

I don't want to leave the impression that Origen was the only early Christian thinker who held to the idea of universal salvation, that in the end, everyone gets saved. Very few (hardly any) would have agreed that the Devil too would get redeemed. But that all humans will eventually "make it" was an attractive view to others - even "orthodox" Christian thinkers.

Among scholars from the later church, the most famous theologian to countenance universal salvation was a self-confessed advocate of Origen, the late fourth-century Gregory of Nyssa (335-94 CE). In a dialogue called "On the Soul and the Resurrection," held with his own sister and fellow theologian Macrina the Younger, Gregory insists that suffering after death is not meant to be a punishment for sin, but as a way of driving evil out of the soul. His sister agrees, at some length. Moreover, she claims that when evil is finally driven out, it will disappear, since evil cannot exist outside of the will of a person. And when that happens, Macrina maintains, there will be a "complete annihilation of evil." When that happens God will be all and "in all." That is, all will be saved.

In many ways the most intriguing suggestions of eternal salvation come in one of the great narrative Gospels put in circulation sometime in the late fourth century, even though it may well have been based on traditions of earlier times. It is variously called ...

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