


Presuppositions of Balthasar's Universalist Hope and Maritain's Alternative Eschatological Proposal

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Abstract

Hans Urs von Balthasar and Jacques Maritain are both confronted by the apparent contradiction between the reality of damnation and the universal salvific will of God. While Balthasar's understanding of grace lends itself to universalism, Maritain's more harmonious perspective is able to avoid the pitfalls of which Balthasar is frequently criticized. Digging beneath the aporia that so plagued Balthasar, Maritain offers an innovative theory that seems to reconcile the divine will to be "all in all" and the enduring choice of some creatures to refuse God's grace. Thus, going beyond any problems with Balthasar's universalist hope, Maritain's proposal seems to represent a higher synthesis of diverse eschatological truths.

Keywords

Balthasar, eschatology, grace–freedom, grace–nature, hope, Maritain, predestinarianism, Sachs, theological anthropology, universalism

Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Was dürfen wir hoffen?*¹ ignited controversy in the Catholic theological world that still has not died, but perhaps few who have read it have also read his more elaborate, albeit in some respects less direct, treatment of the problem of the question of universal salvation in his *Theodramatik*:

1. *Was dürfen wir hoffen?* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1989); ET, *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"?* with "A Short Discourse on Hell," trans. David Kipp and Lothar Krauth (San

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Das Endspiel.² The two works together provide an insight into three key presuppositions of which he is more or less aware and which logically determine his conclusion that hell might very well be empty of human beings. The three point to long-standing areas of dispute in theology in which one must make fundamental decisions. If readers of these works understand this background, they are in a much better position to judge the validity of his conclusions. With these disputed questions in mind and the positions presupposed in Balthasar's treatment of the question of damnation, I propose that the much lesser-known speculative opinion of philosopher Jacques Maritain is a better way to approach the definitive reality of human freedom in relation to God's infinite love.

The problem of universal salvation versus actual damnation (in the case of human beings) is simply put thus: if God desires all persons to be saved (1 Tim 2:15), then does God get what God desires, rendering the prophecies of hell (e.g., Mt 25) mere warnings, or is God's will frustrated and the prophecies in fact revelatory of the eternal condemnation of some? Many exegetical and historical questions may arise at this point, but I limit myself to the speculative concerns. Balthasar evidently thinks that revelation is clearer on the topic of God's desire to save all than it is about the factual damnation of some,³ even though he concedes the necessity of the scriptural warnings about our real capacity to reject God's love definitively. Balthasar's entire argument indicates that he thinks revelation intimates a universal consummation that would seem incompatible with the damnation of any human being and that it obliges us to hope for the conversion of every soul, which itself is evidence of a concealed promise that the infinite sagacious power of God's grace may choose to persuade from within every finite freedom (at or before the existential "moment" of death) of God's unyielding love, which is personified in the crucified Christ who descends to the depths of hell and therein comes face-to-face with all sinfulness in purifying judgment.⁴

Leaving aside the "mechanics" of a universal conversion, about which revelation says nothing, Balthasar feels free to clear away a space for such speculative avenues

Francisco: Ignatius, 1988). The German pages cited for the latter work, *A Short Discourse on Hell*, which was a further response to criticism of his *Was dürfen wir hoffen?* (changed in English to *Dare We Hope*) are found in the latest edition, *Kleiner Diskurs über die Hölle, Apokatastasis* (Freiburg: Johannes, 2013), which also, like the English version, contains the text from another subsequent response concerning *apokatastasis*, originally published in *Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift* 97 (1988) 169–82.

2. When referencing Balthasar's works, I cite the English version, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 5, *The Final Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998) with TD V, and the pages of the German version (*Theodramatik*, Band IV: *Das Endspiel* [Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1983]) appears in parentheses preceded by the letter G. Likewise, the other volumes will appear in the same format (with no mention of the volume number for the corresponding German).
3. "We must frankly admit that a great number of passages really do speak of universal salvation" (TD V, 269 [G 244]).
4. Here the influence of Adrienne von Speyr is palpable, as in much of Balthasar's writing, especially his latest works. For her role in Balthasar's theology, see Johann Roten,

because while revelation is clear about the consummation of all things (“God will be all in all”) and even about God’s desire to convert each person,⁵ it does not link the two together; instead, some texts seem to assert the actual condemnation of some individuals; Balthasar designates these texts as “pre-Easter.”⁶ Hence, he does not claim that there is a clear revelation of universal salvation to which we must respond with faith, as indicative universalists do,⁷ but he seems to favor the position that there is a concealed promise of universal salvation to which we must respond with the theological virtue of hope. In the least, he says there is the promise that God desires universal salvation and that God’s will is always fulfilled, that is, if God truly wants it to be, and (according to Balthasar) God clearly does;⁸ in this way, we are left to draw our own conclusions, as it were.

Balthasar concludes that we must hope that all will be saved, and that it seems most likely that the consummation of all things would involve the fulfillment of such a will *because of his positions on three prior questions.*⁹ First, the obvious one: Does God really desire that all be saved (à la 1 Tm 2:15), or is there some other way to interpret the meaning of such a saying? Some argue for a restrictive view of God’s election precisely in order to be consistent with the other truth of metaphysics and revelation that God’s will is effectual (i.e., nothing created can obstruct the infinite power of

S.M., “The Two Halves of the Moon: Marian Anthropological Dimensions in the Common Mission of Adrienne von Speyr and Hans Urs von Balthasar,” in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Works*, ed. David Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011); Matthew Lewis Sutton, *Heaven Opens: The Trinitarian Mysticism of Adrienne von Speyr* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).

5. See Ezekiel 18:23 and Luke 15:7.

6. “All the Lord’s words that refer to the possibility of eternal perdition are pre-Easter words” (TD V, 279 [G 253]).

7. For the distinction between indicative and subjunctive universalism, see Michael Root, “The Hope of Eternal Life,” *Ecumenical Trends* 41 (2012) 100–103, at 100.

8. Romans 9:19; Esther 13: 9, 11; Isaiah 55:11; and Proverbs 21:1 are commonly cited as declaring that God’s will is always fulfilled. If God desires the salvation of all (1 Tm 2:4; Mt 18:14; 2 Pt 3:9; Ezek 18:23, 32; Wis 13:1), then how could anyone be condemned? Balthasar wants to say that if God truly desires all to be saved, then we can at least hope that God’s will is accomplished. But it is forgotten that, perhaps, even though God can be said genuinely to desire the conversion and salvation of each human being, God’s will may also contain other desires, such as that this salvation be accepted by creatures capable of nihilating the movements of grace—that is, on the condition that such free creatures do not will to refuse God’s love.

9. Some would argue, instead, that Balthasar merely wished to oppose claims to certainty like the Origenist *apokatastasis* “system” and the Augustinian opinion that revelation clearly indicates the condemnation of many. See, e.g., Jan Ambaum, “An Empty Hell? The Restoration of All Things? Balthasar’s Concept of Hope for Salvation,” *Communio* 18 (1991) 35–52; and Joseph Ratzinger, “Christlicher Universalismus: Zum Aufsatzwerk Hans Urs v. Balthasar,” *Hochland* 54 (1961) 68–76, at 74–75, which preceded publication of Balthasar’s most universalistic works. Even Ambaum concedes that “hope in the effective power of God’s grace, however, may even imply some doubt whether hell still

God).¹⁰ Entangled with this tradition is the distinction between the antecedent and consequent wills of God.¹¹ Some theologians say the latter is distinct from the former in its consideration of creation having been willed, some say in its consideration of the Fall, some say in its consideration of human sins altogether; and sub-schools of thought abound. Balthasar is very critical of setting up such a distinction of wills in God.¹² Hence, his answer to this question is that God does really will that all be saved. But it is not that simple. Augustine had not formulated the distinction, and so he had to interpret the text of 1 Timothy to mean that God desires persons of all sorts and nations to be saved, not literally every person.¹³ So-called “Thomists of the strict observance,” however, will say that with antecedent will God really desires that all be saved, but to manifest justice more fully God ultimately wills (before any foreknowledge of sin) that only some be saved (i.e., God’s “consequent will” is restrictive).¹⁴

This point leads to a further question: Does one understand predestination (and therefore the influence of grace on freedom) in terms of coordinate causality or subordinate causality? In other words, Aquinas (and Augustine) understood created causes as secondary causes participating in the prime causation of God, whereas Molina (in)famously thought it necessary to introduce the notion of “two men dragging a

makes sense” (36). While I do not explicitly address this point of contention here, it is clear that Ambaum is not merely advocating a charitable desire for all to be saved. I concur with Roch Kereszty who says, “I do agree with Balthasar that, since the Church prays for the salvation of all, we should all join in that prayer. And since the Church prays for all, we should hope for the salvation of all. My reservation regarding his position comes from the suspicion that the logic of his thought leads not just to hope, but to a (consciously denied but logically inescapable) certainty for the salvation of all” (“Response to Professor Scola,” *Communio* 18.2 [Summer 1991] 227–36, at 229–30). It is true that Balthasar frequently affirms in the penultimate volume of the *Theodramatik* the possibility of final refusal, but it becomes apparent in the final volume, *Das Endspiel*, that such “real possibility” functions as a mere “moment” in the theodrama of the finite–infinite freedom interplay, even if he resists systematization in favor of mere “hopefulness.” Kereszty raises a similar concern, pointing to comments in Balthasar’s *Theodramatik* III (“Response to Professor Scola” 230 n. 7). This interpretation is also corroborated by the final pages of the *Epilogue*; see *Epilogue*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004), trans. of *Epilogue* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1987).

