

Universalism and Predestinarianism: A Critique of the Theological Anthropology that Undergirds Catholic Universalist Eschatology

Theological Studies
2016, Vol. 77(3) 603–626
© Theological Studies, Inc. 2016
Reprints and permissions:
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0040563916652157
tsj.sagepub.com


Joshua R. Brotherton

Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore, MD, USA

Abstract

The way one addresses the question of the possibility of universal salvation and the reality of damnation is determined by one's understanding of the relationship between human freedom and divine grace. The universalist solution presupposes a predestinarian approach, which undermines the natural integrity of created freedom. Highlighting the determinative role of theological anthropology in eschatology, I propose that the subjunctive universalism advocated by some Catholic theologians, such as Hans Urs von Balthasar, ought to be replaced with a more nuanced theodramatic eschatology based upon the emerging consensus in the twentieth-century Catholic theology of grace.

Keywords

Hans Urs von Balthasar, eschatology, grace and freedom, Jacques Maritain, predestinarianism, John Sachs, theological anthropology, universalism

In this essay I propose to combine the results of previous studies concerning Balthasar's universalism, on the one hand, and the relationship between divine grace and human freedom, on the other, by confronting the general approach to the grace–freedom dynamic that must “undergird” (to borrow a phrase from Balthasar) any attempt to argue (or suggest) that all human beings are most likely

Corresponding author:

Joshua R. Brotherton, Loyola University Maryland, 46 Olde Forge Ln., Nottingham, MD 21236, USA.
Email: brotherton8684@gmail.com

saved.¹ In the process I will highlight the determinative role of theological anthropology in eschatology and will explore the particular relationship between one great topic within each field, namely, the grace–freedom dynamic (in theological anthropology) and the “problem” of hell or damnation (in eschatology). Certainly, any attempt to evaluate Balthasar’s theodramatic eschatology in one essay would be doomed to failure, and even more so, any attempt to encompass entire fields of theology within one essay would be futile. Therefore, I have to presuppose here a particular analysis of Balthasar’s theodramatic eschatology. I do so merely as a point of departure for addressing the broader question of the foundations of universalism, particularly, among those who grant the reality of human freedom in addition to the universal salvific will of God.

The particular thesis operative here, regarding the role of theological anthropology in evaluating the question of whether and/or how creatures infinitely loved by God may be permitted to exclude themselves definitively from the order of glory, is this: universalism presupposes predestinarianism. By “predestinarianism” is meant a competitive understanding of the relationship between divine grace and created freedom such that freedom is authentic only if grace *overcomes* its capacity for sin. It is easy to see, then, why a Christian who takes the universal salvific will of God (or God’s infinite love for creatures) seriously, would hold that all human beings ought to be saved, if this understanding of the grace–freedom dynamic is assumed. There are predestinarians who are not universalists, but they escape universalism only by undermining the universal salvific will of God. The Catholic Church has clearly taught the latter, at least, since the time of the Jansenist controversy. While some universalists may not address the relationship between grace and freedom explicitly, they must implicitly accept a particular theology of the grace–freedom dynamic in order to conclude that all human beings are saved (indicative universalism) or that the salvation of all human beings is the object of theologically certain hope (subjunctive universalism).²

Regarding the relationship between the efficacy of the divine salvific will and the real possibility of damnation, there are four logically possible positions: (1) affirmation

-
1. Concerning Balthasar’s universalist argumentation, see my “Presuppositions of Balthasar’s Hope and Maritain’s Alternative Proposal,” *Theological Studies* 76 (2015) 718–41, doi:10.1177/0040563915605255. Regarding Balthasar’s deficient theology of grace, or the dynamic between infinite and finite freedom, see my “The Possibility of Refusal: Grace and Freedom in Balthasar,” *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 21 (2014) 342–61. Regarding the grace–freedom question itself, see my “Toward a Consensus on the *De Auxiliis* Debate,” *Nova et Vetera* 14 (2016) forthcoming, which culminates in a critique of Steven A. Long’s articulation of the neo-Bañezian position, utilizing Jacques Maritain and William Most. I also summarize Maritain’s treatment of the question in “God’s Relation to Evil: Divine Impassibility in Balthasar and Maritain,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 80 (2015) 200–205, doi:10.1177/0021140015583242. Concerning the same question in Bernard Lonergan, see my “The Integrity of Nature in the Grace–Freedom Dynamic: Lonergan’s Critique of Bañezian Thomism,” *Theological Studies* 75 (2014) 552–62, doi:10.1177/0040563914538720.
 2. For the terms “indicative universalism” and “subjunctive universalism,” see Michael Root, “The Hope of Eternal Life,” *Ecumenical Trends* 41 (2012) 100. The apocatastic view that even angels are eventually restored to glory, held by some universalists, will not be

