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THE PASTORSHIP OF FEAR, FAITHLESSNESS AND THE RETURN OF CHRISTIAN UNIVERSALISM IN 21ST CENTURY EUROPE: AN ANALYSIS OF NEW POLITICO-RELIGIOUS DYNAMICS

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Abstract: This article explores the contemporary resurgence of Christian Universalism in Europe, a doctrine historically marginalized in European theology but revitalized through transatlantic influence, particularly from the American religious context. Drawing on the development of universalist thought in the United States – where it gained traction amid growing disillusionment with traditional doctrines of eternal damnation, the democratization of biblical interpretation, and an increasing emphasis on inclusivity and reconciliation – the study investigates how these theological currents are reshaping European Christianity. Three central themes structure the analysis: (1) the impact of transatlantic influences and the American evolution of Christian universalism from the late 20th century onward; (2) the rise of a "pastorship of fear" in Europe, characterized by apocalyptic rhetoric, moral anxiety, and civilizational pessimism; and (3) the erosion of traditional eschatological doctrines and the parallel ascent of universalist theology, with a particular focus on the Catholic Church's shifting stance on LGBTQ+ inclusion and its implications for church – state dynamics. By situating these developments within broader sociopolitical and religious transformations, the article argues that Christian universalism is not merely a revived theological position, but a marker of a new religious epoch shaped by contemporary existential uncertainty, societal fragmentation, and a renewed yearning for universal salvation.

Key words: Christian Universalism, Transatlantic Influences, American Christianity, European Christianity.

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1. Introduction

Christian Universalism, a doctrine that holds for the final salvation of all souls, had early origins in European theology, sporadically advocated by isolated voices within patristic and reforming Christianity (Ramelli 2013). However, it was only in the modern era that the idea took deeper roots overseas, in the context of a religiously effervescent North America (Lazar 2022, 209). This phenomenon raises several important questions: how did this movement - marginalized for centuries in Europe - find fertile ground in the religious soil of the United States? What led American Christians, brought up in a theology often marked by soteriological dualism (salvation vs. damnation), to gradually embrace universalism? And what is the current impact of this concept in the architecture of American Christianity? How did universalism come to be embraced by Christian Europe in the 21st century? What ideological, political, and religious factors contributed to this development?

The answers can be found in the confluence of several factors: the democratization of access to the Bible and personal interpretation of the sacred text, disillusionment with traditional doctrines of eternal hell, but also the emergence of a religious culture increasingly oriented towards inclusiveness, empathy and universal reconciliation. In this context, Christian universalism has begun to shape not only the personal theology of many Americans, but also the institutional architecture of contemporary Christianity in America and Europe - influencing preaching, mission, interfaith relations, and even the social policies promoted by some churches.This article aims to analyze the dynamics through which Christian universalism is re-emerging in 21st century Europe, in a climate dominated by fear, theological uncertainty, and the failure of traditional pastoral models. At the same time, we examine how the American experience can offer valuable clues about the direction that European Christianity may take in the coming decades. This article also explores how three major themes intersect in the European religious present: (1) transatlantic influences and the form that Christian universalism has taken in the American context at the beginning of the 21st century; (2) the emergence of a "pastorship of fear" in Europe, often marked by apocalyptic themes, moral instability, and rhetorics of civilizational loss; and (3) the erosion of traditional eschatological doctrines and the concurrent rise of Christian universalism, focusing in particular on the Catholic Church's evolving position on LGBTQ+ issues and its broader political role in shaping church – state relations.

Through this analysis, the article aims to understand the extent to which the resurgence of Christian universalism is not just an isolated

theological phenomenon, but the expression of a new religious epoch in 21st century Europe, shaped by contemporary anxieties, world alienation and a deep desire for reconciliation and universal hope.

2. Universalism in the late 20th and early 21st centuries in the architecture of American Christianity

The 20th century has been labeled by contemporary theologians as the century of universalism par excellence (McClymond 2018, 38), and the impact of this theological vision can be seen today in the architecture of American Christianity, where Christian universalism took root, developed and came to maturity.

Christian Universalism arrived on American soil in 1774 through John Murray, an Irish-born preacher who founded the first Universalist community in Gloucester, Massachusetts (Richard 2010, 78). Twelve years later the commonwealth was granted tax freedom by a Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruling. Established as an official religious congregation in North America in 1790, Universalism was later renamed the Universalist Church of America in 1942. In 1961, it merged with the American Unitarian Association, giving rise to the Unitarian Universalist Association.

