

# UNIVERSALISM AND ULTIMATE RECONCILIATION

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**Note:** *this document is merely a draft, waiting for the time when I can give the subject further attention.*

In its simplest form, Universalism declares that no being will spend eternity in hell. There are a variety of views that fall under the general term, “Universalism.”

- At one end of the spectrum are those who believe that there is no life beyond the grave – all are universally “out of existence.”
- Adjacent to that view is the contention that there is no after-life judgment of any sort.<sup>1</sup>
- At the other end of the spectrum are those who believe that there is a hell where some will spend a period of time before being reconciled to God. Hell, or the lake of fire, is where the damned are “enlightened,” a time of “attitude adjustment.” Those who hold this view are known as *Ultimate Reconciliationists*. Most who hold this view state that even Satan and his angels will be reconciled to God.
- There are a variety of expressions of Universalism found between these various views.

## ORIGEN, THE ORIGIN OF UNIVERSALISM

Universalism is not a new idea. The first church leader of any note to advocate Universalism was Origen (185-254 AD). Origen has been denied the title, “Church Father,” because he departed so drastically from Orthodox theological positions. He advocated<sup>2</sup> *apokatastasis*, the teaching that ultimately God will reconcile all creation and created beings to himself, including Satan. As shown in the following quote, he understood Psalm 110:1 (Psalm 109:1 in the Septuagint, the version read by Origen) to result logically in *apokatastasis*.

The end of the world, then, and the final consummation, will take place when every one shall be subjected to punishment for his sins; a time which God alone knows, when He will bestow on each one what he deserves. We think, indeed, that the goodness of God, through His Christ, may recall all His creatures to one end, even His enemies being conquered and subdued. For thus says holy Scripture, “The LORD said to My Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.” And if the meaning of the prophet’s language here

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah McLachlan’s touching song, *Angel*, was her response to the heroin overdose death of Jonathan Melvoin, the touring keyboard player of the group, *Smashing Pumpkins*. Ignoring the fact that the “angel” in the song is heroin, some have made this beautiful song, the anthem of the view that at death everyone – a good person or a bad person – goes to “a better place.”

<sup>2</sup> Although the statement often is made that Origen firmly believed these things, it is my opinion that a fair reading of Origen presents a different picture. He clearly states that this is a speculation which he presents for debate. Note his comments in *De principiis*, “These subjects, indeed, are treated by us with great solicitude and caution, in the manner rather of an investigation and discussion, than in that of fixed and certain decision. For we have pointed out in the preceding pages those questions which must be set forth in clear dogmatic propositions, as I think has been done to the best of my ability when speaking of the Trinity. But on the present occasion our exercise is to be conducted, as we best may, in the style of a disputation rather than of strict definition.” Origen, *De principiis*, Book 1, Chapter 6, Section 1 *Ante-Nicene Fathers* Volume 4, page 499

be less clear, we may ascertain it from the Apostle Paul, who speaks more openly, thus: “For Christ must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet.” But if even that unreserved declaration of the apostle does not sufficiently inform us what is meant by “enemies being placed under His feet,” listen to what he says in the following words, “For all things must be put under Him.”<sup>3</sup>

Origen then discussed the meaning of “subjection,” concluding that it is the same relationship that all disciples of Christ, even while in this present world, experience in their relationship with Christ.

According to Origen, this reconciliation/subjection will result in the total removal of all evil. Otherwise, according to Origen, God is not “All in all.”

...and thus God will be “All,” for there will no longer be any distinction of good and evil, seeing evil nowhere exists; for God is all things, and to Him no evil is near: nor will there be any longer a desire to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, on the part of him who is always in the possession of good, and to whom God is all. So then, when the end has been restored to the beginning, and the termination of things compared with their commencement, that condition of things will be re-established in which rational nature was placed, when it had no need to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; so that when all feeling of wickedness has been removed, and the individual has been purified and cleansed, He who alone is the one good God becomes to him “all,” and that not in the case of a few individuals, or of a considerable number, but He Himself is “all in all.” And when death shall no longer anywhere exist, nor the sting of death, nor any evil at all, then verily God will be “All in all.”<sup>4</sup>

In Origen’s later writings, there are only faint traces of the *apokatastasis* and he seems to have modified his teaching to exclude Satan from final restoration.<sup>5</sup>

Full universal salvation (including Satan) was taught by a well-known later teacher at the school of Origen, Gregory of Nyssa (died 395), as well as by Diodorus of Tarsus (died 394), Theodore of Mopsuestia (died 429) and many Nestorian bishops. Fifteen anathemas against Origen were passed by the local Synod of Constantinople in 543 AD.

Augustine noted that in his day there were some who held to the view of Universalism, but that they were a minor group.

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<sup>3</sup>Origen, *De principiis* Book 1, Chapter 6, Section 1, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* Volume 4, page 500

<sup>4</sup>*De Principiis* Book 3, Chapter 6, Section 3

<sup>5</sup>*Epistle ad Romans* Book 1, Chapter 8, Section 9; Origen states that Satan will not be converted, not even at the end of the world.

## UNIVERSALISTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Universalism experienced a revival in the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Various sects called, “Origenists,” and “Merciful Doctors,” developed in England. Dr. George de Benneville preached Universalist views in Pennsylvania in 1740, but there seemed to be no lasting results from his ministry. John Murray was the founder of the Universalist Church in the United States.

John Murray (1741-1815) was an Englishman of “high Calvinist” background who, through the preaching of Wesley and Whitfield, had become a part of the Methodist movement. He was converted to Universalist teaching by another British Methodist, James Rely (1720- ca.1780). Rely extended Wesley’s “grace to all” to mean that Christ’s sacrifice had purchased salvation, not only for the elect but for the entire human race and as a result all would be saved. This was a drastic departure from the “limited atonement” position of Calvinism.

After being excommunicated by the British Methodists, John Murray arrived in America in 1770. He preached throughout the colonies and finally settled in Gloucester, Mass, where he found that a small group of Rely’s converts had preceded him. In 1779, he organized these into a congregation, which was the first Universalist Church in America. Six years later a convention was held to win legal rights in Massachusetts (legal rights were won in the courts in 1789). In 1793 a New England Universalist convention began to meet.

The man who led the movement to prominence was Hosea Ballou (1771-1852). Ballou was of Baptist background. He was influenced by the liberal sentiments of Boston Congregationalists, many of whom were arriving at Universalist views (chiefly Charles Chauncy). The Boston Congregationalists were emphasizing the goodness of man and the benevolence of Deity. In 1804, Ballou published his *Treatise on the Atonement*, which displayed a shift toward Unitarianism and a substitutionary view of Christ’s sacrifice. Ballou defended a “moral theory” of the Atonement, holding that Christ suffered for men, but not instead of them. In 1803 the Universalists adopted the *Winchester Profession*, which became the standard expression of Universalists views, which coined the expression, “salvation by character.” Other similar statements were formulated in later decades.

Universalists began publishing a weekly paper in 1819. By the time of the War Between the States, there were state conventions in most northern states. Tufts College (founded 1852) and Divinity School (1869), in Medford, Mass., became its major educational institution, although there were several colleges and seminaries elsewhere.

One thing that contributed to rise of Universalism was the Second Great Awakening. Most of the ministers associated with the awakening were Calvinists. When they saw great numbers coming to repentance, they began to question their hyper-Calvinism and to ask if perhaps all could be saved. In time, some took the leap from “could” to “would” and began to espouse Universalist views.

The movement divided in 1831, when a group that came to be known as the “Restorationists” broke away from the denomination. The Restorationists maintained that the wicked would pass through a temporary state of punishment after death, then be “restored” to God. The original Universalists maintained that there is no punishment for sin, except for the consequences of sinful behavior that one experiences in this life. The Restorationist sect dissolved after about a decade.

Universalism lost ground, as an organization, following the War Between the States, but it did not die, especially in New England. In 1947, a joint commission of Universalists and Unitarians began to meet to lay the groundwork for merger. Total consolidation was completed in 1961, forming the Unitarian/Universalist Society.

## VARIETIES OF UNIVERSALISM

### *Institutionalized Universalism*

As already stated, the original Universalists were biblical, although they quickly began to accept liberal doctrines. The present day Unitarian/Universalist Association of Congregations is not biblical in its orientation. The following quote from a pamphlet written for inquirers gives insight on this point.

“The most fundamental of all our principles, then, is *individual freedom of religious belief* – the principle of the free mind (emphasis in the original).

Churches, Bibles, and creeds are the creations of those who once exercised their freedom to create. Is there any reason why we should expect to do less?