of both predestinarianism and the universal salvific will, (2) affirmation of predestinarianism and negation of the universal salvific will, (3) negation of predestinarianism and affirmation of the universal salvific will, and (4) negation of both predestinarianism and the universal salvific will. The first possible position is properly termed “universalism”; the second applies to traditional Augustinians, Calvinists, traditional Lutherans, and the so-called “Thomists of the strict observance” (or neo-Bañezians); the fourth option includes traditional Molinists and seems the least formidable; and the third option is represented by what I call the emerging Catholic theological consensus, articulated variously by Francisco Marín-Sola, Bernard Lonergan, Jacques Maritain, Charles Journet, William Most, and many others (including the Orthodox theologian, David Bentley Hart).³ In this essay, I will simply explore how the first option is inadequate in comparison to the third option, itself a *tertium via* between the second and fourth options (which notoriously met head to head in the controversy *de auxiliis divinae*).⁴ Apparently unaware of the third option (or at least, how it may be intelligibly articulated), theologians like Hans Urs von Balthasar end up supporting the first option in opposition to both the second and the fourth.

Drawing on the conclusion to the entire *Theo-Dramatik* of Balthasar, Geoffrey Wainwright fittingly links the themes of universalism and predestination:

Has God, then, predestined *all* to beatitude? Such could seem to override the freedom of the creature (at least the human creature). A universalist outlook has to face the problem of a “forced” salvation in its most extensive and stubborn form. . . . [human beings] are created not just to be free for any goal that might happen to suggest itself, but *for the sake of*

addressed, but certainly much of the same reasoning offered here concerning human beings may be applied as well to angelic beings.

3. For a long list of citations in this regard, see my “Toward a Consensus on the *De Auxiliis* Debate.” In his *Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths* (New York: Oxford University, 2011), Matthew Levering points to numerous supporters of the thesis as it appears in Maritain (see 155n96, also 156n101 and 178n2). For Maritain’s articulation, see his *Dieu et la permission du mal* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963), translated as *God and the Permission of Evil*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1966); *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil* (Milwaukee: The Aquinas Lectures, 1942), translated as *De Bergson à Thomas d’Aquin* (New York: Edition de la Maison Française, 1944) chap. 7; *Court traité de l’existence et de l’existant* (Paris: Paul Hartmann, 1947) chap. 4, translated as *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantieri and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Pantheon, 1948) chap. 4. In this essay, I will cross-reference all quoted material with the original language citation in brackets preceded by the first letter of the foreign language.
4. By the *de auxiliis* controversy I mean to indicate, in general, the perpetual debate between Molinists and Bañezians, nowadays usually Suarezians and so-called Thomists of the strict observance, concerning the precise relationship between the capacity of human freedom to resist grace and the intrinsic efficacy of grace, sufficient for the salvation of all. Historically, the *congregatio de auxiliis* was convened by Pope Clement VIII to try to resolve the question, but it was ended without resolution by Pope Paul V, with many popes urging both sides to be tolerant of the other. See especially R. J. Matava, *Divine Causality and Human Free Choice: Domingo Báñez, Physical Premotion and the Controversy de Auxiliis Revisited* (Boston: Brill, 2016).

participation in the divine life. . . . [T]hen the question becomes: how can finite freedom be “contained” within, or “held” by, infinite freedom—without being overwhelmed? . . . “God gives man the capacity to make a (negative) choice against God that seems *for man* to be definitive, but which need not be taken *by God* as definitive” (ET 4, 421). Or as Edith Stein puts it, “Human freedom can be neither short-circuited nor tuned out by divine freedom; but it may well be, so to speak, outwitted” (quoted favourably in DWH, 221). Balthasar refuses to say whether God can really “lose the game of creation through the creature’s free choice to be lost” (2SW, 51). But if Edith Stein is right, God is a pretty resourceful player; he may even, in Stein’s account, bend the rules—which are, in any case, his own.⁵

Hence, the Balthasarian perspective may serve as a good case study in the relationship between predestinarianism and universalism, particularly, with respect to Catholic theology.

Leaving aside questions of theological method, the aesthetic perspective underpinning Balthasar’s theodramatic approach ought not to be a tool for evading the detailed and complex philosophico-theological question of the dynamic relationship between infinite and finite freedom (i.e., the grace–freedom dynamic). In Balthasar, Barth’s faith in *apokatastasis* is simply replaced by a theologically certain (but somehow unassured) hope for universal salvation, to be accomplished in the end by means of the mystical body in union with the hellish sufferings of Christ (as a trinitarian event). One’s perspective on how God relates to the human being as a whole, that is, as a free creature called to accept God’s infinite love, involves one’s understanding of how God relates to moral evil. Only on that basis can one, finally, approach competing eschatological models for how God may super-abundantly fulfill authentic universal hope with a theological acumen that is adequately informed.

