

UNIVERSALISM--THE PREVAILING DOCTRINE OF THE FIRST 500 YEARS OF CHRISTIANITY

The following is the final summary from the book by J.W. Hansen in 1899.

You can read the entire book at <http://www.tentmaker.org/books/Prevailing.html#17>

Summary of Conclusions.

A few of the many points established in the foregoing pages may here be named:

- (1) During the First Century the primitive Christians did not dwell on matters of eschatology, but devoted their attention to apologetics; they were chiefly anxious to establish the fact of Christ's advent, and of its blessings to the world. Possibly the question of destiny was an open one, till Paganism and Judaism introduced erroneous ideas, when the New Testament doctrine of the *apokatastasis* was asserted, and universal restoration became an accepted belief, as stated later by Clement and Origen, A.D. 180-230.
- (2) The Catacombs give us the views of the unlearned, as Clement and Origen state the doctrine of scholars and teachers. Not a syllable is found hinting at the horrors of Augustinianism, but the inscription on every monument harmonizes with the Universalism of the early fathers.
- (3) Clement declares that all punishment, however severe, is purificatory; that even the "torments of the damned" are curative. Origen explains even *Gehenna* as signifying limited and curative punishment, and both, as all the other ancient Universalists, declare that "everlasting" (*aionion*) punishment, is consonant with universal salvation. So that it is no proof that other primitive Christians who are less explicit as to the final result, taught endless punishment when they employ the same terms.
- (4) Like our Lord and his Apostles, the primitive Christians avoided the words with which the Pagans and Jews defined endless punishment *aidios* or *adialeipton timoria* (endless torment), a doctrine the latter believed, and knew how to describe; but they, the early Christians, called punishment, as did our Lord, *kolasis aionios*, discipline, chastisement, of indefinite, limited duration.
- (5) The early Christians taught that Christ preached the Gospel to the dead, and for that purpose descended into Hades. Many held that he released all who were in ward. This shows that repentance beyond the grave, perpetual probation, was then accepted, which precludes the modern error that the soul's destiny is decided at death.
- (6) Prayers for the dead were universal in the early church, which would be absurd, if their condition is unalterably fixed at the grave.
- (7) The idea that false threats were necessary to keep the common people in check, and that the truth might be held esoterically, prevailed among the earlier Christians, so that there can be no doubt that many who seem to teach endless punishment, really held the broader views, as we know the most did, and preached terrors pedagogically.
- (8) The first comparatively complete systematic statement of Christian doctrine ever given to the world was by Clement of Alexandria, A.D. 180, and universal salvation was one of the tenets.
- (9) The first complete presentation of Christianity as a system was by Origen (A.D. 220) and universal salvation was explicitly contained in it.
- (10) Universal salvation was the prevailing doctrine in Christendom as long as Greek, the language of the New Testament, was the language of Christendom.
- (11) Universalism was generally believed in the best centuries, the first three, when Christians were

most remarkable for simplicity, goodness and missionary zeal.

(12) Universalism was least known when Greek, the language of the New Testament was least known, and when Latin was the language of the Church in its darkest, most ignorant, and corrupt ages.

(13) Not a writer among those who describe the heresies of the first three hundred years intimates that Universalism was then a heresy, though it was believed by many, if not by a majority, and certainly by the greatest of the fathers.

(14) Not a single creed for five hundred years expresses any idea contrary to universal restoration, or in favor of endless punishment.

(15) With the exception of the arguments of Augustine (A.D. 420), there is not an argument known to have been framed against Universalism for at least four hundred years after Christ, by any of the ancient fathers.

(16) While the councils that assembled in various parts of Christendom, anathematized every kind of doctrine supposed to be heretical, no œcumenical council, for more than five hundred years, condemned Universalism, though it had been advocated in every century by the principal scholars and most revered saints.

(17) As late as A.D. 400, Jerome says "most people" (*plerique*). and Augustine "very many" (*quam plurimi*), believed in Universalism, notwithstanding that the tremendous influence of Augustine, and the mighty power of the semi-pagan secular arm were arrayed against it.

(18) The principal ancient Universalists were Christian born and reared, and were among the most scholarly and saintly of all the ancient saints.

(19) The most celebrated of the earlier advocates of endless punishment were heathen born, and led corrupt lives in their youth. Tertullian one of the first, and Augustine, the greatest of them, confess to having been among the vilest.

(20) The first advocates of endless punishment, Minucius Felix, Tertullian and Augustine, **were Latins**, ignorant of Greek, and less competent to interpret the meaning of Greek Scriptures than were the Greek scholars.

