly.

The core of Hart’s book is found in four meditations, the first on the identity of God, the second on the nature of judgement, the third on personhood, and the fourth on freedom. These correspond to four arguments, each of which appears in various places throughout the book. The argument from freedom charges that no genuinely free intellectual creature can reject God. Hart rejects the modern view of freedom as negative liberty, and shares with his Thomist opponents an ‘intellectualist’, dynamic, patristic view of freedom, where the perfect freedom of heaven in the presence of divine goodness excludes the ability to sin. However, what is surely at issue is not perfect freedom, but sufficient freedom: do those on earth have sufficient freedom to reject God definitively? Hart seems to recognise the point but does not focus enough on what his opponents might consider as rendering freedom sufficient for such a choice. Without such an extended engagement, Hart cannot make the requisite critique of his opponents’ position. To that extent his assault is wide of the mark.

Another of Hart’s argument is that no person can be in heaven while any other person is permanently excluded from it. It is an argument that surely touches all of us insofar as we wonder how we can be truly happy

so long as someone we love is in hell eternally. Hart is especially disparaging of any response that watching the sufferings of those in hell can add to the happiness of the saints. However, if we suppose that God himself is our ultimate good and our beatitude, in the way that Hart's argument from freedom seems to suppose, then can the perfect knowledge of God's justice not exclude all sorrow from the souls of the saints? If God's perfect beatitude is undisturbed by the effect of his justice on those who have freely rejected him, and the saints are somehow enabled to see things from God's perspective, does this not point us to a solution? For Hart this will not do. For Hart not even God can have such a perspective, just because God is Good and completely in charge of his creation.

This brings us to Hart's argument from who God is. While he agrees with Brian Davies OP that God is not a moral agent among others, Hart contends that God is Moral Agency itself. Moreover, he is the First Cause of all. Rejecting the Thomist distinction between God's will as permitting and God's will as positively causing, Hart is nearer here to the Calvinists he so much despises. Although even sins are caused by God, Hart is not outraged that these and other evils such as their punishment are caused by Moral Agency itself, so long as they do not last for ever. However, it seems to many that, if Scripture supports even the possibility of an endless hell, then the latter must be compatible with the Goodness of God, and an endless punishment fitting for an offence against the infinite God. It is thus that the desire to be faithful to Scripture gives rise to the kind of theological speculation for which Hart has run out of respect. So Hart's view still has to negotiate Scripture: does Scripture teach that there is an end to hell or not? Hart reviews the Scriptural evidence for universalism and infernalism in his second meditation. What he does effectively is to treat universalism as clearly taught by the majority of relevant texts, although it seems to me that at least some of them can be interpreted as teaching a universal offer of salvation that only some might accept. The texts normally used to support an endless hell he treats as in a minority and more obscure, needing to be read in line with the universalist majority with the help of his own translation of *The New Testament* (2018). Much turns on Hart's translation of *aiōnios*, normally rendered 'eternal', as 'of the Age'. Where all this leaves Hart's own theology of an endless heaven, in terms of a Scriptural basis, I am not sure. My own impression overall is that he is more successful in exposing the range of possible translations of the infernalists' texts than in proving his own beyond reasonable doubt.

Many of Hart's adversaries doubtless appeal to Tradition as their guide for interpreting Scripture. It is thus a pity that Hart has little to say about Tradition. He himself follows, among others, St Gregory of Nyssa, drawn to them by his own personal instinct, but he knows that they are in the minority. Western theologians naturally have to deal with a wider range of authorities, which would have little significance for Hart, but it is

disappointing that he has little to say about the condemnation of Origen, his continuing influence on the minority, and how this is to be negotiated. It seems to me that more needed to be said, but Hart is convinced he has said all that needs to be said.

SIMON FRANCIS GAINE OP

**A CATECHISM FOR FAMILY LIFE. INSIGHTS FROM CATHOLIC TEACHING ON LOVE, MARRIAGE, SEX, AND PARENTING** edited by Sarah Bartel and John S. Grabowski, *Catholic University of America Press, Washington, 2018*, pp. xxii + 265, \$24.95, pbk

*A Catechism for Family Life. Insights from Catholic Teaching on Love, Marriage, Sex and Parenting* offers precisely what the title suggests: a summary of Church teaching on marriage, sexuality and family life, using the format of question and answer. However, as the title also indicates, this teaching comprises of rich insights that go beyond simple summary. Thus the answers take the form of excerpts from relevant church documents, primarily from the past one hundred years, including scripture, papal audiences, encyclicals, exhortations and homilies, targeted to specific questions. As the editors explain, the documents speak for themselves either by presenting explicit responses or by offering principles for ongoing discernment. On a few occasions the editors have provided comments for clarification. The editors are suitably qualified for this task. Sarah Bartel is a consultant for marriage and family life for the Archdiocese of Seattle; John Grabowski is a lecturer in moral theology and ethics, and Pope Francis invited him to the 2015 synod on the family as an expert.

Although the questions range from the practical, such as ‘should I go to my child’s wedding if both parties are Catholic but they are not marrying in church?’ to the more abstract ‘how is our family a domestic church?’, and to the more theoretical such as gender ideology, the excerpts from church teaching always offer theological reflection that allows the reader to take away more than a ready answer. In this way both the complexity of seemingly simple questions and the wisdom of the church become more apparent. Indeed the excerpts invite a response of prayerful discernment. The editors point out that questions on marriage and family life are often difficult and complex and they recommend that their book is used as part of a process of moral discernment founded on prayer.

The book is clear, well-organised, user-friendly, and offers further resources. Bringing together church teaching in an accessible and ordered