Unitarian Universalism, then, is an ethical rather than a doctrinal religion, with individual freedom as its method and reason as its guide.”<sup>6</sup>

### *Ultimate Reconciliation*

A belief system that often has been called, “ultimate reconciliation,” has experienced an ebb and flow over the last century. Generally reflecting the views of the Restorationists, mentioned above (and Origen), those who contend for ultimate reconciliation currently maintain a plethora of internet websites.

In its simplest form, ultimate reconciliation maintains that there is a hell and that those who have not accepted Christ in this life will go to hell for an eon. Some Ultimate Reconciliationists state that people do not go to hell to be punished or purified, as taught in the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, but the unregenerate go to hell where they have an “attitude adjustment.” In the resurrection, everyone, including Satan, will bow the knee to Christ and then will enter into unending heavenly life.

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<sup>6</sup> Jack Mendolsohn, *Meet the Unitarian Universalists*, Unitarian Universalist Pamphlet Commission Publication, 25 Beacon Street, Boston.

The Concordant Publishing Concern, founded in 1909 by A. E. Knoch, presents one of the most highly developed and systemized ultimate reconciliation concepts. The Concordant Publishing Concern published the Concordant Literal New Testament and at this time is in the process of completing the Concordant Version of the Old Testament. These versions of Scripture reflect the Ultimate Reconciliation eschatology.

The view presented by the many websites compatible with the CPC holds that there are five eons mentioned in Scripture. Each eon (αἰών) has its own world (*cosmos*, system) and they synchronize (Ephesians 2:2). God is the King of the eons (I Timothy 1:17) and made them through Christ (Hebrews 1:2). The first two eons are not mentioned in Scripture, but their corresponding worlds are. Two eons are in the future (Ephesians 2:7). We are living in the present wicked eon (Galatians 1:4). The eons have consummations (I Corinthians 10:11) and a conclusion (Hebrews 9:26). During the eons, some (many/most) will go into eonian (αἰώνιος) punishment (hell). Furthermore, during the eons, God especially is the Saviour of believers (I Timothy 2:4; 4:10). At the consummation (after the eons and the end of the eonian worlds) all will be saved, justified, vivified, and all estranged will be reconciled (Romans 5:18; I Corinthians 15:22; I Timothy 6:13; Colossians 1:20; II Timothy 1:9; I Corinthians 15:26). Death will be abolished, since all will have repudiated sin (Hebrews 9:26) and God will be All in all (I Corinthians 15:28).

During the formative days of the Charismatic Movement,<sup>7</sup> Ultimate reconciliation was taught by Charles Schmidt, a very gifted teacher who was a man of huge influence during this period. He presently leads a large congregation in Silver Springs, Maryland.

The Gospel of Inclusion, as some have labeled the doctrine being espoused by prominent Charismatic leader, Carlton Pearson, falls squarely in the Ultimate Reconciliation camp.

On the website that has been set up to explain this teaching, Carlton states,

*It is my objective to simply re-present Jesus in a softer and more loving way, being less excluding and more inclusive in His love, tolerance, acceptance, and glorious promise to all.*<sup>8</sup>

We can understand Carlton's motivation. Too often God has been presented as a big all-knowing very stern judge whose sole activity is to keep a ledger and sternly write down every thing that we do wrong, so that He can justify the punishment that He has waiting for us. That is an erroneous picture of God.

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<sup>7</sup> 1968 – the early 1980's. During this period, two annual gatherings of leaders set the direction of the Charismatic Movement. One was the annual Apostles and Prophets gathering, held on the east coast. The second was a meeting of 50 leaders, held annually at Glencoe, Missouri. The Glencoe meeting was somewhat covert and was by invitation only. The Shepherding Movement, led by five hugely respected teachers, almost captured the Charismatic Movement during these years. Today most of those who were the dominate leaders of the Shepherding Movement have disavowed the doctrines that they presented in the 1970's. Many of them have died. The Shepherding doctrines no longer are accepted in most of the Church.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.greater-emmanuel.org/inclusion.html> paragraph 13

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.*

Romans 5:8 *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

However, in order to present Jesus as kind and loving, Carlton has gone too far. He presents a different Jesus and a different Gospel.

Carlton states on his website, *A careful study of early church history will show that the doctrine of universal restoration was the prevailing doctrine of the Primitive Christian Church.*<sup>9</sup>

As we have already demonstrated in recounting the early history of this eschatology, Carleton's statement simply is not true. It was a point of controversy, because Origen was such a popular and influential teacher, but it was strongly opposed by many others. It was not *the prevailing doctrine*. For that matter, as stated in footnote #1, Origen initially presented the doctrine as a *speculation*.

## **GOD IS LOVE**

Advocates of this doctrine declare that God is love and since love is the overriding definition of god, *eternal* hell is impossible because love never would send anyone to eternal hell.

Two verses frequently quoted by those who present this argument are:

**I John 4:8** *The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love*

**I John 4:16** *We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him*

All other scriptural statements are forced to fit under this rubric

Two things are wrong with this argument:

- Love is not the all-encompassing definition of God.
- This statement assumes that how we define love is how God will display love.

### **The all-encompassing definition of God is *holy*.**

The term, *Holy*, is a virtual synonym for God. Quoting Leviticus, Peter wrote,

*but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."* (I Peter 1:15-16)

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.greater-emmanuel.org/inclusion.html> paragraph 10

In the New Testament, the terms, *holy*, *holiness*, *sanctify*, and so on, are renderings of some form of the Greek term, ἅγιος (*hagios*), and its derivatives.

In the Old Testament, these terms are the rendering of קֹדֶשׁ (*qodesh*) and its derivatives.

The basic idea in both the Greek and Hebrew terms is *separation*. When used for God, these terms are describing a being who is totally separate from His creation. He is unique. He is *suigeneris*. There is nothing in all of our human experience that enables us to define him.

The technical theological term that communicates the essence of *holy* is the term, *transcendent*, which means

- *something beyond the limits of possible experience,*
- *something that exists totally apart from the material universe.*

Every race of people has tried to understand God. Consider the Greek and Roman effort.

The Greeks and Romans pictured the gods as a hierarchy of super humans, except that they did not die. The gods traced their origin to mother earth, named, *Gaea*, and father heaven, named, *Ouranos*. After several eons and all sorts of strange creatures and events, Zeus was born. The Romans called him, Jupiter. Zeus became the king and father of the gods. His wife was Hera. The story of the gods was one of giant human propensities – jealousy, greed, lust for power – all of the things that a human emperor might experience. The gods were giant-sized beings with giant-sized egos and emotions. Greek poets wrote about them, Greeks and Romans worshipped them, and tried to appease them, because they seemed more bent on giving man trouble than helping him. The Greek gods delighted in playing games with mankind. From time to time, in their stories, the Greeks pictured the gods as viewing a man as if he were in a maze, and putting obstacles in his way just to see how he would handle it. It was a cruel game.

The Greeks and Romans tried to understand God by envisioning gods who where super-humans. The gods of the Greeks and Romans were not transcendent. They were a part of the material universe and were within the paradigms of human experience.

The true God, however, is transcendent.

- He is beyond the limits of human experience
- We have nothing whereby adequately to comprehend Him, no language adequate to describe Him, or define him.

The term, *holy*, therefore, means “unique, separate, totally beyond the human experience.”

*Holy* and *transcendent* are terms that are synonymous, when used in reference to God. We would not be in error if when we sang the Hymn, *Holy, Holy, Holy*, instead of singing, *Holy, Holy, Holy*, we would sing,

*Transcendent, transcendent, transcendent,  
Lord, God, Almighty;  
Early in the morning, our song shall rise to Thee.*

Because of this, God has, from time to time, given *theophanies* to various men. A *theophany* is something that can be seen, either in a vision or physically, which represents God. Although one is not actually seeing God, when a theophany is given it is as if one were seeing God.

When Abraham was visited by the Angel of Jehovah, prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Angel of Jehovah was a theophany. It were as if Abraham were seeing God Himself (That very same angel, the Angel of Jehovah, led Israel through the wilderness).

- When Ezekiel saw the wheels, fire, and so on, that was a theophany.
- When Moses beheld the burning bush, that was a theophany.
- When Isaiah had a vision and saw the Lord, high and lifted up and the train of his robe filled the temple, that was a theophany.

Scripture states that no one has seen God and lived.

John 1:18 *No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.*

John 6:46 *Not that any man has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father.*

1 Timothy 6:16 *who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.*

1 John 4:12 *No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.*

However, men have seen theophanies.

Jesus Christ came into the world for two reasons:

- To redeem us from our sins
- To reveal the character of God

For a season, one person of the Godhead left the realm of the unapproachable light, as described in I Timothy 6:16, gave up His glory, and dwelt among us in human flesh.