In the iconic words of John Murray: "Give them not hell, but hope" (Murray 1896), universalism captured its first followers and has continued to expand its fellowship not only in its universalist community, but throughout the United States. Today this church comprises "1,000 congregations, 161,000 adult members and 54,000 children" (McKanan 2013, 15). In reality, individuals who hold this belief – despite its contradiction with the Church's core teachings – are found across the United States.

At the beginning of the 21st century, this universalist ideal began to be more widely accepted within American Christianity, with a stronger emphasis on the acceptance and inclusion of all individuals, regardless of denominational, racial or cultural differences.

Although historically rejected by the Church and officially condemned as heresy at the Fifth Ecumenical Council, the concept of universalism has experienced a gradual resurgence. Since the 1960s, the idea of universal salvation has gained growing acceptance among Christian theologians, expanded into popular Christian literature during the 1990s, and more recently, has been reflected in mainstream film culture. Michael McClymond likens the sudden rise of universalism to a horizontally laid hockey stick with its blade sharply angled upward (McKnight 2018), illustrating how, after centuries of little to no support from the Church, there was an abrupt and significant surge in interest and endorsement of universalist ideas within a relatively short span of time.

The surge in support for universalism is closely linked to the current cultural context in which the church finds itself. What cultural factors are contributing to this shift? Sociologist James Davison Hunter provides an answer, noting as early as the 1980s the emergence of an "ethic of civility" among young American evangelicals. A central tenet of this ethic is to avoid offending others. Hunter noted that this mindset was already prevalent among younger evangelicals of that period - people who today are in their 50s and 60s and occupy important positions in Christian leadership. However, many New Testament teachings were deeply offensive to the original Gospel audiences - an example being the very idea of a "crucified Savior" (McKnight 2018).

Today's preachers often emphasize the personal benefits of following Christ but avoid addressing the consequences of rejecting the Gospel. This silence can unintentionally suggest that everyone is ultimately safe, with no real cost to unbelief. As a result, Christianity may seem demanding, while non-Christianity appears risk-free – leading some to view universalism as a logical, even inevitable, conclusion (McKnight 2018).

According to Hugh Rock, "God must be embraced by the new generation of religiously unaffiliated individuals" (Rock 2014, 4). That is, this God must be able to bridge the artificial conceptual divide between people who are religious and people who are not religious, between people who believe in God and people who do not believe in God. It advocates for the inclusion of all individuals, irrespective of their religious affiliation or belief, under the assurance of unconditional salvation (Lazăr 2024, 5).

In this paradigm, American Christian universalism excludes any practice of Christian asceticism, of any spiritual discipline, of practicing virtue (Lazăr 2025, 86). It centers on the intense craving to accumulate wealth as a means of building "a modern, secure, and prosperous earthly paradise through human effort. However, this pursuit only intensifies the tragedy of a personal hell and a widespread hell on a planetary scale" (Lemeni 2007, 224) in this way, all the fundamental values of society are transformed entirely – both at their core and in their parts – establishing the primacy of matter over spirit.

The misunderstood relationship between God's mercy and justice have urged believers to turn to universalism (Hronich 2023, 233), and this, in the apologetic interest of making "Christianity credible in a hostile world" (McClymond 2018, 1012). As American society became increasingly pluralistic and increasingly skeptical of religious exclusivism, the idea that God would eternally condemn one part of humanity became problematic for many believers. In this climate, universalism presented itself not just as a theological alternative, but as a pastoral and moral response to the crisis of credibility of traditional Christian doctrine. Influential works such as "The Inescapable Love of God" (Talbott 2014) and "Love Wins" (Bell 2011) provided an accessible and appealing argument for a wide audience,

helping to popularize the idea that divine love is ultimately irresistible and universally saving.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the religious architecture of American Christianity underwent significant transformations, reflecting changes in society and the theological and cultural evolution of Christianity in the United States under the influence of Christian universalism (Cornwall 2023, 253). Thus the religious architecture of the United States continues to change rapidly. Recent studies by the Pew Research Center reveal a profound and disturbing change in the religious structure of the American population. Long-term trends point to a steady decline in religiosity among adults in the United States, manifested in a decline in Christian affiliation and an increase in the proportion of those who say they are not religious. A key factor in this dynamic is "generational replacement": where older generations, characterized by a high degree of religiosity and Christian affiliation, are being replaced by younger generations with much lower levels of religious involvement. These new cohorts include a larger number of people who identify themselves as atheists, agnostics or who do not associate themselves with any particular religion.