10. See, e.g., Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination: The Meaning of Predestination in Scripture and the Church* (Rockford, IL: Tan, 1998) 206–11.
11. John Damascene is commonly known as the originator of this distinction (see *On the Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 2.29) combined with Augustine’s view of grace, but it takes on a distinct significance in the Thomist tradition.
12. See Balthasar, *Dare We Hope* 23–24 [G 19–20]; and 184–86 [G 31–33].
13. See *Enchiridion de fide, spe, et charitate: Liber unus* (PL 40) 27, 103.
14. See Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The One God: A Commentary on the First Part of St. Thomas’ Theological Summa*, trans. Bede Rose (St. Louis: Herder, 1954) 530–38. Steven A. Long is a contemporary proponent of this “neo-Bañezian” approach; see his “Providence, Freedom, and Natural Law,” *Nova et Vetera* (English ed.) 4 (2006) 557–606 (originally, “Providence, liberté, et loi naturelle,” *Revue thomiste* 102 [2002] 355–406).

boat” (as a metaphor) in order to preserve human freedom.¹⁵ If one accepts God as *ipsum esse* and therefore God’s universal causality permeates all finite causes, whether free or necessary, then all free good acts we perform are caused by God precisely as such; i.e., finite freedom is radically contingent upon the power of the supreme necessary being. If one thinks that God and man contribute different parts—even if unequal—of the free good act, where there is an ever-so-miniscule aspect of the act that only the free creature can contribute for the act to be truly her own, then one posits something coming from the creature that does not come to her from the Creator, and the two freedoms are thereby to some degree placed alongside each other. Balthasar appears to be on the side of the Augustinians and Thomists in this debate, and, in my view, rightly so.¹⁶ But when one does not accept the distinction between antecedent and consequent wills in God, ensuing universalism is almost inevitable¹⁷—hence why Thomists like Jacques Maritain, Bernard Lonergan, and William Most, building on the interpretative work of Francisco Marin-Sola, use the distinction in a way that does not contradict the universal salvific will of God.¹⁸

The third question pertains to the now hotly contested nature–grace debate. Insofar as it is relevant to my purpose here, the question goes as follows: What is the relationship between the natural desire to see God and the theological virtue of hope in an intellectual being created with a graced nature destined for communion with God? Balthasar fundamentally accepts Henri de Lubac’s thesis that God’s infinite love cannot help but freely imprint upon the very nature of the intellectual creature a desire for the beatific vision that is innate and unconditional.¹⁹ Although one may discern differences in their

15. See Luis de Molina, *Concordia liberi arbitrii cum gratiae donis, divina praescientia, providentia, praedestinatione et reprobatione ad nonnullos primae partis divi Thomae articulos* 2.26.15.

16. See, e.g., Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 3, *The Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993) 35 [G 32]; *Epilogue* 73–74 [G 56]; Balthasar, *Dare We Hope* 209–10 [G 57–58]; and Gerard O’Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Cambridge University, 2007) 160–61.

17. See Thomas Joseph White, O.P., “Von Balthasar and Journet on the Universal Possibility of Salvation and the Twofold Will of God,” *Nova et Vetera* (English ed.) 4 (2006) 633–66, at 646; Richard Schenk, O.P., “The Epoché of Factual Damnation? On the Costs of Bracketing Out the Likelihood of Final Loss,” *Logos* 1.3 (1997) 122–54, at 132–33.

18. See Michael Torre, “Francisco Marin-Sola, OP, and the Origin of Jacques Maritain’s Doctrine on God’s Permission of Evil,” *Nova et Vetera* (English ed.) 4 (2006) 55–94; and my “The Integrity of Nature in the Grace–Freedom Dynamic: Lonergan’s Critique of Bañezian Thomism,” *Theological Studies* 75 (2014) 537–63, at 552–62. Some Thomists prefer to suspend judgment on the question of how God’s infinite love and the definitive refusal of grace by men may be reconciled without contradicting the universal causality of divine providence; see Matthew Levering, *Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths* (New York: Oxford University, 2011).

19. See especially, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 2, *The Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990) 314 [G 286]; and *Theologik*, vol. 2, *Wahrheit Gottes* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1985)

respective treatments of the details of such natural desire, Balthasar and de Lubac agree that man in fact would be deprived of something concomitant to his spiritual being if he were not fundamentally orientated to this vision.²⁰ Such a position renders the possibility of hell all the more grievous since the nonattainment of the beatific vision would entail not only frustration of the supernatural dimension of man's existence, but also the failure of the very nature God created as intrinsically ordained to the desire for supernatural bliss. On the other hand, if one maintains the possibility of a final happiness that is inferior to supernatural vision and proportionate to human nature, the integrity of nature may be maintained even in the case of definitive condemnation.²¹ The aspect of this question on which I will focus is the relationship between natural human desires and the theological virtue of hope as an essentially supernatural reality.

I will leave aside the first and second presuppositions in order to elaborate on the third. But instead of getting bogged down in the complexities of how precisely the relationship between nature and grace ought to be understood,²² I will argue both that

88–90. See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), trans. Joseph Fessio, S.J., and Michael M. Waldstein. Nonetheless, at certain points he appears to sympathize with Karl Rahner's thesis of supernatural existential, integrating it with de Lubac's thesis (see *TD IV*, 138, 165–66 [G 126, 151–52]). He seems to hold both that man is naturally open to the supernatural and that God instills in nature an orientation that is properly supernatural.

20. John Milbank discerns a difference between de Lubac and Balthasar on the grace–nature issue, but he practically reduces Balthasar's thought on the subject to Barth's; see *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005) 66–67. Barth's influence in this regard is also palpable, although he states that “by denying the fact that created freedom necessarily involves a decision in favor of God and of itself, Barth contradicts the basic thesis of de Lubac's *Surnaturel* (1946)” (*TD V*, 207 [G 186]). For Balthasar's Christocentric approach to the nature–grace relationship and its implications with regard to the autonomy of philosophy within Christian wisdom, see Angelo Scola, “Nature and Grace in Hans Urs von Balthasar,” *Communio* 18 (1991) 207–26.
21. I will consider the potential concomitance of condemnation and natural happiness when I discuss Maritain's eschatological proposal (in place of *apokatastasis*).
22. Concerning Maritain's position on the matter, see René Mougel, “The Position of Jacques Maritain Regarding *Surnaturel*: The Sin of the Angel, or ‘Spirit and Liberty,’” in *Surnaturel: A Controversy at the Heart of Twentieth-Century Thomistic Thought*, ed. Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P. (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia, 2009) 59–83. While I think Mougel is right to point to indications in Maritain of a position more nuanced than the typical neo-Thomist, there is certainly not sufficient data to support the inference that his understanding of the grace–nature relationship is in line with de Lubac's, especially considering his continuous speculations on limbo, which bespeak a position more akin to Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange's. Nonetheless, Balthasar and Maritain both oppose (along with Henri de Lubac) the idea that developed in the commentator tradition that the angels could have been created in a naturally impeccable state, although Balthasar does not acknowledge Maritain on this issue: see *TD III*, 480–82 [G 441–42]; Jacques Maritain, *The Sin of the Angel: An Essay on a Re-Interpretation of Some Thomistic Positions*, trans. William L. Rossner, S.J. (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1959).