- John 1:14 *And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.*
- John 1:18 *No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.*
- John 12:45 *And he who beholds Me beholds the One who sent Me.*
- John 14:9 *He that hath seen me hath seen the Father*
- Colossians 1:15 *And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation.*
- Hebrews 1:3 *And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high;*

To illustrate: The all encompassing definition of Jim Garrett is human. Everything else that you say about me reflects my traits, but my full identity is, human.

*Holy* is the same thing in reference to God.

### **Love is not the all-encompassing definition of God; It is one of God's attributes**

As a human I have attributes – you might say that the human, Jim Garrett, is *mean spirited*, or *jealous*, or *kind*. These are my attributes, they are not the all encompassing definition of who I am. So it is with God. Love is one of God's outstanding attributes.

God has other attributes as well

- **Jealous**

Exodus 20:5 *"You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,*

- **Hate**

Malachi 2:16 *"For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the LORD of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."*

- **Anger & Wrath** – These two terms, *anger* and *wrath* are found together in 26 passages that describe God. Here is an example:

Psalm 21:9-10 *You will make them as a fiery oven in the time of your anger; The LORD will swallow them up in His wrath, And fire will devour them. Their offspring You will destroy from the earth, And their descendants from among the sons of men.*

Many other traits of God are described in Scripture, but the point that must be recognized is that love is one of the traits of God, but not the all-encompassing definition of God.

### **Ultimate Reconciliationists are in error when they assume that how they define love is how God will display love.**

This is a faulty assumption even when applied to humans.

- Someone might argue that if you spank your child that you do not love him.
- Someone else might argue that if you love your child you cannot fail to spank him.

The major error in this supposition is equating God's love with the sympathetic, perhaps romantic, kind of love. God's love is *agape* and God defines this love by how He models it, not by how we define it.

**The declaration that love is the all-encompassing definition of God, and that a loving God would not allow anyone to spend eternity in hell, is a faulty declaration.**

## **TWO KEY PASSAGES CITED BY ULTIMATE RECONCILIATIONISTS**

No passage is more important to Reconciliationists than Philippians 2:10-11

*Philippians 2:10 that at the name of Jesus "every knee should bow," of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

This passage teaches that the *authority* of Christ will be acknowledged by all beings, but it in no way indicates that all who acknowledge that authority will be saved. The biblical picture seems to be that at death, each person knows his eternal destiny. The Judgment is an event in which justification for one's eternal state becomes apparent. For those who had opportunity to accept His Lordship in this life, but refused to do so, they will be released from Hades to publicly acknowledge the His Lordship; because they refused it when they had a choice, they justify their damnation and are consigned to hell.

The other passage to which Reconciliationists constantly point is Colossians 1:20.

*and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.*

The entire passage must be read in order to grasp understanding of this verse. Suffice it to say Paul elaborates on the reconciliation in the verses that follow, stating,

*Colossians 1:21-23 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach-- if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.*

The reconciliation will be realized, *if indeed you continue in the faith....* Thus, verse 20 must mean something other than the everlasting ultimate reconciliation of every being.

## SOME ULTIMATE RECONCILIATIONISTS MAKE A DISTINCTION BETWEEN REDEMPTION AND SALVATION.

Carlton Pearson has written,

*The so –called “Doctrine of Inclusionism” or as some call it, the “Theory of Universal Reconciliation,” maintains that Christ’s crucifixion and death on Calvary accomplished its purpose of reconciling all mankind to God. The death of Christ made it possible for God to accept sinful man, and that he has, in fact done so. Consequently, whatever separation there is between man and the benefits of God’s grace is subjective in nature and exists only in man’s mind and unregenerate spirit. The message man needs to hear then, is not that he simply has a suggested opportunity for salvation, but that through Christ he has, in fact, already been redeemed to God and that he may enjoy the blessings that are already his in Christ.*

In another place Pearson comments,

*If the sinner’s debt is cancelled, do you think it reasonable to assume that they are still going to hell? Would that be Christ-like or fair?*

In another section he quotes Kenneth Hagin’s book, *The Authority of the Believer*,

*There is no sin problem, there is a sinner problem. Get the sinner to Jesus, and that cures the problem....The sinner doesn’t know what belongs to him, so it won’t do him any good.*

Pearson responds to Hagin’s statement,

*I agree it won’t do him any good as it pertains to his **overall quality of life here on earth**; but the sinner’s ignorance does not necessarily cancel the potency and ultimate effectiveness of Christ’s finished work at Calvary.<sup>10</sup>*

In other words, all are redeemed and nothing will keep anyone from spending eternity with Jesus. The only advantage to accepting Christ in this life is that one’s life on earth will be better. While on earth one can have the fellowship with God that he will have in heaven and that is the only difference between the saved and the unsaved.

This doctrine not only changes the motivation for evangelism, it also makes it difficult to justify sending dear brothers and sisters to distant nations where life will be difficult, so that they can tell people about the redemptive work of Christ. Would Christ commission his disciples to go into all the world and make disciples, knowing that those who became disciples would be beaten, tortured, and martyred, if the only goal of their preaching was related to this present life?

When someone in a closed society is being beaten, tortured with cattle prods, whipped with a metal cable – as happens all of the time – how does this apply to them? If they are going to

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<sup>10</sup> All of these quotations are from the website, [www.higherd.org/html/gnac.htm](http://www.higherd.org/html/gnac.htm)

spend eternity with Jesus anyway, why experience suffering because you wear the name of Jesus, if that has nothing to do with your eternal fate?

Ponder these two passages

Hebrews 6:4 *For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. 7 For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; 8 but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.*

Hebrews 10:26 *For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and "the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries." 28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "the Lord will judge His people." 31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Peter wrote that the choice is repent or perish.

*The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for **any to perish but for all to come to repentance.** (2 Peter 3:9)*

Hebrews 12:14 declares that sanctification is required for one to "see the Lord." The implication of the citation of Esau (12:16) is that one who lives as an immoral or godless person has no hope in some future repentance, no ultimate reconciliation.

*Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.*

*See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;*

*that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears. (Hebrews 12:14-17)*

## THE ULTIMATE RECONCILIATIONIST UNDERSTANDING OF HEBREW AND GREEK TERMS

In my opinion, the most challenging argument put forth by advocates of Universal Reconciliation (henceforth we will use the initials “UR” ) involves the translation of the Greek and Hebrew terms that most English Bibles translate as *eternity* and *eternal*. The Greek terms are *aion* (αἰών), which most English versions render as *eternity* and *aionios* (αἰώνιος) which most English versions render, *eternal*. The Hebrew term is *olam* (עֹלָם). The translators who produced the Septuagint consistently chose the Greek term αἰώνιος, to translate the Hebrew term, עֹלָם (*olam*).<sup>11</sup> Therefore, we conclude that in the mind of the Septuagint translators both the Hebrew and Greek terms convey the same sense of time.

We must examine the assertions made concerning these terms before we can evaluate the scriptural arguments for UR. Many pivotal passages related to the topic before us will be impacted by how one renders αἰών and αἰώνιος.

For example, most Christians consider Jesus’ description of the general judgment, as recorded in Matthew 25:31-46, to be “case closed” evidence for the eternal damnation of the lost. The two key verses are 41 and 46.

*Then He will also say to those on His left, “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal (αἰώνος) fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41)*

*And these will go away into eternal (αἰώνιος) punishment, but the righteous into eternal (αἰώνιος) life. (Matthew 25:46)*

Because Jesus used the term, αἰώνιος, to describe the duration of the blessed state of the righteous and also the duration of the punishment of the damned, then these two conditions must be of the same duration. Believing that the blessed state of the righteous is eternal, we must conclude that the state of the damned likewise is eternal.

“Not so,” say the UR advocates. They argue that orthodoxy has misunderstood the Greek adjective, αἰώνιος. URs contend that their understanding of the meaning of these terms is based upon their use in Greek literature. They argue that the terms refer to a limited duration. A survey of both biblical and non-biblical literature clearly demonstrates that indeed the noun, αἰών, from which the adjective αἰώνιος is derived, commonly is used in a durative sense (referring to something of limited duration). That being true, we must seek to discover the implications of this fact (for example, how does this influence the understanding of the adjective), and then ask if the terms are used in any sense other than durative. If it can be shown that these terms always have a durative sense (i.e., that there is an end to the duration referenced), then the doctrine of eternal punishment can be questioned.

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<sup>11</sup> The Septuagint is a Greek version of the Old Testament, produced by Jewish scribes in Alexandria Egypt in the Third Century BC. The Pentateuch translation as completed c. 250 BC, with the balance of the Old Testament’s being translated over the following seventy-five years.