Data from the most recent Religious Landscape Survey show that 62% of American adults now identify as Christian. This represents a decrease of 9% since 2014 and 16% since 2007. At the same time, the percentage of those who do not claim any religion has risen significantly: 29% in 2023-2024, compared to 23% in 2014 and 16% in 2007 (Pew Research Center. 2023).

This trend is evident across all age groups, with each birth cohort becoming progressively less religious as it ages – a phenomenon that runs counter to the assumption that religiosity increases with age.

The differences are much more pronounced when we analyze religious preferences by ideological orientation. Among self-described liberals, only 37% now identify as Christian. This represents a decrease from 62% in 2007, marking a 25-point decline. Conversely, 51% now identify as having no religion, compared to 27% in 2007 – an increase of 24 points. Thus, non-religious people now outnumber Christians among liberals, a clear reversal from nearly two decades ago Pew Research Center. 2023).

Alongside the decline in identity, there has been a significant erosion of religious practices and doctrinal beliefs even among those who still identify as religious (Pew Research Center 2023). The gap between active and nominal believers is especially noticeable:

- Only 20% of religious adults still say they believe in God as described in the Bible, compared to 82% of those who consider themselves very religious.
- Only 21% of the moderately religious pray daily, compared to 64% of the most devout.

• Attendance at weekly religious services has fallen sharply: only 2% of religious adults attend church weekly, compared to 36% of the highly religious.

Recent data indicates a steady and significant decline in religious identity and practice in the United States, visible across all age groups but especially among those with liberal orientations. This decline is not limited to nominal affiliation; it also reflects a deep erosion of doctrinal convictions and practical commitment, even among those who still consider themselves religious. The situation marks a major cultural and doctrinal shift, calling into question not only the future relevance of religious institutions in an increasingly pluralistic and individualistic society, but also the stability of the Church's traditional teachings.

To revive North American Christianity and support LGBTQ+ communities, Universalists have formed religious associations that promise salvation regardless of behavior, weakening the traditional evangelical message. These groups also push for full social inclusion and rights, including access to religious and ministerial roles. One example is the "Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA)", formed by the merger of the "American Unitarian Association" and the "Universalist Church of America" (Solinger, 2013). The UUA collaborates with interfaith and advocacy organizations like the Human Rights Campaign, Lambda Legal, the National LGBTQ+ Taskforce, and the ACLU.

All these associations have supported the Biden-Harris administration in promoting laws that allow minors to access gender-affirming surgeries without parental consent in states like Washington, Tennessee, and Texas. They also backed the landmark 2020 U.S. Supreme Court ruling protecting LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace (Riley, 2015).

The political involvement in these issues has led followers of traditional faiths to demand that their churches become more inclusive, even if such an attitude would mean changing long-standing dogmas. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center at the beginning of February, before Pope Francis's hospitalization, shows that most Catholics in the United States hold differing views on issues related to marriage and priesthood. Thus, 55% of Catholic men say they prefer the Church to be much more inclusive, compared to 43% who believe the Church should maintain its traditional teachings. Among women, the difference is greater: 64% prefer the Church to be more inclusive, while 32% believe the Church should adhere to its traditional teachings. According to six in ten Catholics, the Church should allow priests to offer blessings to same-sex couples. Additionally, one in two Catholics believes that the institution should officially recognize same-sex marriages (Tevington 2025).

3. The pastorship of fear in Europe at the beginning of the 21st century

As the 20th century drew to a close and the 21st century made its presence felt, the European Churches faced an increasingly evident crisis in the effectiveness of a traditional pastoral model, often based on appeals to fear - especially fear of hell, punishment and eternal damnation. This kind of discourse, often called "fear pastoring", had for centuries been a legitimate tool for reinforcing morality and religious conformity.

As early as the Restoration, ecclesiastical authorities – the papacy, bishops and theologians – introduced new specifications on the sufferings of hell and intensified the warnings addressed to the faithful. The whole theological formation was centered on this topic, reflecting a deep concern for eternal punishment. The pastoral exhortations of Father Pierre-Denis Boyer, the head of the school at Saint-Sulpice, reflected this strict perspective. He advised future priests not to fear the charge of rhetorical exaggeration when preaching about hell, for the sufferings of hell surpass any human imagination or words (Minois 1998, 302).