Balthasar's treatment of universal hope is problematic and that Maritain's alternative eschatological proposal is a more coherent resolution to the problems that accompany the fundamental presuppositions of Balthasar's perspective on the prospect of universal salvation.²³

Desire, Hope, and *Caritas*

Universal hope, or the desire for universal salvation, Balthasar discerns, is both a sign and cause of salvation for all, if God were in fact to accept the pleas of the saints. Whether or not the unanimous prayer of the saints is for the salvation of all indiscriminately is a topic that would require additional investigation. What is pertinent here is precisely the argument that such desire indicates the real possibility of universal conversion (and hence its inevitable actuality, given the divine salvific will). For Balthasar, the fact exemplified in the mystics that the Christian is driven in prayer to hope for the salvation of all is a sign of a deep reality in human nature, namely, the structural orientation of the intellectual creature toward the beatific vision. The conversion of all as belonging objectively to the Redeemer's body, which is abandoned to hell precisely for our sake, would be brought about at least in part by the very hope for all that is expressed in prayer and is reflective of the radical interconnectedness of the human community.

Balthasar reflects on the connection between grace-filled vicarious suffering and the firm hopefulness that such charity can affect those presently untouched by grace.²⁴ His loyalty to de Lubac's thesis on the natural desire for the beatific vision causes a conflation of the properly supernatural essence of theological hope and the elements of natural hope integrated into Christian hope. Balthasar notes a distinction in Aquinas between natural love and *caritas* that should have sparked in his mind the necessity to draw a similar distinction in regard to hope. Distancing Aquinas from Augustine's position, which is to restrict "theological hope to the hoping subject, so that one cannot hope on the part of others and their salvation," he cites Aquinas saying, "Thus, where there is this unity of love with another, it is possible to envisage and hope for something on the other person's behalf, just as on one's own behalf."²⁵ Balthasar comments, "It must be borne in mind, however, that the love referred to here is supernatural *caritas*, and [Thomas] is speaking only of particular close individuals: for Thomas, on the basis of his eschatology, there can be no question of hoping for the salvation of

23. Conspicuously missing, one might think, is Balthasar's doctrine of the descent. I do not treat it as a presupposition of his subjunctive universalism both because I do not think it necessitates such a view and because it is an explicit point used throughout his work, not a supposition in need of greater explication. For a nuanced defense of Balthasar on this point against contemporary critique, particularly Alyssa L. Pitstick, *Light in Darkness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007). See my "Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Redemptive Descent," *Pro Ecclesia* 22 (2013) 167–88.

24. See, e.g., *TD* IV, 412–13 [G 385–86].

25. *ST* 2–2, q. 17, a. 3; see *TD* V, 317 [G 289].

all.”²⁶ Apparently conceding that Aquinas would not agree with his conclusion, Balthasar seems to make no argument for why the founding of this “hope for something on the other person’s behalf” upon supernatural charity makes the former properly or intrinsically theological/supernatural.²⁷

In *Dare We Hope*, Balthasar’s basic argument appears in a variant form. Balthasar sets the stage with Augustine’s assertion in the *Enchiridion* that whereas faith extends to things good and bad as well as things past, present, and future, hope is limited to what is good and future for the person affected by them.²⁸ In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Aquinas is the first to overcome such a restriction, “[circumventing] the problem by allowing certainty (*certitudo*) to theological hope, which, however, can deceive ‘*ex aliquo accidentale impedimento* [from some accidental obstacle]’ (meaning when merits or steadfastness are lacking), so that ‘here below, the fear of separation [from God] is bound up with the hope’ (3 d 26 q 2 a 4, ad 2 and 4).”²⁹ His interpretation of this passage seems to be that the certainty of theological hope, which can extend to the salvation of others (i.e., everyone), does not therefore necessitate doctrinal universalism since obstacles can always cause a “falling away” from perseverance in grace. The problem is that when it comes to others, there is no basis for thinking *caritas* exists there in the first place, which is necessary for hope to be theological and therefore certain, even if the latter quality must be qualified by the concomitant existence of a filial fear of separation (also an effect of grace). Therefore, when he goes on to argue that Aquinas “tears to shreds a veil that had been hanging for centuries over Christian hope” because when hope is considered in unison with love (which, he notes, the Marietti edition says may be natural), “it is the same virtue of hope through which one” desires eternal salvation “for oneself and for the other.”³⁰ True, it is an expression of love to hope for the salvation of others, but it is important to stipulate that such a desire is not necessarily efficacious. In fact, since Aquinas obviously thought it was a datum of revelation that some men were condemned, he certainly would not have allowed for an indiscriminate hope for all in the sense for which Balthasar is arguing.

Balthasar soon thereafter, in a slightly different context, unwittingly cites a passage in which Aquinas distinguishes between desire and hope: “Man can, namely, also have desire for things that he does not believe he can attain; but hope cannot exist in such circumstances.”³¹ We often experience in life the desire to pray for particular things we think may be good for us, and many times we may in fact be right, but if these things are not supernatural goods, they are not the object of supernatural hope. There may

26. *TD V*, 317 [G 289].

27. On the theological character of Balthasar’s hope, see Margaret Turek, “Dare We Hope ‘That All Men Be Saved’ (1 Tm 2:4)? On von Balthasar’s Trinitarian Grounds for Christian Hope,” *Logos* 1.3 (1997) 92–121, at 101–3.

28. See *PL* 40, 235; cited in Balthasar, *Dare We Hope* 73 [G 59].

29. Balthasar, *Dare We Hope* 74 n. 2 [G 60 n. 2]; all parentheses are original.

30. *ST* 2–2, q. 17, a. 3, cited in *Dare We Hope* 75 [G 60–61].

31. Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae* 7, cited in *Dare We Hope* 76 [G 61].

also be things we think are supernatural goods without our being entirely certain of such a conviction, and for that reason also we “leave them in the hands of God.” Balthasar sometimes appears to argue that the salvation of all is one of these supernatural goods about which we cannot have the certainty of revelation.³² It is a step too far, though, to suggest that because there appears to be a lacuna in revelation about whether some are definitively condemned (which itself can be disputed), the existence itself of the spiritual darkness granted the mystics is a reason to have certainty in such hope for the salvation of all. The primary argument of *Dare We Hope* is precisely that because it is good for us to desire out of love the salvation of all, we ought in fact to hope for the salvation of all, and this indicates in an anticipatory way the fate of humanity in God’s mysterious design.³³ This “argument from hope” in fact says too much: if we have a theological hope for the salvation of all, then there must be a promise in revelation that salvation will be granted to all, if one understands hope as a response to a revealed promise. Balthasar does not want to draw such a conclusion explicitly, but it is inevitably implicit if one fails to draw the distinction between the theological virtue of hope and hope that is merely natural (or “human”). If Balthasar wanted to argue, instead, that we must have a natural hope that all be saved, there would be no weight in the conclusion that perhaps hell is empty, as there is no need for correspondence between our human hopes and supernatural realities.³⁴

Balthasar does not consider the possibility that in prayer we may bring to God conditional desires that belong to the natural love for humankind, such as the hope that no one would reject one’s own ultimate good. Just as we ought to hope that no one definitively rejects divine mercy, we ought to hope that no evil be performed by anyone. As the latter hope obviously is not fulfilled, it is equally possible that the former will not be. There is little or no grounds for thinking these desires belong to a theologically certain hope (i.e., as a supernatural response to revealed promise). But this kind of parsing is evidently repugnant to Balthasar and is therefore matched with sarcasm and dismissal.³⁵

He does mention “the Scholastic distinction between hope understood as a human possibility, as *spes communis* (a *passio animae* that can actually rise to the level of *virtus*) and hope as a theological virtue, which is a pure gift of grace that comes to us from the divine mercy,”³⁶ but his understanding of the former is fuzzy at best. He continues:

Augustine himself drew the same distinction between the *spes de terrenis* found in the world and the hope that he describes as “praesumentium de coelestibus, quae promisit non mendax

32. See *Dare We Hope*, 36–38 n. 3 [G 30–31 n. 3].

33. See *ibid.* 36–38 n. 3, 53–55 n. 10, 74–75, 87 [G 30–31 n. 3, 43–44 n. 10, 59–60, 71].

34. Hence, Ralph Martin argues that Balthasar uses the word “hope” equivocally: see *Will Many Be Saved? What Vatican II Actually Teaches and Its Implications for the New Evangelization* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012) 174. See also Kevin L. Flannery, S.J. “How to Think about Hell,” *New Blackfriars* 72 (1991) 469–81.

35. See, for example, *Dare We Hope* 184–86 [G 31–34].

36. *TD V*, 175 [G 155].

Deus.” . . . Hope looks forward primarily to the highest good, God himself, our ultimate aim, and secondarily to the acquisition of graces that help us attain this final goal. . . . Christian hope, theological hope, goes beyond this world, but it does not pass it by: rather, it takes the world with it on its way to God. . . . Hope must never be individualistic: it must always be social.³⁷

It is invalid to conclude from the incorporation of earthly goods into Christian hope as means to the end (of eternal beatitude) that therefore theological hope includes universal salvation in its object. Balthasar's arguments seem to want to imply such a conclusion.