## THE ULTIMATE RECONCILIATION EONIAN PARADIGM

Ultimate Reconcilianists contend that the Greek noun, αἰών, refers to a particular era or “age,” partitioned and delineated from the rest of time. God’s creative and redemptive events are the markers that set the partitions. The events that began and ended each of the past ages are known, because they are history. The duration of the present age and of the ages to come cannot be known, but they will be clearly partitioned segments of time. According to this view, the terms, *age* and *ages*, refer to specific periods.

There are passages of Scripture in which this clearly is the sense in which the terms are used. As noted earlier, Matthew 28:20 contains Jesus’ promise that as the disciples go forth to make disciples, He will be with them to the consummation of the age. Clearly, this speaks of the age that began with His ascension and will be consummated by His second coming.

Most of us, in contemporary speech, do not use these terms with such preciseness. When someone says, “Oh, that’s been true through all the ages,” he means to convey that something has existed for a long time. Or, when someone says, “He is an eternal pest,” the meaning is that his pestering is constant. When so used, the expression does not mean that one is referring to a series of specific, defined eras.

URs do not consider these terms, in any scriptural passage, to have the ambiguous meaning just illustrated. In keeping with their view, URs believe that the terms rendered *eternity* and *eternal* always must be understood as referring, in some way, to epochal eons. Modern URs have developed an eonian paradigm to conform to their understanding. The following summary will assist in understanding their doctrine.

Here is the Concordant Publishing Concern’s summary of the UR’s eonian scenario.

**“Concerning God’s Eonian Purpose:** The Scriptures speak of God’s wisdom, in a secret, designated *before* the eons (1 Cor.2:7), His own purpose and grace *before* eonian times (2 Tim.1:9), and life promised *before* eonian times (Titus 1:2). Each eon (*aiōn*) has its own world (*cosmos*, system), and they synchronize (Eph.2:2). God is King of the eons (1 Tim.1:17), and made them through Christ (Heb.1:2). Five epochal eons can be found. The first two eons are not mentioned, but their corresponding worlds are. Two eons are impending (Eph.2:7), and we are living in the present wicked eon (Gal.1:4). They have consummations (1 Cor.10:11) and a conclusion (Heb.9:26). God is the Saviour of all mankind at the consummation, but especially of believers during the eons (1 Tim.2:4; 4:10). At the consummation, we find all saved, justified (Rom.5:18), vivified (1 Cor.15:22; 1 Tim, 6:13), and all the estranged, reconciled (Col, 1:20). Death will be abolished (2 Tim.1:9; 1 Cor.15:26), sin having been repudiated (*cf* Heb.9:26), and God will be All in all (1 Cor.15:28).”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Some of the Special Truths for Which We Stand*, Concordant Publishing Concern website, [www.concordant.org](http://www.concordant.org)

William W. Bentley Jr. presents a simple outline of the eons and the events related to them.<sup>13</sup> In keeping with the CPC summary given above, Bentley describes Seven Grand Segments of Time:

- the time before the eons,
- the five eons
- the time after the consummation of the eons.

The eons are identifiable as follows (I have added explanatory parenthesis that convey the understanding presented in earlier sections of Bentley's book).

1. **Before the Eons**
  - God was all - Romans 11:36
  - Then Christ – John 1:3; Colossians 1:15-17 (earlier in his book, Bentley states that God “brought forth” Christ – JWG)
2. **The First Eon**
  - Christ sets up eons – Hebrews 1:2-3
  - Universe is created – Genesis 1:1; Deuteronomy 32:4; Isaiah 45:18
  - Earth is disrupted (as a result of Satan's rebellion-JWG) – Matthew 25:34-35; 2 Peter 3:5-6; Genesis 1:2
  - Earth is restored - Genesis 1:3-25
3. **The Second Eon**
  - Adam and Eve (are created – JWG) – Genesis 1:26-27
  - The Great Flood – Genesis 7:17-24
4. **The Third Eon (our present Eon)**
  - Noah's family – Genesis 9:1
  - Abraham called – Genesis 12:1-3
  - Old covenant – Exodus 19:3-6
  - The New Covenant – Matthew 9:18-19, 23-26; Luke 7:12-15; John 11:11-44
  - Jesus born – Luke 1:31-33; 2:6-7
  - Jesus crucified – Matthew 27:35
  - Jesus roused – Matthew 28:6
  - Christ's revelation to Paul – Paul's epistles
  - Body Church called away – Ephesians 2:5-7; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18
  - Great Tribulation & Christ's second coming – Matthew 24:4-36
5. **The Fourth Eon (coming next)**
  - The Millennium – Revelation 20:1-10

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<sup>13</sup> William W. Bentley Jr., *The Simple Story of the Universe, Revealing the Reasons for Everything*, [www.concordant.org/exphotml/SimpleStoryOfTheUniverse/SimpleStoryofTheUniverse.html](http://www.concordant.org/exphotml/SimpleStoryOfTheUniverse/SimpleStoryofTheUniverse.html) pgs 31-32

## 6. **The Fifth Eon: Eon of the Eons**

- New heaven and the new earth – 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1

## 7. **After the Eons**

- Consummation – 1 Corinthians 15:24
- Death abolished – 1 Corinthians 15:26; 2 Timothy 1:10
- God is All in all – 1 Corinthians 15:28

This outline displays a form of Dispensationalism, incorporating such elements as a Pre-Tribulation, Pre-Millennial Rapture of the Church, and a literal Millennium. This UR scenario also includes the view that the earth was “recreated” after the chaos created by Satan’s fall, which is a position held by some Dispensationalists.

As with many esoteric doctrinal positions, especially those that are somewhat oblique to the mainstream understanding, there is a mixture of obvious truth and questionable exegesis in this outline and in the Concordant Publishing Concern’s summary, quoted above.

Of obvious note is the rejection of the Trinity.<sup>14</sup> URs (at least those associated with the CPC) contend that before the eons God was All; He then brought forth Christ (described by some URs as, “God’s Creative Original”<sup>15</sup>). The Holy Spirit is not a person, but rather, the Spirit of God, that is bestowed upon all believers. This view of Christ is a virtual template of the heresy of Arius, who early in the Fourth Century AD contended that the Son is a semi-divine being, not begotten, but created by the Father, before the creation of the world.<sup>16</sup> We will not embark on a defense of the Trinity, but needless to say, this definitely departs from the well established view of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Some of the verses cited as authority for the elements in the outline given above do not appear to be related to the topic, unless one has read UR literature. There is the feel of “proof-texting” in some of the citations. To examine each verse and its application would require more space than we are prepared to allot to the effort. We will note only one of Bentley’s points to illustrate this tendency.

A glaring example of defining a term to fit one’s theology is Bentley’s citing of Matthew 25:34-35 as evidence that the world was “disrupted” during the first eon and then restored at the close of that eon. Here is how the passage reads in the New American Standard Version:

*Then the King will say to those on His right, “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in...*

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<sup>14</sup> For a rather complete treatment of a view of Christ held by many URs, see A.E. Knock, *Christ and Deity*, (<http://www.concordant.org/expohtml/GodAndChrist/ChristAndDeity1.html>)

<sup>15</sup> A.E. Knock, pamphlet, *The Pre-existence of Christ* (Santa Clara, California, Concordant Publishing Concern)

<sup>16</sup> See Bentley, *Simple Story*, html page 4, “The Grand Scheme,” line 2; Part B, “Scriptural Explanations,” Trinity, html page 32; CPC *Simple Truths*, html page 1, “Concerning the Deity,” and “Concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Bentley cites this passage because verse 34 contains the Greek word, καταβολή, which he translates as *disruption [of the world]*. Traditional English versions translate the term, *foundation [of the world]*.<sup>17</sup> Bentley's definition of this term is common in UR literature, not only in this passage but in others as well.<sup>18</sup>

Καταβολη is a composite term that carries the idea, *throw down*, or *lay down*. The term is used for casting seed into the bosom of the earth, and for the male ejaculation of sperm. For example, the term occurs in Hebrews 11:11, in which the aged Abraham is described as receiving power to *lay down seed*, in the founding of his posterity.<sup>19</sup> I have not found any lexicographer who in his survey of Greek literature lists *disruption* as a valid rendering of καταβολή. This unusual translation seems to be motivated by the UR's need to shore up their contention that the world was "disrupted." The disruption and recreation of the world is a necessary condition for the UR eonian paradigm. Manipulation of the translation is the very thing of which URs accuse traditionalists of doing, when αἰώνιος is rendered as, *eternal*, in selected passages.

One of the passages that URs employ as an argument that ages do end is Hebrews 9:26. It is interesting that they would use this as a proof text for their argument, since this verse defies their eonian paradigm.