In the late modern period, preaching about hell intensified rhetorically, particularly within conservative Catholic and Protestant communities. Some priests, in an effort to uphold the Church's authority and enforce moral discipline, began to emphasize threats of eternal damnation. In certain cases, these warnings went beyond mere words; dramatic gestures – such as walking through the community with a coffin filled with bones – were employed to vividly illustrate the fate awaiting those who lived in sin. These practices aimed to instill fear and repentance, but they also reflected the growing tension between a doctrine of fear and a society undergoing profound transformation.

This atmosphere of spiritual terror reached its peak in the early 20th century, when sermons obsessively underscored the torment of the condemned soul. A revealing example from that time proclaims: "We must repeat these three words over and over again: remorse, despair, sorrow. Sorrow, despair, remorse! No pity, please, no childish pity, no tears! Do not give the condemned the sad consolation – if it can be called that – of mocking them, for by his deeds he alone accuses himself, he alone condemns himself, he alone punishes himself" (Minois 1998, 303).

This vision places absolute emphasis on individual responsibility and the complete absence of any post-mortem divine mercy. Hell is no longer merely an abstract place of punishment; it becomes a deeply personal, inevitable, and self-inflicted reality, where there is no room for compassion – neither divine nor human. In this way, hell-focused preaching not only inspired fear, but redefined the entire understanding of life, death, and moral accountability. It contributed to a form of religious control through fear, characteristic of an era marked by deep spiritual and identity crises.

By the early 20th century, priests were already encountering growing skepticism among believers regarding the existence of hell. One clergyman noted a clear shift in the attitude of parishioners, observing that they no longer displayed the same unquestioning faith: "Distrust has replaced Christian naivety. Though no more educated, they have become more critical – more pretentious, less trusting of those who guide them, and less inclined to accept their words at face value. It is no longer sufficient to simply present the truths of faith; now, these truths must be proven" (Minois 1998, 303).

More and more religious communities have begun to adopt a ministry centered on unconditional love, hope and trust in divine mercy - a trend that has often accompanied the rise of universalist ideas. Preaching no longer evokes hell literally, but rather spiritual unhappiness or existential suffering as symbolic forms of separation from God. Thus it is that Dean Farrar, the Westminster preacher, delivered a series of sermons in which he challenged the traditional doctrine of the Church in many of its aspects. At the center of this perspective was the idea of re-evaluating the notion of "eternity" in relation to hell's punishment. Farrar argued for the elimination of the eternal character of suffering in hell, suggesting that divine love and mercy are not compatible with endless damnation. His message generated wide discussion at that time, marking an important moment in the evolution of Christian conceptions of the last judgment (Powys 1992, 101).

This transformation of pastoral discourse reflects not only a strategic adaptation, but a fundamental shift in applied theology: from fear to companionship, from control to freedom, from condemnation to compassion.

James Packer claimed that universalism has thus become a "welcome guest" in more and more religious circles. The status of "discredited speculation" has in this century at least been transformed into an acceptable and welcome theological opinion (Parker 1973, 4). Bertrand Russell asserted that "there is a very serious defect to my mind as to the moral character of Christ, caused by the fact that He believes in hell, saying: I feel that no profoundly human person can believe in eternal punishment" (Bertrand Russell 2004, 13). A series of transformations in the mundane plane facilitated the opening of eschatological horizons in the 20th century. The penal reform movement of 1969 regarding the punishments meted out to defendants called into question the justness of some of the eternal torments preached by the Christian Church (Lewis 1987, 148). Endless torments seemed to serve no purpose and were at odds with divine love which, according to the biblical text, always awaits the return of the sinner (Mălin 2019, 15). John Ică is of the opinion that it is precisely the invocation of a punishing God and author of hell that is the main cause for the West's de-Christianization and atheism (Ică 2003, 13).

4. Universalism and the Church in Europe: Rethinking Hell, LGBTQ+ Inclusion, and Political Dynamics

According to a sociological survey carried out by Yves Lambert, starting at the beginning of the 20th century, in the province of Brittany, France - the area where he conducted his research - the fear of hell no longer exercised a significant influence on believers in the province. To relativize some people's residual fear, expressions began to circulate that were intended to diminish its impact, such as "No one has come back from there to tell us what it's like" or "If we go to hell, almost everyone will be there" (Minois 1998, 305). Eight decades later, Lambert notes an even sharper decline in this belief to the point of near extinction, reflected in frequent statements such as "Hell? We don't know if it still exists" or "Nowadays, people don't believe in hell" (Minois 1998, 305).