In fact, Joseph Ratzinger, an Augustinian confidant of Balthasar, takes issue with an aspect of his treatment of hope. In his article “On Hope,” in the section entitled “Faith as Hope,” Ratzinger discusses the dependence of hope as response to divine promise upon faith as its “hypostasis.” Appealing to Josef Pieper, whom the two greatly respect, Ratzinger comments on Balthasar's argument: “[Pieper] rejects all anticipating as contradicting hope. While there does exist a manner of anticipating which is incompatible with hope, there is also an attentive gift without which even hope is impossible. For the Christian this attentive gift is faith.”³⁸ While the solidarity of all in the economy of salvation is a recurrent theme in Ratzinger,³⁹ he concludes his essay on hope with the following insight from Pieper: “The one who prays, says Josef Pieper, ‘keeps himself open to a gift which he does not know; and even if what he has specifically asked for is not given him, he remains certain, however, that his prayer has not been in vain.’”⁴⁰

Thus, we may fervently pray the beautiful petition given the children of Fatima by the Blessed Virgin, “O my Jesus . . . lead all souls to heaven, especially those in most need of thy mercy,” all the while knowing that some are most likely condemned. The desire for universal salvation is a legitimate human hope that is integrated even into the Church's eucharistic liturgy.

But that desire cannot be designated as properly theological since doing so would actually presuppose faith in something not revealed (and therefore not suitably grounding supernatural response to a divine promise), namely, that all human beings will in the end turn toward divine mercy and accept God's salvation. The conviction that revelation indicates the condemnation of some does not inhibit the believer from possessing a human hopefulness that he might be wrong and that everyone may convert in the end. But it is only supernatural hope (*theological* hope, in the strictest sense) that “does not disappoint” (Rom 5:5). To “hope against hope” (Rom 4:18) is not to hope theologically for something that is not contained in revelation (whether explicitly or

37. *TD* V, 175–76 [G 155–56].

38. Joseph Ratzinger, “On Hope,” in *Joseph Ratzinger in Communion*, vol. 2, *Anthropology and Culture*, ed. David L. Schindler and Nicholas J. Healy (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013) 34 n. 10.

39. As Pope Benedict XVI, Ratzinger reiterates, “Our hope is always essentially also hope for others” (*Spe salvi* no. 46, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/spesalvi_en.htm). All URLs cited herein were accessed June 19, 2015.

40. Ratzinger, “On Hope” 41.

implicitly) or perhaps even contrary to it. Hence the supernatural character of this hope is simply asserted, not demonstrated.

Apparently taking issue with the distinction between natural and supernatural elements in Christian hope, Margaret Turek, on the basis of texts in the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, argues against Leo Scheffczyk that the theological virtue of hope need not be essentially constituted by a supernatural response to a promise in divine revelation:⁴¹

Is it necessary for us to follow Scheffczyk in confining the scope of theological hope to the certitude attendant upon God's promises? Evidently not, if we examine the notion of supernatural hope as presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Especially noteworthy is a passage which, though it begins by affirming the elements that are central to Scheffczyk's conception, concludes nonetheless by declaring that *supernatural* hope can be directed to the salvation of all: ". . . In *hope*, the Church prays for 'all men to be saved'" (1 Tim 2:4).⁴²

Although the text quoted from the *Catechism* is in the section on the theological virtue of hope, the conditional character of such hope is highlighted in the initial sentence of the same paragraph: "We can therefore hope in the glory of heaven promised by God to those who love him and do his will."⁴³ Christian hope integrates natural hopes since grace builds on and perfects nature, but the certainty that accrues to divine promise does not pertain to all objects of Christian hope both because some are inevitably contingent and because the very promise of eternal life is conditional—conditioned by the absence of final resistance in the free creature.

Thus, the Church prays for many good things that may never come about (e.g., world peace). She is obliged by the virtue of charity to hope for all good to be bestowed upon all people at the Lord's discretion. But properly *theological* hope, in the strictest sense, responds to an article of faith about what is beyond;⁴⁴ in other words, the *ultimate* object of Christian hope is precisely what God promises. The question is whether Scripture or tradition warrants a confident hope in universal salvation as a coming reality consequent on God's own infinite love and power. But it is an article of faith that the conversion of all sinners is not guaranteed (i.e., revelation does not promise to persuade

41. The director of her dissertation on Balthasar, Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn, was the chief drafter of the *Catechism* under the direction of the then-prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. Defending Balthasar against Scheffczyk, Margaret Turek and John Sachs mention Ratzinger only parenthetically. See John R. Sachs, S.J., "Current Eschatology: Universal Salvation and the Problem of Hell," *Theological Studies* 52 (1991) 227–54, at 242 n. 66. The article by Scheffczyk cited by both is entitled "Apokatastasis: Faszination und Aporie," *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift* 14 (1985) 34–46. For Turek's summary of Scheffczyk's argument, see her "Dare We Hope" 101–2.

42. Turek, "Dare We Hope" 102, emphasis added.

43. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (hereafter CCC) no. 1821.

44. Prayerful petitions concerning needs in the present life pertain to Christian hope as secondary objects subordinate to eternal beatitude as *the* object of theological hope.

all freedom to yield to grace); hence, the hope for universal salvation is not at all certain precisely because God leaves us the radical freedom to refuse every grace.⁴⁵

Turek then turns to the real issue:

Scheffczyk, it seems to us, considers theological hope primarily within [this] context . . . : insofar as human freedom chooses to believe and live by love, it can rely on the promise of heaven. Hope for another is permissible in virtue of the free assent he or she renders to divine grace. The dramatic encounter between infinite divine freedom and finite human freedom is thus viewed with the spotlight cast on the creature's self-disposing: given that God does not promise universal salvation, it is the role of human freedom that appears ultimately determinative of the scope to Christian hope. Von Balthasar, however, . . . will . . . cast the spotlight in the other direction—toward the role that infinite freedom plays in the encounter. It then becomes a matter of illuminating how the work of infinite divine freedom *vis-à-vis* finite human freedom can be ultimately conducive of an outcome in which all may be saved, without disallowing human freedom the possibility of a final “No” to God.⁴⁶

If the intrinsic efficacy of grace were to trump created freedom, then Balthasar would be right “to see the prospect of universal salvation” ultimately in terms of divine omnipotence rather than the capacity of men to resist God's grace to the end.⁴⁷ However, God purposely created free creatures with the power to negate his resistible motions (or frustrate his antecedent will), and although God is certainly powerful enough to overcome such nihilations, God's salvific will does not contradict his creative will.

Perhaps there is a way in which universal hope, founded on faith in God's infinite love, wisdom, and power, may be fulfilled in a way so far unforeseen, certainly in a mysterious economy beyond the reach of theological speculation in this life, but nevertheless approachable in an apophatic manner.

Maritain Answers the Balthasarian Dilemma

Having looked at the presuppositions operative in Balthasar's approach to eschatology, there remains the question, Is there an option available that is better than both Balthasar's proposal and the “traditional” views that he rejects? Whatever the reason may have been for Balthasar's deficient understanding of grace and predestination, it certainly caused him an unnecessary dichotomy: either the all-benevolent God chooses to convert all by the power of divine grace and wisdom, or God's desire for all to be saved is frustrated by mere creatures. Balthasar rejects out of hand the setting up of distinctions in the divine will, but it seems to me that the basis for this rejection is not

45. For the differences between Balthasar's and Ratzinger's approaches to the seriousness with which God takes human freedom confronted with the possibility of condemnation, see my “Damnation and the Trinity in Ratzinger and Balthasar,” *Logos* 18.3 (2015) 123–50.