*NAS Hebrews 9:26 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages (ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων) He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*

This verse is an element in the Hebrews argument that the New Covenant sacrifice of Christ is superior to the sacrifices enjoined in the Old Covenant. Under the Old Covenant, the priest, taking not his own blood, but the blood of an animal, each year entered the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the people. Under the New Covenant, Christ offered His own blood, not that of an animal, and He did it only once. The sacrifice does not need to be repeated.

Hebrews 9:26 states that Christ came into the world in order to make this one-time sacrifice. When did He come into the world to do this? *At the consummation of the ages*. It is an historical event that occurred in the First Century *Anno Domini* (in the year of Our Lord). If, as URs argue, there are five "ages," two are past, we are living the present evil age, and there are two ages in the future, and after the fifth eon the eons will be consummated, then Hebrews 9:26 can't be true. If one chooses to use the term with UR understanding (a definite, partitioned period of time), the present age must be the consummating age and there are no more to come.

Furthermore, if one gives the specificity to the terms, αἰών and αἰώνιος, as URs insist, then Scripture contradicts itself, i.e., Scripture speaks of this present age and the age to come,<sup>20</sup> but Hebrews 9:26 states that the consummation of the ages occurred in the First Century. Such uses

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<sup>17</sup> ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου.

<sup>18</sup> Matt. 13:35; 25:34; Lk. 11:50; Jn. 17:24; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 4:3; Heb. 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8; 17:8

<sup>19</sup> Numerous textual authorities argue convincingly that there was an early corruption of this text and that Abraham should be the subject of the verb, not Sarah. For an excellent but brief discussion, see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, (United Bible Societies, 1971) pg 672; also see Kittel, *op cit*, Volume III, page 620.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 12:32

of the terms αἰών and αἰώνιος illustrate that one cannot give the specificity to the terms that URs insist upon. In each passage, one has to ask, “What is the point being made by this statement and how do the terms relate to the point?”

### AN EXAMPLE IN WHICH CONTEXT DETERMINES DEFINITION

Ecclesiastes 3:11 has become an important verse in the modern missionary movement. The phrase, *eternity in their hearts*, is an encouragement to missionaries who believe that God has planted in each human heart a yearning for that which is eternal. Because of that yearning, missionaries assume that one of their roles is to unlock that yearning and to meet it with the Gospel of Christ. Here is how the more popular versions render these terms:

*KJV He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.*

*NKJV Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.*

*NIV Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.*

*NAS Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.*

The King James Version of 1611 rendered the term, *world*. However, other popular versions, including the New King James Version, render the term, *eternity*. Why? The explanation is the fact that the 1611 KJV translators almost always rendered these Hebrew and Greek terms as *world* (i.e., “end of the world,” rather than “end of the age”). Modern translations, seeking to be more consistent with the Greek and Hebrew terms, render them as *age* or some other time related term. Most recent versions recognize that serious exegesis of the text of this passage requires that the term be rendered, *eternity* in Ecclesiastes 3:11.

In the Keil & Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament*, the highly respected orientalist, Franz Julius Delitzsch devotes several pages to a detailed discussion of this passage. Prior to the exegetical section, in the introduction to Ecclesiastes, Delitzsch summarizes the flow of the thought in the book. Concerning Chapter Three, he writes,

“...Everything has its time appointed by God, but man is unable to survey either backwards or forwards, the work of God, which fills eternity, notwithstanding the impulse to search into it which is implanted within him; his dependence in all things, even in pure enjoyment, most become to him a school in which to learn the fear of God, who maintains all things unchangeably, who forms the course of that which is done,”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* Volume 6, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon (Peabody, Mass., Hendrickson Publishers, 1989) Page 185

In the exegetical section of the commentary, following detailed scholarly discussion of the history of the use of the Hebrew **אֶת־הָעֹלָם** (rendered in the Septuagint by the Greek τὸν αἰῶνα), Delitzsch summarizes the thought of the passage in the following manner:

“...the impulse of man shows that his innermost wants cannot be satisfied by that which is temporal. He is a being limited by time, but as to his innermost nature he is related to eternity. That which is transient yields him no support, it carries him on like a rushing stream, and constrains him to save himself by laying hold on eternity. But it is not so much the practical as the intellectual side of this endowment and this peculiar dignity of human nature which Koheleth<sup>22</sup> brings here to view.

It is not enough for man to know that everything that happens has its divinely-ordained time. There is an instinct peculiar to his nature impelling him to pass beyond this fragmentary knowledge and to comprehend eternity; but his effort is in vain, for ‘man is unable to reach unto the work which God accomplisheth from the beginning to the end.’ The work of God is that which is completing itself in the history of the world, of which the life of individual men is but a fragment.”<sup>23</sup>

Thus, here is an illustration of a situation in which contextual use requires that a certain understanding be given to terms. In this instance, only *eternity* meets the exegetical/expositional requirement.

A second illustration is Daniel 7:14

*NAS Daniel 7:14 "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations, and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.*

Here the term, *everlasting*, is the only rendering of the Hebrew *olam*, or the Greek *aionios* (Septuagint) that is consistent with the declarations that follow, *Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed*. Thus, context clearly defines the terms for us.

## **A SURVEY OF *AION* (αἰών) and *AIONIOS* (αἰώνιος) IN BIBLICAL AND NON-BIBLICAL LITERATURE**

URs contend that their understanding of these terms is the result of their study of Greek literature. In order to evaluate that claim, we will examine classical Greek literature, as well as biblical Greek literature.

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<sup>22</sup> *Koheleth* is the Hebrew pseudonym that the writer of the book uses for himself (Eccl. 1:1). This could have been meant to be a name, or a title, since the term means, “collector (of sentences)”. In most versions, the term is rendered, “preacher” or “teacher.”

<sup>23</sup> Keil & Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 Volume Set, Volume 6, “Ecclesiastes” (Peabody, Mass., Hendrickson Publishers 1989) page 261

## Classical Greek Literature

From the time of Heraclitus (c.540-c.480 BC) and Empedocles (c.490-430 BC), philosophers made use of the term αἰών in discussing the problem of time. Generally, αἰών was considered to refer to the period of time allotted to each specific thing (for example, a man's lifetime is his αἰών).<sup>24</sup>

The difficulty in determining the meaning of αἰών and αἰώνιος, in both biblical and non-biblical literature, is illustrated by the manner in which Plato and his student Aristotle used these terms. Plato gave one meaning to these terms, whereas Aristotle gave a contradictory meaning.

Plato (c.428- c.347 BC) departed from the general use of the term, αἰών. In his dialogue, *Timaeus* (written c.360 BC), he used the term, αἰών, to refer to timeless, ideal eternity, in which there are no days or months or years. Plato chose the word, χρόνος, to refer to the relative time allotted to a being (one's life-span). Plato considered χρόνος to be a characteristic of the world, which was created at the same time as the world and is a "moving image of eternity."<sup>25</sup>

Aristotle (384-322 BC) was a student in Plato's Academy. He adhered to the more traditional understanding of these terms. He used the term, αἰών, to refer to the period of time allotted to each specific thing (a man's lifetime is his αἰών). He gave to αἰών a definition similar to but not identical to the meaning that Plato had given to χρόνος. Aristotle considered the world to be eternal, and consequently the world's αἰών [lifetime] is eternal.

Commenting on the world's αἰών, Aristotle wrote in *De Caelo*, Book II, Part One,

“...boundless time: Accordingly, the entire universe neither has come into existence nor is it possible [for it] to be destroyed. But is one and eternal, having no end or beginning of its entire duration [*aion* αἰών], but having and embracing in itself of endless time.”<sup>26</sup> (JWG rendering)

<sup>24</sup> A rather complete survey of the use of these terms and their evolution is found in G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964) Volume I, pgs 197-209.

<sup>25</sup> When He saw it to be moving and living, to the eternal gods (τῶν αἰδίων θεῶν), it had become a thing of joy, the Creating Father rejoiced. And being delighted *μη*He conceived the thought of finishing it more exactly like the Model; and as this [Model] was eternal (ζῶον αἰδιον, i.e. *eternal living thing*) he sought to make the universe of a like kind, so far as might be possible. Now the nature of the Living Thing [the Model] was eternal (αἰώνιος); to bestow this attribute in its fullness upon a creature was impossible. Wherefore he resolved to have a moving image of eternity (Εἰκὼ κινητόν τινα αἰώνος), and when He set in order the heaven, He made an eternal (αἰώνιος) image of that Eternity (αἰώνιον) which rests in unity, but moving according to number, and this image we have named, “time.” *Timeaeus* 37d (JWG translation)

Of special note in this passage is the manner in which Plato uses the two terms, αἰδιος and αἰώνιος. He uses the first of these terms for the gods and the Father Creator, and the “Model.” Then, he uses the second term for the Model, both expressing the eternal nature of the Model, a nature that cannot be bestowed upon the created universe. Clearly in this passage the two terms are used as synonyms.