This trend is not an isolated phenomenon, but is also found in other Western European countries. In Germany, a survey published in Der Spiegel magazine shows a considerable decline in belief in the existence of hell. Whereas in 1967, 78% of Protestants denied this belief, by 1980 the percentage had risen to 83%. Among Roman Catholics, 47% said in 1967 that they did not believe in hell, but by 1980 the percentage had risen to 59%. The situation is similar in the Netherlands, where only 28% still believed in the existence of hell in 1968, and by 1981 the percentage had fallen to 15% (Minois 1998, 305).

These figures illustrate a profound shift in the European religious imagination, where the fear of eternal damnation no longer occupies a central place in people's spiritual experience.

This decline in belief in hell is often correlated with the rise of a form of Christian universalism, according to which salvation may ultimately be accessible to all, and eternal damnation is either metaphorical or incompatible with the image of a merciful God. In this context, hell is no longer perceived as an absolute reality, but as a relic of a theology of fear, gradually abandoned in favor of a more optimistic and inclusive vision of human destiny.

This trend raises many questions about the future of Christian theology and the role of eschatological punishment in contemporary spirituality. Will universalism continue to gain ground? Or will there be a reassessment of dogmatic traditions in new generations?

Today, we are witnessing a profound paradigm shift in religious discourse: the focus has shifted from a pastoralism based on fear and punishment to a theology centered on love, hope and divine reward. According to the Pew Research Center – a research institute that analyzes social trends, public opinion and religious dynamics globally – Western Europeans are more likely to believe that they have been rewarded by God than to believe they have been punished for their behavior. For example, in Spain, 41% of adults say they have been directly blessed by God, while

only 18% say they have experienced some form of divine punishment. (Pew Research Center 2018).

This reorientation is also reflected in the way people perceive God. Responses in the same survey, "Being Christian in Western Europe", illustrate a positive and close-up picture. A 67-year-old Spanish participant describes Him as follows: "For me, God is goodness. Goodness in the broadest sense of the word: good. And then, because I like family very much, I think he is a super-father. He is there when you need him, he will forgive you for what you do wrong, he will let you go free if you want, and he won't blame you at all. He will explain, and nothing more" (Pew Research Center 2018).

Throughout Europe, there is a notable decline in religious affiliation, with fewer adults identifying as Christian compared to those raised in the faith. In contrast, the proportion of people who do not identify with any religion is now much higher than those who were raised without a religious affiliation (either as atheists, agnostics or without a particular belief). For example, in Spain, only 5% of adults say they grew up without religion, but now 30% consider themselves to be religiously unaffiliated – an increase of 25%. Similar trends are also seen in other European countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, where the number of religiously unaffiliated has increased considerably. The differences are even more pronounced among those who identify as Christian: while 62% of American Christians give religion a central role, in Western Europe the average is only 14% among Christians in a total of 15 countries analyzed. Unaffiliated people continue to say that there is a God or some form of higher power, but this will not condemn them to the torments of hell, but will offer them happiness, because God cannot be anything but good (Pew Research Center 2018).

This testimony summarizes a growing vision: God is no longer seen as a harsh judge, but as an empathetic, liberating and understanding presence. Thus, in place of a theology of punishment, a "happy theology" seems to be emerging more and more clearly, one that responds to the emotional and spiritual needs of contemporary believers.

In response to the declining number of believers and followers of traditional faith, the Catholic Church seeks to redefine itself by engaging with contemporary cultural movements, particularly with the political challenges related to gender advanced in the public sphere through LGBTQ+ political activism (Woodard 2022). Out of this context, queer theology has emerged – not only to foster a sense of inclusion, but also to articulate a theology of liberation, wherein God is envisioned as the one who liberates the oppressed, namely sexual minorities (Mișcoiu et al. 2024, 110).

The Vatican has expressed concern regarding the inclusion of homosexual individuals within the Church, reflecting the evolving dynamics in the relationship between Church and state. On January 14, 2024, in an

interview for an Italian television program, Pope Francis stated: "This is not dogma, just my thought: I like to think of Hell as being empty. I hope it is" (Lazar 2024, 141). While in the 20th century it would have been unthinkable to claim that a person outside the Catholic Church could attain salvation, Pope Francis now expresses the belief that Hell might be empty. The discrepancy between the pontiff's universalist stance and the doctrinal convictions held by many contemporary Catholics highlights the broader influence of LGBTQ+ activism on theological and institutional discourse.