46. Turek, “Dare We Hope” 103–4.

47. Turek states that the CCC “see[s] the prospect of universal salvation as resting primarily with the will and the power of God rather than with human freedom” (“Dare We Hope” 102). The truth of such a claim depends on how one construes “primarily” here.

so much opposition to the making of distinctions with regard to how the divine being is to be understood as it is opposition to a restrictive view of election. The latter view, shared in different ways by both Molinists and Bañezians, is precisely that God “frustrates” the divine will to save all, even if the two schools have different reasons for why, according to revelation, God does such a thing. Neither approach offers a coherent reason for Balthasar to think God in the end may have reason to will that not all are saved, and from this discontent flow Balthasar’s forced exegetical maneuvers, claiming an aporia in Scripture on the matter and dividing the competing texts into pre- and post-Easter proclamations.⁴⁸

Had Balthasar attended to Maritain’s theory, based on Thomistic texts,⁴⁹ of how God’s will relates to evil acts, he may have been able to escape the apparent Molinist–Bañezian aporia that undergirded his claim to an aporia in the biblical texts,⁵⁰ which he clearly recruited to support his theological speculations and not the foundation on which he builds a theology. Although a more adequate understanding of predestination could have prevented Balthasar’s universalism,⁵¹ one may accept Maritain’s alternative proposal for how God may be “all in all” without accepting his pioneering reflections on the relationship between human freedom and divine grace.⁵² In fact, one could argue that Maritain’s theory of predestination and grace was not fully developed until 1966, although he had begun to formulate its foundations in 1942, while what I call his theory of “final limbo” was apparently first formulated in 1939, although the “conjectural essay” in which it appears was revised in 1961 and the text was still being augmented as late as 1972.⁵³

48. Balthasar himself seems reluctant to commit fully to this thesis (see *Dare We Hope* 29–30 [G 24]).

49. Aquinas’s writings also supply a competing set of texts. Apparently Aquinas felt the need at times to side with Augustine’s interpretation of Romans, despite his own understanding of finite freedom (see, e.g., *De malo* q. 1, a. 3). Probably the best exegesis of Aquinas’s texts appears in Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Aquinas*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 1, ed. Frederick E. Crowe, S.J., and Robert M. Doran, S.J. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2000). For Maritain’s interpretation see his *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil*, Aquinas Lecture (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1942).

50. Concerning the Bañezian–Molinist divide, see Robert Joseph Matava, *Divine Causality and Human Free Choice: Domingo Bañez and the Controversy ‘De Auxiliis’* (Boston: Brill, forthcoming).

51. For a critique of Balthasar’s implicit theology of the grace–freedom dynamic, see my “The Possibility of Refusal: Grace and Freedom in Balthasar,” *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 21 (2014) forthcoming.

52. See especially his *Dieu et la permission du mal* (Paris: Desclee de Brouwer, 1963), ET, *God and the Permission of Evil* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1966); and chap. 4 of his *Court traite de l’existence et de l’existant* (Paris: Paul Hartmann, 1947), ET, *Existence and the Existent* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1948).

53. Jacques Maritain, “Beginning with a Reverie,” in *Untrammelled Approaches*, Collected Works of Jacques Maritain 20 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1997) 3–26.

Since Maritain was not a theologian by profession, although his philosophical keenness and familiarity with Aquinas's writings gave him an upper hand on many a theologian, he does not entertain exegesis of the texts of Scripture even in the capacity of adding force to his argument, but he presupposes and builds upon a particular understanding of the relationship between grace and nature that today would be called "neo-Thomist." Of course, one need not agree with the particularities of such a view of grace and nature to entertain the theory Maritain proposes as a possibility.⁵⁴ It is certainly necessary to hold with him and Aquinas the *possibility* of a limbo, but it is not necessary to accept their belief that limbo is *in fact* the destination of children who die before baptism.⁵⁵

Fundamentally, Maritain's hypothesis is that after the final judgment each of the damned may at some point be "pardoned" by God in such a way as to receive a flow of natural love for God. This would induce a certain "natural felicity" that in effect counteracts the subjective severity of both the pain of loss and the pain of sense; the pain of sense is transformed, but the pain of loss remains intact, even though it is in a way "covered over" by a newfound gratitude for the enjoyment granted of growing in knowledge of God as author of nature. Therefore the damned remain in hell, strictly speaking, but are transferred from a lower to a higher region, as it were. Maritain is not proposing a form of *apokatastasis*, if by that term one intends the heresy according to which the damned are eventually saved.⁵⁶ For the damned he holds only a restoration of nature, not of grace:

The editor's footnote to the subtitle "Eschatological Ideas" reads, "Privately circulated. Thirty mimeographed copies were made in April 1939, and again in October 1961" (3 n. 1). The only addition in 1972 explicitly noted is a long footnote in the middle of the essay that is primarily concerned with the limbo of unbaptized children after the resurrection (see 14–15 n. 15). For a list of relevant letters on hell and limbo, see Charles Journet and Jacques Maritain, *Journet-Maritain: Correspondance*, vol. 2, 1930–1939 (Paris: Saint-Paul, 1997) 932–34.

54. Although Maritain's clear distinction between grace and nature is welcomed, some of his language may not display a sufficiently unified vision of grace and nature in man. Lonergan does not succumb to the lack of precision with respect to the grace–nature problematic that pervades de Lubac's otherwise laudable efforts to combat a tendency among some neo-Thomists (whether Bañezian or Suarezian) to estrange the natural and supernatural from each other. J. Michael Stebbins (*The Divine Initiative: Grace, World-Order, and Human Freedom in the Early Writings of Bernard Lonergan* [Toronto: University of Toronto, 1995] 78–79) reports that Lonergan acknowledges the relative autonomy of the realm of natural knowledge and love in the context of the supernatural virtues, thanks to the "theorem of the supernatural." Regarding Lonergan's balance with regard to this question, see my "The Integrity of Nature in the Grace–Freedom Dynamic" 546–52.
55. Regarding the magisterium's current stance on the question of limbo for unbaptized infants, see the International Theological Commission's "The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die without Being Baptized" (2007), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070419_un-baptised-infants_en.html.
56. Hence, Schenk does not do Maritain's proposal justice in describing it as a return to *apokatastasis*, amid exoneration of Edith Stein from the position Balthasar takes up in *Dare We*

They missed the end for which Love destined them. To have been miraculously restored, and put in possession of the simple end of their nature, gives them a truer feeling, though without torment or revolt, of what they have lost. And for similar reasons it can be said that, spiritually, the pain of sense also continues for them (in an analogical sense, but all the more real because, even though they suffered by means of fire, it was above all spiritually that their soul [*sic*] suffered). The evil which they remember having done will no longer gnaw at them through fire but will continue to afflict them by the thought that they have not made up for that evil and that they have cut themselves off by their own accord from the order of the goods of grace, from the perfect accomplishment of the designs of the Father; never will they live by the life of the Lamb, never will they know “the delicious taste of the Holy Spirit,” never will they be filled with charity—and all this through their own fault. Nevertheless to this very sorrow which crowns, without diminishing it, their happiness at seeing the order of nature fully accomplished in them, they give their full consent; they know it is just, it dignifies them, and they thank God for it.⁵⁷

Following Augustine and Aquinas, Maritain accepts some sort of sensible fire constitutive of the pain of sense for the damned;⁵⁸ the consummation of all things would involve the remittance of this pain, which would produce a certain gratitude (an effect of the natural love to which the damned are miraculously “converted”); but they will feel remorse for the evil deeds that contributed to their definitive rejection of God’s grace, even if it will be compensated by the natural joys God’s mercy granted them.

Maritain explains how this manifestation of divine justice and mercy takes effect after the final judgment:

And so, through the prayers of the saints . . . a damned soul is . . . restored to the norm of nature, not of grace or of glory. Those who remain in the fire only rage and blaspheme and despair all the more at the departure of their companion. For they do not believe in divine mercy, which for them is nothing but hypocrisy. And they do not want to be made good by a miracle; such an idea exasperates them. And now, let this miracle be renewed at intervals of time as great as one would wish; since eternity exhausts all time, it will inevitably come about that at a certain moment the lower regions of Hades will be completely emptied. If such is the case, Lucifer doubtless will be the last one changed. For a time he will be alone in the abyss and will think himself the only one condemned to endless torments, and his pride will know no bounds. But of him also there will be prayers, there will be cries. And in the end he too will be restored to good, in the order of pure nature, brought back in spite of himself to the natural love of God, borne miraculously into that Limbo whose night glitters with stars. There he will once more assume his office of prince—still damned, in regard to glory; loved once again, in regard to nature. He remains fallen forever, forever humiliated, for he had been created in the state of grace and is now reduced solely to the goodness of his nature. He contemplates the infinite abyss which separates these two states. He

Hope: “If, on the one hand, greater caution should be employed in listing E. Stein under the witnesses to a new obligation of apocatastastic hope, then, on the other, the name of Jacques Maritain could well be added to the list of admirable Christians who have in fact entertained the possibility of *apocatastasis*; cf. his ‘Idées Eschatologiques,’ in Jacques and Raissa Maritain, *Oeuvres complètes* XIII (Fribourg/Paris 1993) 445–78, especially 469 sq.” (Schenk, “Factual Damnation” 150–51 n. 35).