<sup>26</sup> ...χρόνος ἄπειρος: ὅτι μὲν οὖν οὔτε γέγονεν ὁ πᾶς οὐρανὸς οὔτ' ἐνδέχεται φθαρῆναι... ἀλλ' ἔστιν εἷς καὶ αἰδιος ἀρχὴν μὲν καὶ τελευτὴν οὐκ ἔχων τοῦ παντὸς αἰώνος, ἔχων δὲ καὶ περιέχων ἐν αὐτῷ τὸν ἄπειρον χρόνον

Thus, for Aristotle, the term αἰών did not necessarily mean *eternal*. The term referred to the lifespan of someone or something, whether eternal or durative. If the entity to which αἰών referred were eternal, then that being's αἰών is eternal.

The fact that Aristotle was Plato's student, and that the student gave a different meaning to αἰών than did his teacher, illustrates the difficulty in assigning a single definition to the terms under question.

## Biblical Literature

Scripture reflects the same pattern of ambiguity in the use of these terms. First, we cite examples of the durative use of these terms in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. We then cite examples which traditionally have been understood as being other than durative.

### The durative use of αἰών, αἰώνιος, and עולם in Scripture.

#### *Old Testament examples in which the terms are used with a durative understanding*<sup>27</sup>.

- The Septuagint declares in Habakkuk 3:6, *the everlasting<sup>28</sup> hills melted at his everlasting going forth<sup>29</sup>*.

Since Scripture clearly declares that all of this present material universe will be destroyed,<sup>30</sup> the existence of the hills cannot be unending. Even this verse declares that the *everlasting* hills “melted” at His *everlasting* going forth. This is an example of using these terms to describe an entity (hills) that has existed or will exist for a long time, but will not last forever. Whether or not the going forth of Yahweh, as described in this verse, is *unending* (referring to His eternal existence) or for a particular period, is ambiguous.

- Another example from the Septuagint is Exodus 21:6, *his master shall bring him to the judgment-seat of God, and then shall he bring him to the door, to the door-post, and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall serve him for ever.*<sup>31</sup>

In this passage, *serving forever* clearly means to serve until the end of one's life. It does not mean that throughout eternity a man will be bound in slavery to the one who was his master on earth.

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<sup>27</sup> In each of the Old Testament verses the Hebrew term is עולם; it is represented in the Septuagint by the Greek terms, αἰών or αἰώιος.

<sup>28</sup> αἰώνιος in the Septuagint; עולם in the Hebrew text

<sup>29</sup> αἰώνιος in the Septuagint; עולם in the Hebrew text

<sup>30</sup> 2 Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

<sup>31</sup> Septuagint: δουλεύσει αὐτῷ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα; Hebrew: וְעָבְדוּ לְעַלְמָם

- Genesis 9:16 provides another interesting example, *When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant<sup>32</sup> between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.*

The covenant is everlasting in that God never will destroy the earth by a flood. Therefore, as long as the earth exists the covenant will stand.<sup>33</sup> *Everlasting*, in this verse refers to the period of the earth's existence (the meaning that Aristotle assigned to αἰών).

#### *New Testament examples of the durative use of Greek term.*

- Matthew 28:20 *teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age<sup>34</sup> (KJV – end of the world).*

In this final verse of Matthew's account of the Great Commission, Jesus promised that He would be with the Church as it made disciples of the nations. He said that He would be true to this promise even to the end of the αἰών (*aion*), which in this passage is best rendered, *age*. This clearly refers to an αἰών that will terminate.

- Matthew 12:32 *And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age, or in the age to come.<sup>35</sup>*
- Ephesians 1:21 *far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.<sup>36</sup>*

In both the Matthew and Ephesians passages, αἰών describes an "age" that will be followed by another age. Thus, the term is used in a durative sense, referring to an age that will pass away.

Most lexicons have lengthy entries concerning αἰών and αἰώνιος. The subtlety of meanings associated with these terms requires more than just a passing definition. An inductive investigation of the use of these terms, in all literature, results in the conclusion that αἰών and αἰώνιος convey the sense of *indefinite time*, i.e., no one knows the end, or the end is not in sight. For example, as already noted, αἰών can be used to describe the life of a man, because no one knows how long that man will live.

The term also is used in the sense that as long as the thing referred to is in existence, then that which is said about it will be true. For example, as already noted, the phrase, *everlasting hills*, refers to the hills' indefinite existence, to which there is no known or assignable limit.

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<sup>32</sup> Septuagint: διθήκην αἰώνιον; Hebrew text: ברית עולם

<sup>33</sup> Of course, when the earth no longer exists, because God will have brought forth a new heaven and a new earth, the earth still will have not destroyed it by a flood.

<sup>34</sup> ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος

<sup>35</sup> Literally, *neither in this age nor in the coming*

<sup>36</sup> Literally, *not only in this age but also in the coming*

Charles Hodge comments on the biblical use of these terms,

“It is objected... that the word “everlasting” is sometimes used in Scripture of periods of limited duration. In reference to this objection it may be remarked

(1) that the Hebrew and Greek words rendered in our version, eternal, or everlasting, mean duration whose termination is unknown. When used in reference to perishable things, as when the Bible speaks of “the everlasting hills,” they simply indicate indefinite existence, that is, existence to which there is no known or assignable limit. But when used in reference to that which is either in its own nature imperishable, or of which the unending existence is revealed, as the human soul, or in reference to that which we have no authority from other sources to assign a limit to, as to the future blessedness of the saints, then the words are to be taken in their literal sense.

If because we sometimes say we give a man a thing forever, without intending that he is to possess it to all eternity, it were argued that the word “forever” expresses limited duration, everyone would see that the inference was unfounded....

(2) ....the Bible says that the worm never dies and the fire never is quenched.<sup>37</sup> We have therefore the direct assertion of the Word of God that the sufferings of the lost are unending.... If that doctrine, therefore, be not taught in the Scriptures, it is difficult to see how it could be taught in human language.<sup>38</sup>”

Hodge presents a reasonable conclusion, but there is a problem with his statement, “...then the words are to be taken in their literal sense.” The core question of the debate is, “What is the literal sense of these Greek and Hebrew terms?”

### **New Testament examples of passages in which αἰώνιος refers to past time without an assigned or known limit.**

- Romans 16:25 *Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, (literally: in times of undetermined length<sup>39</sup>)*

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<sup>37</sup> *And if your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, {where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.} And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than having your two feet, to be cast into hell, {where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.} And if your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. (NAS Mark 9:43-48)*

<sup>38</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Volume Three, Part IV, “Eschatology” (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprinted 1975) pgs 876-877

<sup>39</sup> In each of the three verses cited, the KJV contains the phrase, *before the world began*, reflecting the influence of Ephesians 1:4.

- Titus 1:2 *in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised **long ages ago** (literally: **in times of undetermined length**)*
- 2 Timothy 1:9 *who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus **from all eternity**, (literally: **before times of undetermined length**).*

**New Testament examples of passages in which αἰώνιος is used to refer to Divinity.**

- Hebrews 9:14 *how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the **eternal Spirit** offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*
- Romans 16:26 *but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the **eternal God**, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;*

**New Testament examples of passages in which the term is used to refer to the life, the graces, and provisions, that the redeemed will receive from God.**

- John 3:36 *"He who believes in the Son has **eternal life**; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."*
- Titus 1:2 *in the hope of **eternal life**, which God, who cannot lie, promised **long ages ago***
- 2 Peter 1:11 *for in this way the entrance into the **eternal kingdom** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.*
- Revelation 14:6 *And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an **eternal gospel** to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people;*
- 2 Corinthians 4:17 *For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an **eternal weight of glory** far beyond all comparison,*
- 2 Timothy 2:10 *For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it **eternal glory**.*
- 1 Peter 5:10 *After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His **eternal glory** in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.*

URs disagree with the rendering, *eternity*, or *eternal*, in all of the above passages.

## THE CONCORDANT VERSION

Of special interest is the UR produced, *Concordant Literal New Testament*, and the *Concordant Version Old Testament* (see Addenda A for fuller discussion of this version).

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Adolph Ernst Knoch began work on what became the Concordant Version. Knoch died in 1965, but his successors continued the work. Knoch and his associates formed the Concordant Publishing Concern, which publishes the Concordant Version.

Knoch correctly discerned that αἰών and αἰώνιος refer to indefinite time. He chose not to attempt the translation of the terms, but to transliterate them, as the KJV translators had done with the Greek term, βαπτίζω (coining the now familiar English term, *baptism*).<sup>40</sup> Thus, each time the term, αἰών, occurs, the CV reads, *eon*. The adjective, αἰώνιος, is rendered, *eonian*. This practice not only removed the difficulty of translating a difficult term, but it also produced a version that does not conflict with the UR eonian paradigm.