Pope Francis has also expressed support for civil unions as early as 2020, and beginning on December 18, 2023, he officially approved the blessing of same-sex civil unions, as well as the possibility for individuals in such unions to receive the Sacraments of the Church. The acceptance of homosexual individuals has become a defining feature of the liberal philosophy embraced by Western states. The legalization of same-sex marriage – not only as a policy with legal standing but also with growing religious significance – reflects the profound transformation in the recognition of LGBTQ+ civil rights within European democratic societies (Hassenstab 2024).

In the response of the "Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith" regarding the question of blessing same-sex couples, God's understanding love is once again emphasized: "God loves every person, and the Church does the same" (Responsum 2021) rejecting any form of unjust discrimination. The Catholic community is called to welcome homosexual individuals with respect and to find the most appropriate ways to include them, always keeping in mind the proclamation of the Gospel of love in its fullness.

Despite these tendencies toward legitimizing and blessing LGBTQ+ relationships, the Church has yet to make an official statement, to the disappointment of its members in Belgium, Germany and Austria. For example, a bishop from Belgium, John Bonny, publicly stated that he is ashamed of his Church (The Brussels Times, 2021). In Germany, over 2,600 pastors and believers signed a letter in support of same-sex individuals after seeing the delay in acknowledging this type of union.

At the initiative of pastors in Austria and with the support of the Austrian state, a reformist movement made up of over 350 priests and deacons, along with more than 3,000 laypeople, announced that they would continue to bless same-sex relationships in the name of love, now with state backing (Religion.orf.at 2021).

In the contemporary European context, the relationship between Church and state is undergoing a process of recalibration, as queer theory and queer identities are becoming increasingly visible outside traditional discourses on gender and sexuality, challenging the binary norms that have historically underpinned these relationships. In certain religious traditions, simultaneous affiliation with a faith community and a sexual

minority is deemed incompatible with access to clerical positions such as deacon, priest, or bishop (Kappler 2013). Although some contemporary denominations are attempting to formulate official institutional positions that support LGBTQ+ inclusion and affirm the acceptance of queer clergy, the internal realities of many religious organizations remain fraught with tension. Behind the scenes, these institutions often exert pressure on queer clergy, compelling them to conceal their gender identity or sexual orientation in order to avoid sanctions or marginalization (Keenan 2009).

The growing political and social influence of homosexual individuals on both secular and religious institutions that have traditionally opposed them highlights the perception and the reality of a shifting power dynamic (Woodard 2022). This development reflects not only the strengthening of the LGBTQ+ community's political presence, but also the tensions between Christian universalism – which, in principle, promises salvation for all – and the gradual decline in the relevance of traditional Church authority within a global context marked by the transition and waning influence of institutional Catholicism. A conquest that the West cannot renounce without losing its identity is the secularization of the state (Frunză 2015, 321), a principle that further complicates the Church's ability to assert moral authority in pluralistic democratic societies.

5. Conclusion

The resurgence of Christian universalism in 21st century Europe reflects more than a revival of a marginal theological tradition; it signals a deeper transformation within contemporary Christianity shaped by shifting cultural, political, and spiritual landscapes. While rooted in early patristic thought, universalism has found renewed vitality through its transatlantic development in the United States – where personal interpretation, skepticism toward eternal damnation, and a drive for inclusivity have fostered fertile ground for its spread. As this current flows back into Europe, it encounters a religious environment marked by theological insecurity, declining institutional authority, and the emergence of a "pastorship of fear" characterized by narratives of moral decline and civilizational anxiety.

This study has shown that the erosion of traditional eschatological doctrines and the simultaneous rise of universalist theology are not occurring in a vacuum. They intersect significantly with the Catholic Church's evolving stance on LGBTQ+ inclusion, pointing to a broader recalibration of church – state relations and ecclesiastical influence in liberal democratic contexts. Pope Francis's recent gestures – support for same-sex civil unions, openness to sacramental inclusion, and a theological softening of traditional eschatology – reflect an effort to redefine the Church's place in a pluralistic and often secular public sphere.

Ultimately, the return of Christian universalism speaks to a growing existential need: a desire for hope, reconciliation, and theological frameworks that respond to contemporary alienation and fragmentation. It challenges both religious institutions and secular societies to reimagine the boundaries of salvation, community, and moral authority in an era of profound change.

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