57. Maritain, “Beginning with a Reverie” 23.

58. See *ibid.* 10 n. 11; and *ST*, Suppl. q. 70, a. 3, and q. 97, a. 5.

bears for all eternity the scars of his wounds; for he remembers what he has lost, and what he now loves. Humiliated for all time, he is humble now.⁵⁹

Maritain points out that this miraculous restoration would be brought about only indirectly by the blood of Christ—it is more properly said to be the effect of the prayers of the saints. But the miracle of restoration to the good of nature, that is, the natural knowledge and consequent enjoyment of God as author of one's being (whether rational animal or pure spirit), can be directly caused by God only in concession to the petitions of the *communio sanctorum*:

And why could their prayer not be granted? Why could not the answer to the excess of their love be the excess of a miracle—a miracle of goodness in justice itself? God can make a man out of a stone; He can change bread into the Body of Jesus Christ. It is no more difficult *by a miracle* to change the will of a man or an angel, to raise up and rectify in its inmost being a will that is dead and confirmed in evil. It is by virtue of the order of nature that the will of the damned is fixed in evil in an absolute and immutable manner. A miracle, and a miracle alone, can change this. I mean leaving them in Hades, and simply transferring them from the abyss to the summits of an eternal Hell. . . . Pierced to its very center, the will, confirmed till then in evil, *is turned about* miraculously, as toward the true end of all nature, toward God the author of nature, toward the God it loved and detested at one and the same time.⁶⁰

The case Maritain wants to make seems to be this: (1) It is a law of nature that the final decision of a spiritual creature hardens into a static reality of eternal consequence. (2) But God is not bound by such ontological regularity. (3) Therefore, it is possible that God might respond to the prayers of the elect for the conversion of all by suspending such a law at some point, allowing those who have been eternally deprived of grace by their final refusal of salvation an everlasting opportunity to embrace the love of God that is natural to one's being. The possibility of embracing such natural love will in time be realized by every condemned being through the divine power naturally operative in the inevitable actualization of a created potency, given infinite time. It is not clear why rejection of grace is not itself reversible by a miracle or what the implications would be for the nature–grace relationship if creatures eternally deprived of grace were capable of regaining a proper relationship to their natural love for God (by a miraculous contravention of the ordinary rules of being).⁶¹ Nevertheless, Maritain is merely attempting to shed light on precisely how the church's intercessions (triumphant and militant)⁶² may be efficacious as the instrument through which God's glory becomes universally manifest in the new creation.⁶³ He writes:

59. Maritain, "Beginning with a Reverie" 22–23.

60. *Ibid.* 21.

61. Maritain does not clarify how natural love is affected by loss of grace.

62. The question of whether the church purgative can offer intercessory prayers would take us far afield, but an affirmative answer would seem alien to the Thomistic understanding of *satispassio* in recompense for one's own sins. See, e.g., *ST* 2–2, q. 83, a. 11, ad 3.

63. God's glory would be made more manifest if it becomes more evidently present in all the realities of the new creation, but such "expansion" of divine glory does not necessitate elevation of all to the order of glory.

How could our love, this love which He has given us, be content to see God hated endlessly, and endlessly blasphemed by beings who have issued from His hands, to see crime endlessly added to crime? And among these damned there are some whom we have loved, there are some whom we still love, as much as St. Paul loved his race, for which he wished to be anathema. No, we shall not cease, we shall continue to pray and to cry out through the Blood of the Savior. . . . I ask simply: Is it not *possible* that it [this transfer from abyss to Limbo] take place—if *God wills it* (and who dare to impose limits on Him)? And are we not permitted to hope for this?⁶⁴

Maritain's answer to my first doubt would be something like this: while God could will that all the damned be restored to grace (or, better yet, that there be no "final" rejection of grace), God respects the freedom given to refuse full vision of divine glory;⁶⁵ yet God could still have a "surprise" in store for the mitigation of the pains of the damned. If the damned are granted a "natural felicity," God can truly be said to be "all in all" because "in this way all the degrees of being will find their fulfillment."⁶⁶ In other words, it seems a most fitting reflection of divine justice and mercy, above all, for the hierarchy of creation in the end to include a hell that is not full of unquenchable pains. The irrevocable penalties of the pain of loss and the remorse for having excluded oneself from glorious communion with God seem severe enough. Divine mercy may compensate for these just penalties by providing the natural joys that accompany natural love for God as the author of one's being. Hence, the Thomistic notion of the order of creation as a whole being the supreme good for which all its parts are ordained is maintained (but negative reprobation is not included as integral to such a design), and Aquinas's famous position that the damned "are not punished . . . as much as they deserve" is elaborated.⁶⁷

Challenges to Maritain's Proposal

The principal problem concerning Maritain's proposal, according to some, is its apparent conflict with magisterial teaching regarding the everlasting character of hellfire.⁶⁸ Some might say that Maritain's moves to circumvent this conflict are acrobatic. Part of the problem, though, is whether the biblical notion of an unquenchable fire could permit for an end to the pain of sense. Even though much of the tradition advocates a literal

64. Maritain, "Beginning with a Reverie" 20, 22.

65. It is hard to imagine a different rational basis (as opposed to 'revealed' basis) for the Church's rejection of *apokatastasis* than this one.

66. Maritain, "Beginning with a Reverie" 16.

67. See *ibid.* 20.

68. See, e.g., the following Denzinger numbers (Ignatius edition, 2012): 72, 76, 212, 338, 342, 442–43, 485–86, 574–75, 630, 780, 801, 839, 2626, 4168 [LG 48], 4657; see also *CCC* nos. 1034–35. Finally, Paul VI's *motu proprio Solemni hac liturgia* (Credo of the People of God) (June 30, 1968) states: "He ascended to heaven, and He will come again, this time in glory, to judge the living and the dead: each according to his merits—those who have responded to the love and piety of God going to eternal life, those who have refused them to the end going to the fire that is not extinguished" (http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19680630_credoen.html).

interpretation of the “fire” of hell, there is also room for metaphorical interpretation. Is not the pain of everlasting loss a sufficiently just “fire” inflicted on those who refuse the order of glory? It seems there is a certain justice to suffering in the body for evils performed in the body, but is there not a more reasonable proposal for the fulfillment of justice than the quasi-mythological view that spirits are imprisoned in some mysterious manner by a corporeal fire? And would it contradict divine justice for divine mercy to relent in regard to the pain of sense, thus tempering the eternal effects of God’s righteous anger?⁶⁹ Such questions would take us outside the parameters of the present article, but raising the questions themselves in a critical manner should give rise to a more profound reflection on the “chief punishment of hell,” namely, the *poena damni*.⁷⁰ Perhaps the most incisive reference in Scripture to the hellfire speaks of a “worm that does not die,”⁷¹ which is almost universally understood to be the “worm of conscience.” Maritain maintains that regret of excluding themselves from the order of glory will persist in the damned even as they grow in natural happiness after having been delivered by divine mercy from the pain of sense consequent to the resurrection.

Avery Dulles criticizes Maritain’s proposal as incongruent with the biblical texts about condemnation at the final judgment,⁷² presumably on the grounds that the scene involves reference to an unquenchable fire, but a close reading of the essay reveals that this objection is escaped as well. Not only is a “spiritualized” pain of sense, the remorse of those admitted to “final limbo,” posited as everlasting, but “[a]fter the resurrection of the body, the damned will suffer in their bodies as well”⁷³ and the corporeal fire from which they are eventually released itself remains forever.⁷⁴ While it seems odd that a corporeal fire would exist forever in the new creation and equally perplexing to ask about the location of bodies eternally burning in the new creation (on the “new earth”),⁷⁵ these considerations originate from the Augustinian speculation that the pain of sense consists in some mystical fire that attaches to souls and then to spiritual bodies.⁷⁶

69. See Jonah 3:9; Micah 7:18; Psalm 103:9.

70. See CCC no. 1035.

71. See Mark 9:48.

72. See Cardinal Avery Dulles, “The Population of Hell,” *First Things* (May 2003), <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2003/05/the-population-of-hell>. But for criticism of Balthasar’s reading of Maximus, see Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002) 201–2 n. 96. Not only does Maximus the Confessor anticipate Maritain’s theory, but John Chrysostom also offers some support for it when, according to Daley, he “urges his listeners to continue the traditional practice of praying for the dead. . . . Even if the dead person whom we mourn is damned, he observes, ‘it is possible—it is, if we wish it—that his punishment will be lightened. If we make constant prayer for him, if we give alms, then even if he is unworthy, God will listen to us’” (*Hope of the Early Church* 108).

73. Maritain, “Beginning with a Reverie” 19.

74. *Ibid.* 22.

75. I might recall here Ratzinger’s quandary: “a heaven above an earth which is hell would be no heaven at all” (*Eschatology* 188 [G 194]).