Many URs argue that the noun, αἰών, should be translated as, *age*. James Corm of the Concordant Publishing Concern argues that even though this correctly communicates the sense of the term in most instances, such a rendering causes problems because there are usages in which αἰών requires an understanding other than "*the epochal eons of Scripture*,"(emphasis in the original).<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, Corm argues, translating αἰών as *age*, presents a problem when rendering the adjective, αἰώνιος. If the sense of *age* is to be retained, this would result in awkward terms such as, *age-pertaining*, or *age-lasting*.

In the passages quoted above (from the NAS), the Concordant Version<sup>42</sup> reads, *the aeonian God, eonian life, eonian Kingdom, eonian Gospel*, etc.<sup>43</sup>

Transliterating rather than translating removes the problem for the translator, and forces the reader to decide what the terms mean in context. Whether or not this is a good practice is open to question, but if that is the process, how should the reader understand these terms? James Coram gives us the Concordant Publishing Concern's answer when the terms are applied to God.

“Finally, let us consider the phrase ‘the eonian [*aiōnion*] God,’ found in Romans 16:26. ‘The eonian God,’ speaks of the God of the eons, even as ‘the French language’ speaks of the language of France. He Who is the King of the eons

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<sup>40</sup> There is a great difference between the problem associated with translating βαπτίζω and the terms, αἰών and αἰώνιος. βαπτίζω clearly means to “immerse” or other English terms synonymous with immerse. The reason for transliterating the term was the theological storm that raged over whether to immerse or to sprinkle. The KJV translators avoided the conflict by choosing to not translate, but to transliterate – producing a new word for the English language.

<sup>41</sup> J. Coram, *Eon as Indefinite Duration*, Part One, page 1 (<http://www.concordant.org/exphtml/TheEons>)

<sup>42</sup> *Concordant Literal New Testament* and the *Concordant Version of the Old Testament*

<sup>43</sup> The same practice is followed in the Old Testament in the rendering of ml"A[

(Rev.15:3), is the eonian King. Similarly, as the supreme God of the eons, He is the eonian God. Even as God is the God of Israel, He is also the God of all the earth. And, even as He is the *eonian* God, He is also the God of all duration, whether past or future. The titles “the God of *Israel*” and “the *eonian* God,” do not confine the Deity to these relations; instead, such titles simply *speak of* such relations, drawing our attention to them accordingly.

The notion of ‘lastingness’ is neither expressed nor entailed in the Greek adjectival ending. *Aiōnion* (or *aiōnios*) no more means eon or ever-*lasting*, than *ouranion* (‘heavenly’) means heaven-*lasting*. Hence the rendering, as in the Authorized Version, “[ever]*lasting*,” is quite wrong.”<sup>44</sup>

The purpose of Coram’s argument is to deflect the assertion that the terms under question are used in Scripture with the meaning, “eternity,” or “eternal.” If it can be demonstrated that they are so used in reference to God, then that opens the possibility that they might be used in that sense in those passages in which they refer to the fate of the damned. So, let’s look at the argument that the use of these terms in reference to God should not be viewed as describing God as *eternal* or *everlasting*.

First, we must ask if there is Greek terminology that we could use to describe God as eternal. Indeed, there is. For example, one could employ the language used to describe Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:3

*Without father, without mother, without genealogy, **having neither beginning of days nor end of life**<sup>45</sup>, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually.*<sup>46</sup>

The *having neither beginning of days nor end of life God*, is one way in which God’s eternity could be expressed. In Greek, six words are used to make this statement (seven, if one includes the term, *God*). Who would want to use an expression like this every time he wanted to express God’s eternity, if there were another option.

What about the last term in Hebrews 7:3, rendered as *perpetually* in the NAS? The Greek uses three terms to make this statement, which literally says, *into the continuing* (or *perpetuity*). Not only is this an awkward expression, but it also presents only one aspect of eternity. It speaks of endlessness, but it says nothing about not having a beginning.

Is there a better solution? I believe that there is and it is by using the Greek term, αἰώνιος. Is there anything that forbids our using this term to refer to eternity? In discussing αἰών and עֲלֵיָּע and their use, James Coram writes,

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<sup>44</sup> James Coram, [www.concordant.org/expohtml/TheEons/eon2.html](http://www.concordant.org/expohtml/TheEons/eon2.html), *Eon as Indefinite Duration Part 2*, The Eonian God,

<sup>45</sup> μήτε ἀρχὴν ἡμερῶν μέτε ζωῆς τέλος ἔχων

<sup>46</sup> εἰς τὸ διηνεκές

“There does not seem to be anything in the word itself that would *definitely* preclude at least the possibility that it *could* be used in reference to an unending duration (since, after all, all the word says is, ‘duration’).<sup>47</sup>

Of course, Coram rejects the idea that the words ever are used to refer to unending duration, based on the research of another writer published by the Universalist establishment. Coram quotes John Wesley Hanson, a Universalist writer of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century,

I do not know of an instance in which any lexicographer has produced the usage of *ancient* classical Greek in evidence that *aion* means eternity. *Ancient classical Greek rejects it altogether* (by ‘ancient’ he means the Greek existing anterior to the days of the Seventy).<sup>48</sup>

The “Seventy” referring to the scribes that produced the Septuagint, did their work after 250 B.C. We have shown that Plato and Aristotle, in one way or the other, a century before the Seventy, in one case assigned and in the other case by inference allowed the concept of eternity to be associated with the term. Thus, we have to conclude that Universalist Hanson’s research is faulty.

Since an inductive study of the terms leads us to conclude that these terms imply indefinite time or indefinite duration, meaning that the end is not in view or cannot be known (whether the view is directed to the past or to the future) is this not a description of eternity? Of course, the URs would argue that *indefinite duration* inherently implies a point of termination, even though the specifics of that termination cannot be known. We must remember that the term, *duration*, is the URs chosen term to give understanding to the Greek words; It is not necessarily the correct term.

However, if we allow *duration* to be the underlying idea of these terms, I would argue that this does not necessarily imply a season that has an end. God’s αἰών, His duration (the period of His existence), is eternal (the duration is defined by the entity to which it refers). On this basis, αἰών and αἰώνιος appropriately could be used to describe God’s eternal existence – indefinite, the end is not in view, it cannot be known, because there is no end.

Two arguments from classical Greek might be made to justify the use of the term to communicate the idea of *eternal*. The first argument is patterned after Plato. Remember that Plato departed from the general use of the term, αἰών, and gave it a technical meaning in his writings. From the context in which he used the term, it is clear that he “accommodated” the term, αἰών, and used it to refer to timeless, ideal eternity, in which there are no days or months or years (see discussion above). Furthermore, according to some who have surveyed ancient literature, Plato seems to have coined the adjective, αἰώνιος, and used it to describe the “eternal image” of the αἰών (see the Plato *Timaeus* quote contained in footnote #22).<sup>49</sup> The writers of

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<sup>47</sup> James Coram, *op cit*

<sup>48</sup> John Wesley Hanson, *Aion-Aionios*, p 12; Chicago: Northwestern Universalist Publishing House, 1875, as quoted by James Coram, *op cit*.

<sup>49</sup> Coram quotes Hanson again, on this topic. Hanson, according to the Coram quote, stated that Ezra S. Goodwin “patiently and candidly traced this word through the Classics, finding the noun frequently in nearly all the writers, but not meeting the adjective until Plato, its [apparent] inventor, used.”

the New Testament did the same thing with various Greek terms. For example, *logos*, first was accommodated by the Gnostics; they used the term to refer to their secret knowledge. In his Gospel, which is a polemic against Gnostics, John accommodated the term from the Gnostics and gave it a Christological meaning. Did the writers of the New Testament follow Plato in giving the meaning, *eternity*, to the noun? If they did, then the adjective derived from the noun would be understood as *eternal*.

On the other hand, what if the writers of the New Testament chose to use the noun as classical writers generally used it (as exemplified by Aristotle i.e., the period of time allotted to each specific thing - for example, a man's lifetime is his αἰών). In that case, the adjective, αἰώνιος, would refer to something related to God's lifetime. I would argue that that since God has no beginning and no end, and that His αἰών therefore is eternal (without beginning and without ending), it is appropriate to translate the adjective, αἰώνιος, as, *eternal* when modifying *God, Father, Christ, Spirit*, or any other term specifying a member of the Godhead.<sup>50</sup> On this basis, I would contend that *Eternal Spirit* and *Eternal God* are appropriate. I also would argue that this traditional rendering conveys the idea that the passages in question seek to convey.