(21) The first advocates of Universalism, after the Apostles, were Greeks, in whose mother-tongue the New Testament was written. They found their Universalism in the Greek Bible. Who should be correct, they or the Latins?

(22) The Greek Fathers announced the great truth of universal restoration in an age of darkness, sin and corruption. There was nothing to suggest it to them in the world's literature or religion. It was wholly contrary to everything around them. Where else could they have found it, but where they say they did, in the Gospel?

(23) All ecclesiastical historians and the best Biblical critics and scholars agree to the prevalence of Universalism in the earlier centuries.

(24) From the days of Clement of Alexandria to those of Gregory of Nyssa and Theodore of Mopsuestia (A.D. 180-428), the great theologians and teachers, almost without exception, were Universalists. No equal number in the same centuries were comparable to them for learning and goodness.

(25) The first theological school in Christendom, that in Alexandria, taught Universalism for more than two hundred years.

(26) In all Christendom, from A.D. 170 to 430, there were six Christian schools. Of these four, the only

strictly theological schools, taught Universalism, and but one endless punishment.

(27) The three earliest Gnostic sects, the Basilidians, the Carpocratians and the Valentinians (A.D. 117-132) are condemned by Christian writers, and their heresies pointed out, but though they taught Universalism, that doctrine is never condemned by those who oppose them. Irenaeus condemned the errors of the Carpocratians, but does not reprehend their Universalism, though he ascribes the doctrine to them.

(28) The first defense of Christianity against Infidelity (Origen against Celsus) puts the defense on Universalistic grounds. Celsus charged the Christians' God with cruelty, because he punished with fire. Origen replied that God's fire is curative; that he is a "Consuming Fire," because he consumes sin and not the sinner.

(29) Origen, the chief representative of Universalism in the ancient centuries, was bitterly opposed and condemned for various heresies by ignorant and cruel fanatics. He was accused of opposing Episcopacy, believing in pre-existence, etc., but never was condemned for his Universalism. The very council that anathematized "Origenism" eulogized Gregory of Nyssa, who was explicitly a Universalist as was Origen. Lists of his errors are given by Methodius, Pamphilus and Eusebius, Marcellus, Eustathius and Jerome, but Universalism is not named by one of his opponents. Fancy a list of Ballou's errors and his Universalism omitted; Hippolytus (A.D. 320) names thirty-two known heresies, but Universalism is not mentioned as among them. Epiphanius, "the hammer of heretics," describes eighty heresies, but he does not mention universal salvation, though Gregory of Nyssa, an outspoken Universalist, was, at the time he wrote, the most conspicuous figure in Christendom.

(30) Justinian, a half-pagan emperor, who attempted to have Universalism officially condemned, lived in the most corrupt epoch of the Christian centuries. He closed the theological schools, and demanded the condemnation of Universalism by law; but the doctrine was so prevalent in the church that the council refused to obey his edict to suppress it. Lecky says the age of Justinian was "the worst form civilization has assumed."

(31) The first clear and definite statement of human destiny by any Christian writer after the days of the Apostles, includes universal restoration, and that doctrine was advocated by most of the greatest and best of the Christian Fathers for the first five hundred years of the Christian Era.

In one word, a careful study of the early history of Christian beliefs, will show that the doctrine of universal restoration was least prevalent in the darkest, and **prevailed most in the most enlightened, of the earliest centuries--that it was the prevailing doctrine in the Primitive Christian Church.**

Let me ADD THIS: Furthermore, the Old Testament Hebrews focus wasn't on the after life, it was on this life. Teachings of after life did not become part of Jewish thought until the Hebrews were exposed to the ideas by their captives, the Egyptians, The Assyrians, and the Babylonians. Later as more Greeks became Jewish, the Pharisees because of the Sages, begin to extrapolate on the afterlife,(teachings). The Saducees attempted to keep the purity of the Old Testament, this is why they didn't teach on the afterlife. Jesus emphasized this life, in His teaching, righteousness and judgement in the here and now. Thus the Kingdom of God is HERE- NOW~

Jesus was a Rabbi, a Teacher, (not just that but more) so He grew up learning all that was taught in the Torah and the tradition of the Elders. Much in what Jesus said, He was deconstructing most all the pagan beliefs that these writings or the tradition of the elders taught on these pagan ideas and building upon and clarifying the good ideas, to correct them to thinking and acting on the Word of God, rather than the tradition of the Elders.

Jesus himself reminded both the Pharisees and the Sadducees, that God was the God of the living and not the dead. Abraham and Moses were among those in the living.