76. See Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 21 [PL 41] 3.1–4.4; 10.1–10.2.

Dulles also charges that there is no basis in tradition for Maritain's theory. On the contrary, Balthasar himself, propounding practically the same idea, cites Maximus the Confessor's interpretation of Gregory of Nyssa:

The third meaning [of *apokatastasis*] is used by Gregory especially in reference to the qualities of the soul that had been corrupted by sin and then are restored to their original state. Just as all nature will regain, at the expected time, its completeness in the flesh [at the resurrection], so also will the powers of the soul, by necessity, shed all imprints of evil clinging to them; and this after aeons have elapsed, after a long time of being driven about without rest [*stasis*]. And so in the end they reach God, who is without limitations [*peras*]. Thus they are restored to their original state [*apokatastenaî*] through their knowledge [of God], but do not participate in [God's] gifts.⁷⁷

Balthasar, indeed, adds the paraphrase, "Maximus has Gregory say, they will only come to enjoy the knowledge of God, not his gracious gifts, that is, eternal happiness."⁷⁸ Likewise, I would interpret the line, "in the end they reach God," to be referring to God as the author of nature (i.e., the Creator God, not God's trinitarian life). It was perhaps not until Maritain, though, that this proposal was clearly distinguished from the Origenist *apokatastasis*, as the final state of the damned is not salvation, but a lesser form of being without supernatural grace (alone proportionate to the order of glory).⁷⁹

Moreover, Maritain's many considerations in his essay regarding limbo and unbaptized children need not be accepted for the core of his proposal to work. Citing several times Aquinas's position that the children in limbo are not aware of the beatific vision of which they are deprived, even though their happiness is incomplete, Maritain draws a qualitative distinction between the limbo of children and the limbo of those who finally refused the life of *caritas*, according to the diversity of experience and knowledge present in each.⁸⁰ What seems common to both experiences of limbo—although Maritain does not make this point explicit—is that "the natural love which accompanies [natural knowledge of God] will also increase without end, in its own order."⁸¹ Given that "in all their activity as damned souls, they still show those ontological gifts and energies of which as creatures they could not be deprived unless they ceased to exist," there is already a basic structure in which the condemned may receive natural knowledge and love of God. The miracle would seem to consist, above all, in the

77. *Questiones et dubia* 13, PG 90, 796AC (emphasis added) cited in Balthasar, *Dare We Hope* 245–46 n. 21 [G 93 n. 36].

78. Balthasar, *Dare We Hope* 245 [G 93].

79. Thus, Balthasar still counts Maximus among the Fathers who purportedly support the notion of universal salvation (see *Dare We Hope* 63–64 [G 51]). But Balthasar's reading of Maximus has been challenged by patristic scholars, as Balthasar himself notes (see *Dare We Hope* 64 n. 38 [G 51–52 n. 38]); see also Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*. As far as I know, Maritain does not reference Maximus.

80. See esp. 23–24, 15–16, and 14 n. 15.

81. Maritain, "Beginning with a Reverie" 15.

cessation of the perpetual conflict between the natural love for God as author of one's being, which must persist in the damned, and the hatred for God as author of grace, which results from final refusal of divine grace. Maritain's hope seems to be that such a hatred for divine mercy will be obliterated by an injection of natural love sufficient to bring about a gratitude for God as author of nature. Consequently, Maritain's hope is that the damned eventually receive an ever-increasing speculative knowledge of the divine being, producing a delight that will compensate for the pain of loss and counteract the memory of one's self-exclusion from the order of grace.⁸²

Concluding Reflections

Balthasar is met with the apparent aporia of conflicting biblical texts, where some seem to imply universal salvation, and others seem to indicate the eternal condemnation of some. His approach is to undermine the latter strand of texts and so elevate the former as to appear inevitable that all will accept God's love before the particular judgment.⁸³ Balthasar's understanding of the relationship between finite and infinite freedom and his rejection of any restrictive view of election enable him to develop a theory of Christ's descent into hell, wherein the Trinity itself is the exemplar equally of suffering as of joy, and the death of Christ is conceived of as an event that permeates all time. The saints are therefore inspired both to participate in Christ's own condemnation and to offer their entire being for the conversion of all sinners. Such a gesture of *caritas* indicates a hope that must be intrinsic to every Christian life, namely, that no one perish, since God "desires that all men be saved" (1 Tim 2:4).

Maritain, on the other hand, does not succumb to the false choice set up by Balthasar between a divine will that is efficacious and therefore saves everyone and a drama in which salvation history is a tragedy with no return, a descent without ascent, a play in which finite freedom conquers the infinite. While Balthasar derides the setting up of distinctions in God's will as proper only to a system that displays too much certainty in the outcome of final judgment, Maritain offers a theory that reconciles the "universalist" and "reprobative" strands of biblical revelation. He proposes that perhaps all the condemned, humans and angels alike, are "pardoned" at some point after the final judgment and are thereby restored to a state in which created nature is in harmony with its natural love for God. Although Maritain presupposes the existence of a *limbus puerorum*, which he nevertheless distinguishes from that other ("natural") state for which all the damned

82. Nevertheless Maritain would need to confront Aquinas's argument in *Summa contra gentiles* 4 "that after death the souls of the wicked have a will unchangeable in evil" (chap. 93) because "the change of a will, furthermore, from sin to good takes place only by the grace of God, as what was said in Book III makes clear [chap. 157]. But, just as the souls of the good are admitted to a perfect sharing in the divine goodness, so the souls of the damned are entirely excluded from grace. Therefore, they will not be able to change their will for the better" (chap. 93.4, <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/ContraGentiles4.htm>).

83. Since Balthasar does not admit the possibility of postmortem conversion (see *TD* V, 297 [G 270]; *Dare We Hope* 182 [G 29]) and yet some persons appear not to repent before their physical death, it would seem necessary to hold that death is not metaphysically definitive until the moment of judgment. But it is not opportune to speculate here at further length regarding such a notion.

are destined (I have called it “final limbo”), the essence of his conjecture is that God’s will to be “all in all” is fulfilled by an eternal hell that eventually functions in a way similar to the classical notion of limbo. Accordingly, divine justice and mercy are most manifest by an influx of natural love granted those who have eternally excluded themselves from the order of grace (and consequently that of glory), resulting in an ever-increasing natural knowledge and love of God. But the efficacious “pardon” that brings about such a state, issued in response to the unceasing pleas of the saints, does not produce in them greater internal strife because, by a miracle of God’s mercy in the order of nature, pardon is freely accepted. The eternal pain of loss and even the pain of remembering their own unbreakable will to exclude themselves from the order of grace and glory is “covered over,” as it were, by the natural joys of increasing in natural knowledge and love of God as author of nature, accompanied by the gratitude consequent on being mercifully liberated from the corporeal fire that previously constituted their pain of sense. In this conception, the damned are said to be transported, as it were, each in their own time, from the depths of the “second death” to the upper regions of hell.⁸⁴

Hence, Maritain agrees with Balthasar on the first theological question, the universal salvific will of God. He has a nuanced Thomistic understanding of the second question (concerning predestination), blazing a pathway of his own in the realm of predestination theory that now claims an increasing number of adherents.⁸⁵ His position on the third issue of the relationship between nature and grace is very different from Balthasar’s Lubacian approach. While I do not think acceptance of Maritain’s theory requires agreement with him on the actual existence of a limbo for unbaptized infants (i.e., that some persons are “ordered” to a merely natural end),⁸⁶ one must at least accept a clear distinction between the orders of nature and grace in order to entertain his conjecture of a restoration of damned natures consisting in a felicity inferior to that of heaven. I think anyone who would concede the abstract possibility of a limbo could grant Maritain’s proposal a hearing. One who says God could not grant men natural joys to compensate for the pain of loss, or that there can be no limbic realm of hell, might resort to other ways of conceiving how divine mercy might punish the damned less than they deserve.⁸⁷

84. Interestingly enough, Maritain, without explicitly linking this act of mercy to the descent of Christ into hell, speculates that the soul of Christ may have suffered the malediction of the Father (in the lower regions of hell) in the form of an abandonment incurred on the Cross for the salvation of all. He ponders whether we might ask whether Christ’s soul experienced the definitive refusal of God’s love by some (see “Beginning with a Reverie” 11 n. 13).

85. See Levering, *Predestination* 155 n. 96.

86. There is a distinction between being “ordered” and being “called.” Accordingly, all are called to the supernatural end of knowing and loving God as author of grace, but until the grace of baptism (whether of water, desire, or blood) is effected in the soul, the person is not constitutionally oriented toward such a supernatural end (i.e., “ordered”). Hence, only actions performed by those actually in the order of grace can have supernatural value, and only the natural virtues intended for all are accessible to those who have not been “ordered” to the supernatural end.