If we take at face value the Concordant Publishing Concern's claim that transliteration moves the burden of definition from the translator to the reader, and that this is a good thing, then I contend that the best understanding that the reader can have of these terms in reference to Divinity is *eternal*. The only reason to do otherwise is to make the language fit into the UR *eonian* paradigm.

## POLYPTONIC USE OF αἰών and αἰώνιος IN SCRIPTURE

Exaggeration to make a point is a common practice in most languages and understood as such when it is used. For example, when asked who was at a party, one might reply, "Oh, everyone was there." The meaning, of course, is that the party was well attended; the speaker did not mean that every person on the face of the earth attended the party. This is called *hyperbole*. It is not deceptive exaggeration. It is a well understood figure of speech.

Scripture often uses hyperbole to make a point. For example, in Genesis 22:17, we find God's promise to Abraham,

*indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.*

Using the figure of the stars of the heavens, which are beyond estimation (it is often stated that there are 100,000,000,000 stars in our own galaxy and that there are 1,000,000,000 other galaxies) plus the figure of the uncountable grains of sand on a beach, make the point that Abraham's descendents would be beyond number. Yahweh expressed this truth through an hyperbole, an exaggeration that everyone understands is not to be taken literally.

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<sup>50</sup> URs that reject the concept of the Trinity, would object to the term, *eternity*, in reference to Christ and the Holy Spirit, regardless of the terms used.

Related to the hyperbole is the *polyptoton*. A polyptoton is the repeating of a word for emphasis. In English, for example, one might say, “It was a big, big, mountain.” Scripture is replete with polyptotons. In the verse just quoted, Genesis 22:17, the Hebrew reads, *multiplying I will multiply*, and the NAS appropriately renders it, *I will greatly multiply*.

Another well known Old Testament polyptoton is *Holy of Holies*, which means, *Most Holy Place* (Exodus 26:33, *et al.*) One could say that polyptotons are as numerous in Scripture as the “sand which is upon the seashore.”

Αἰών frequently is used as a polyptoton to emphasize an incomprehensible length of time, most often (but not exclusively) in reference to God. Nine times in the New Testament this polyptoton is used in a doxology, ascribing glory, and other attributes to God, concluding with *amen*. Here are the instances in which this is true (because the English translation does not always reflect the polyptoton, we have highlighted the terms by which it is rendered).

- Galatians 1:5 *to whom be the glory **forevermore**. Amen.*
- Ephesians 3:21 *to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations **forever and ever**. Amen.*
- Philippians 4:20 *Now to our God and Father be the glory **forever and ever**. Amen.*
- 1 Timothy 1:17 *Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory **forever and ever**. Amen.*
- 2 Timothy 4:18 *The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory **forever and ever**. Amen.*
- Hebrews 13:21 *equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory **forever and ever**. Amen.*
- 1 Peter 4:11 *Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion **forever and ever**. Amen.*
- 1 Peter 5:11 *To Him be dominion **forever and ever**. Amen.* (only in the Scrivener/Beza Text)
- Revelation 1:6 *and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion **forever and ever**. Amen.*
- Revelation 7:12 *saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God **forever and ever**. Amen."*

In all of these passages, the Greek states, *into the ages of the ages* (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων), with the exception of Ephesians 3:21, which reads, *into all the generations of the age of the ages* (εἰς πάσας τὰς γενεὰς τοῦ αἰῶνος τῶν αἰώνων).

Note that the above quotes are from the pens of Paul, Peter, and John (and another writer, if one rejects the Pauline authorship of Hebrews), demonstrating how common was the practice of expressing incomprehensible time through the use of a polyptoton.

Here are other passages in which this polyptoton is used to describe God.

- Hebrews 1:8 *But of the Son He says, "Thy throne, O God, is **forever and ever**, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom."*
- Revelation 1:18 *and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive **forevermore**, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.*
- Revelation 4:9 *And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives **forever and ever**,*
- Revelation 4:10-11 *the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives **forever and ever**, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created."*
- Revelation 5:13 *And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, " To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion **forever and ever**."*
- Revelation 10:6 *and swore by Him who lives **forever and ever**, Who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there shall be delay no longer,*
- Revelation 11:15 *And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign **forever and ever**."*
- Revelation 15:7 *And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives **forever and ever**.*
- Revelation 22:5 *And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign **forever and ever**.*

As in the nine doxologies quoted earlier, the Greek in all of these passages is, *into the ages of the ages* (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων), with the exception of Hebrews 1:8, which reads, *into the age of the age* (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος).

The only basis by which one might argue that the polyptoton in the verses quoted does not refer to eternity, are those verses that speak of the Son's having dominion for eternity. This argument is based on I Corinthians 15: 24-28.

*then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all.*

URs argue that since the Son will surrender the Kingdom to God the Father, the polyptoton in the verses referring to the length of the Son's rule cannot mean eternity. This argument is an uncertain argument, however, when one exegetes the verses in question. In every controverted verse, with one exception, the passage can be understood to refer to God the Father, rather than to the Son, or to both of them together. The exception is Hebrews 1:8.

*But of the Son He says, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of his kingdom."*

Does the fact that the throne of the Son is forever and ever mean that he is not subject to the Father? Certainly not. For that matter, several of the verses quoted in Revelation speak of the Father and Son in shared glory.

Therefore, in these verses in which the αἰών polyptoton is used to describe Divinity – the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit – the concept of eternity is an appropriate understanding. *Forever and ever* is a good way to express this concept.

In addition to referring to Divinity, the αἰών polyptoton is used to describe the fate of the key players in Satan's realm, as well as the fate of those who accepted their rule. Here are the three uses of the polyptoton in reference to these entities:

- Those who worship the beast (Revelation 14:11)

*"And the smoke of their torment goes up **forever and ever**; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."*

- The great whore who corrupted the earth with her fornication (Revelation 19:2-3)

*"Because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her." And a second time they said, "Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up **forever and ever**."*

- The devil, the beast, and the false prophet (Revelation 20:10)

*And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night **forever and ever**.*

The terminology in these verses follows the common pattern noted above, *into the ages of the ages* (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων), except for Revelation 14:11, which reads, *into ages of ages* (εἰς αἰῶνας αἰώνων).

Since the polyptoton is used to describe the everlasting existence of Divinity, it is logical to assume that the use of the polyptoton in the verses describing the fate of Satan and his minions also refers to eternity. As an aside, note that there is no hint of ultimate reconciliation in any of these scenes.

## CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING THE GREEK TERMS

The preceding summary of the UR argument based upon Greek and Hebrew, demonstrates that the linguistic argument is not a simple matter. However, as the above pages have shown, the UR argument is not proven by their linguistic evidence. Since the Church throughout history, with the exception of isolated pockets, has held to the eternal existence of the redeemed in heaven and the eternal existence of the damned in hell, the burden of proof lies on the URs to prove their opposing view. Linguistically, they fail, unless one makes the assumptions upon which their doctrines rest. A doctrine based upon assumptions is not sound doctrine.

### A Final Assessment of Matthew 25:41-46

*Then He will also say to those on His left, "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the **eternal** fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me." Then they themselves also will answer, "Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?" Then He will answer them, "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me." These will go away into **eternal punishment**, but the righteous into **eternal life**.*

Since αἰώνιος is the term used to describe both the life of those on the right and the fire which is the fate of those on the left, we must choose from one of the following four options:

1. **Annihilation** – since what is said about the damned will be true as long as they exist, then as long as the damned live they will be in *ainonos fire*. At the close of the eons they will be annihilated. No Ultimate Reconciliationist would accept this view because they believe in restoration to God where all will live forever.
2. **Both the damned and the righteous will have a limited life, then it's all over.** No Ultimate Reconciliation advocate teaches anything like this. They teach that every being in the universe will live forever with God who becomes All in all.
3. **There will be a chain of eons and the eonian life that the believer enjoys is coexistent with the aeonian hell of the lost.** At the end of this aeon, all will be reconciled to Christ. Since this teaching is based on the eschatology of the Concordant Publishing Concern, and all Scripture is made to fit into that scheme, rather than a firm exegetical basis, this view is highly suspect.
4. **The damned will be forever in hell and the righteous will be forever in heaven.**

The last option is the one that the Church at large (in the historical section, we noted those who presented an aberrant view) has held from the beginning of Christianity. In my opinion the

Orthodox view (option 4) is the one that fits most comfortably with the entire corpus of Scripture.

## CONCLUSION

Ultimate Reconciliationists and Universalists seek to present a kinder Gospel. One certainly can empathize with their motives. However, the Gospel that they present is a drastic departure from the historic Gospel that has been proclaimed by the church at large from the apostolic era until the present.

***But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed.***

(Galatians 1:8)