87. Kevin Flannery, not a Lubacian, points to Balthasar’s reflections on time in hell, building on a couple of comments of Aquinas that refer to eternal death as “complete withdrawal to

Granting Balthasar's first presupposition and here leaving aside consideration of the second presupposition, I have focused on the third presupposition as it relates to his and Maritain's eschatological proposals. A coherent position on the question of the natural desire for the beatific vision is integral to an adequate theological anthropology and the anthropological dimension of the question becomes properly theological when considering the virtue of theological hope (as a response to the promise of salvation). While Balthasar's treatment of the natural desire may be more nuanced than de Lubac's, a thesis that is not detailed here, it is clear that fundamental agreement with de Lubac's interpretation of Aquinas exacerbates Balthasar's consternation with the doctrine of eternal damnation. If desiring perfect union with the God of grace and infinite glory belongs to the very structure of rational creatures, then damnation is all the more dramatic a tragedy. It makes sense for someone who possesses such an understanding of the *desiderium naturale ad videndum Dei* (natural desire to see God) to argue from the good of universal hope for the "infinite improbability" of divine freedom opting not to fulfill such supernatural yearning (a theoretical possibility, nonetheless). Instead of arguing at length for a particular understanding of the grace–nature relationship via the precise nature of the "natural desire," I have engaged Balthasar's argumentation regarding the virtue of hope itself, as it relates to the so-called problem of hell and/or the possibility of universal salvation.

As it turns out, Balthasar does not explore all the options for dissolving the great dichotomies in which he finds himself. Maritain presents another way than subjunctive universalism to resolve the aporias that plague Balthasar. Instead of operating on the premise that the natural desire to see God is innate/structural and absolute/unconditional, he relies on a hard distinction between nature and grace without entering into the question of the precise relationship between the intellect's propensity to seek the highest causes and the will's determination on the part of the goods proposed to it via the intellect.⁸⁸ While Maritain could have tried to work out the complex relationship

the point of shriveling into a disconsolate immovable now" (Balthasar, *Dare We Hope* 133; see Flannery, "How to Think about Hell" 475). Flannery later seems to suggest that the idea may have originated in a note Newman appended to his *An Essay in Aid of Grammar of Assent* (New York: Longmans, 1930, new impression): "[Regarding 'Note III' of *Grammar of Assent*, 1930 edition 501–503], it is, to my mind, a legitimate use of the notion that the eternity of hell might shrink to a 'disconsolate immovable now.' But again, the notion that the hypothetically condemned might be taken out of hell could play no part in such a theory" (481 n. 25). His latter qualification would not exclude Maritain's theory, even if some assert otherwise (see Schenk, "Factual Damnation" 150–51 n. 35). But in this terse description intended by Newman as "a way of mitigating the objections to the notions of eternal damnation" ("How to Think about Hell" 481 n. 25), I am reminded of the quip, "when hell freezes over," which is often intended to convey the message "never," but may in fact point to a deep anthropological hope.

88. Here I am alluding to the debate that later circulated around Lawrence Feingold's naturally necessitated elicited act of conditional desire for the vision of God, on which I cannot here comment. See Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God according to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia, 2010) 186, 218, 261–69, for example.

between grace and nature in more precise detail, it is not necessary to grasp fully this problematic in order to realize that there are other ways in which universal hope may be both inspired and fulfilled by God.

Instead of arguing on the basis of Maritain's or Balthasar's respective conceptions of divine grace and human freedom, I limit myself here primarily to comparing Balthasar's universalist hope as one way to approach the nettlesome aporia with the fundamentally distinct way in which Maritain attempted to answer such unresolved questions in the tradition. If one takes the Lubacian position on the grace–nature relationship and looks at the available eschatological options, one is confronted with the tumultuous decision between a hell that is exceedingly cruel for its inhabitants and a hell that is in fact empty. Maritain's proposal may be seen as a more moderate possibility, but at the same time it suggests a more modest position on the natural desire to see God than is promoted by staunch defenders of de Lubac's articulation.

Maritain's solution is also a better alternative than the annihilationist view.⁸⁹ Is it not more fitting also for all whom God created with immortal being to persist in being and glorify God in a purely natural way than to end in self-annihilation, whether progressively or immediately upon judgment?⁹⁰ Interlocutors may go back and forth on whether it is more fitting for spiritual creatures to continue existing even if tormented forever, or for them to have received from God a self-annihilative power. For the annihilationist position to accord with the Christian doctrine that all will be raised from the dead, it would have to delay the point at which sinfulness becomes fully self-annihilative until after the final judgment, and yet this modification does nothing to make it cohere with the Catholic teaching on the immortality of the soul.⁹¹

Finally, one who believes in the existence of angels must take seriously Augustine's objection in the *City of God* to the notion that all men might be saved.⁹² Balthasar does

89. See, e.g., Paul J. Griffiths, "Self-Annihilation or Damnation? A Disputable Question in Christian Eschatology," in *Liberal Faith: Essays in Honor of Phillip Quinn*, ed. Paul J. Weithman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2008) 83–117; and Griffiths, *Decreation: The Last Things of All Creatures* (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2014) chaps. 24 and 26; and Ross McCullough, "The Darkling Lights of Lucifer: Annihilation, Tradition, and Hell," *Pro Ecclesia* 22 (2013) 55–68.

90. Such questions of *conveniens* escape Thomistic critiques of Leibniz's "the best of all possible worlds," not least because the latter culminates in a metaphysical "monadology" that constrains divine freedom rather than a morally most fitting but freely created world that is graced and glorified.

91. Griffiths argues that even Aquinas's arguments do not prove the *necessary* immortality of the soul (but only its *conditional* immortality); he also finds in them an apparent internal contradiction regarding whether spiritual beings have an intrinsic potency for nonbeing, given that they too are created *ex nihilo* (see "Self-Annihilation or Damnation" 99). For a brief rebuttal of annihilationism, see Harvey D. Egan, S.J., "Hell: The Mystery of Eternal Love and Eternal Obduracy," *Theological Studies* 75 (2014) 52–73, at 60.

92. *De Civitate Dei* 10 (*PL* 41) 17–18 and 23–24. Balthasar opposes the universal restoration (*apokatastasis*) of damned angels and men at the end of time, apparently seeking merely to protect himself against official charges of heresy by simply asserting without argument, "Let it be said at the outset that theological hope can by no means apply to this power

what he can to avoid addressing the problem of the revealed condemnation of angels, while Maritain's proposal adequately responds to the difficulty by conceding human damnation but positing a restoration of nature (i.e., natural felicity) for all the damned, extending such mercy also to the angelic realm.

Even if it is pegged as another form of the *misericordia* tradition going back to Origen,⁹³ Maritain's proposal provides an answer to Augustine's fundamental objection to this tradition, to which many illustrious Catholic theologians may be said to belong, at least in some respects, including doctors of the church such as Jerome and Aquinas himself.⁹⁴ But certainly it is not necessary from the reasoning here presented to hold rigidly to the particular proposal offered by Maritain for how God's infinite and unending mercy may be reconciled with the eternal tortures incumbent upon those who persist in rejecting God's grace and glory. There may be other reasonable proposals as well for how God may be "all in all" in the new creation such that God's glory is most perfectly manifest in both its mercy and justice. Perhaps with such speculations I am venturing onto terrain that lies beyond the capacity of the human mind in this life, but as with topics as lofty as the Trinity, certainly worthy of speculative attempts to render intelligible for those to whom God so deigned to reveal Godself, an apophatic approach need not exclude all attempts to conceptualize the apparently irreconcilable realities of divine love and irrevocable moral evil, so unintelligible to many and so disturbing even to great theologians like Hans Urs von Balthasar. It is evident, though, that Maritain's eschatological proposal has certain benefits not present in Balthasar's subjunctive universalism.

Author biography

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[namely, Satan]" (*Dare We Hope*, 144 [G 117]). Flannery points to *Dare We Hope* 145, where Balthasar entertains the idea that fallen angels may have lost their personhood, and appeals also to *The City of God*, 21.23 in response (see "How to Think about Hell" 474).

93. I encountered this term in Ratzinger, *Eschatology* 216 [G 218]. Balthasar likewise resists the notion of pity for the demons on the basis of de Lubac's position on the nature-grace relationship: see *TD* III, 497–98 [G 456–57]. I fail to see how a willingness to suffer with the damned, if there ever be any, squares with the rejection of all pity for fallen angles, even if the lost becomes "the un-person, the dissolution and collapse of personal being" (Ratzinger, "Abschied vom Teufel?," cited in *TD* III, 497 [G 456]).

94. See *ST*, Suppl. q. 99, a. 2, ad 1.