Thus, the “subjunctive” aspect of a Catholic universalism (like Balthasar’s) can only be evaluated in the light of a theological anthropology that reckons with the grace–freedom dynamic. Perhaps a contemporary Thomistic view of the questions involved in the *de auxiliis* controversy, particularly the way in which God permits moral evil, would yield a more refined theodramatic eschatology than is found in Balthasar.⁶ Going beyond Balthasar himself, I want to confront universalism in general, as it is articulated

5. Geoffrey Wainwright, “Eschatology” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004) 113–30 at 124–25. Wainwright parenthetically cites the following sources: *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 4, *Spirit and Institution*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), designated by ET, also cited in note 75; *Dare We Hope ‘That All Men be Saved’? with A Short Discourse on Hell*, trans. David Kipp and Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), designated by DWH; and *Two Say Why: ‘Why I am Still a Christian’ by Hans Urs von Balthasar and ‘Why I am Still in the Church’ by Joseph Ratzinger*, trans. John Griffiths (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973), designated by 2SW. The first part of DWH was originally published as *Was dürfen wir hoffen?* (reprint, Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1989) 19–20, and 184–86, 208–10, which pages correspond to *Kleiner Diskurs über die Hölle, Apokatastasis* (repr. Freiburg: Johannes, 2013) 31–33, 56–58.

6. Perhaps Balthasar would have discovered this contemporary Thomistic theology of grace if he had not dismissed out of hand any attempt to reevaluate the debate. See, e.g., DWH 23–24.

by a number of Catholic theologians. John Sachs, relying largely on Balthasar and Karl Rahner, articulates Catholic universalism as a position continuing to gain favor. But, while he presupposes a certain view of the grace–freedom dynamic, he does not address its significance. On the latter issue, although Marín-Sola and Lonergan are forerunners to the “emerging consensus” for which I have argued, Maritain could be considered its popularizer and, perhaps, for that reason I have found an elaborate critique of the position only as it appears in his work. H. Rosalind Smith offers some significant criticism that ought to be confronted in order for the nonpredestinarian Thomistic position to be proposed in a formidable manner for Sachs’s (and others’) consideration. Therefore, I will confront Sachs’s argumentation in favor of twentieth-century Catholic universalist theology by defending Maritain’s understanding of divine permission of moral evil against the elaborate critique offered by Smith.⁷ Finally, I will reflect briefly on the implications of this more harmonious and sophisticated theology of grace (or theological anthropology) for a theodramatic eschatology.

The Problem of Freedom in the Universalist Framework

Before considering Sachs’s defense of Catholic universalism, it is necessary to address briefly one of the foundations for his argument, namely, Balthasar’s perspective on the infinite–finite freedom relationship. Balthasar warns in the second volume of his *Theo-Drama* against the doctrine of (double) predestination because, according to it, “infinite freedom, which is necessarily the final arbiter, now threatens to swallow up finite freedom.”⁸ The only problem is that instead of taking human freedom on its own

-
7. While the form of predestination theory confronted most directly in this essay is the neo-Bañezian (or traditional Augustinian-Thomistic), the definition of “predestinarianism” here and the criticism of Balthasar’s conceptualization of the finite–infinite freedom relationship applies equally to those who would hold the modified Molinist (or Suarezian) view that is sometimes called “congruism” as well as the Scotist view sometimes called “moral pre-motion.” The notion that, provided the right circumstances, finite freedom inevitably yields to the persuasive powers of infinite freedom is demonstrably fallacious. In fact, in order for finite freedom’s potential for rejecting grace definitively to be real, it must be actualized, given infinite time, unless infinite freedom prevents such actualization. Hence, circumstances and finite graces cannot make it inevitable for finite freedom to accept divine grace definitively, but if the grace offered is not (ordinarily) infallible, it must fructify only where the potential for definitive resistance to it is not actualized; thus, for finite freedom to be taken seriously, it must be afforded only a finite amount of time to resist grace definitively or not. It is also most fitting and most in accord with Christian tradition (in opposition to the pagan notion of reincarnation) for this finite amount of time to coincide with one’s earthly life, culminating in the existential moment of metaphysical death. On the latter point, see my forthcoming article, “The Possibility of Universal Conversion in Death: Temporality, Annihilation, and Grace,” *Modern Theology*, forthcoming, doi: 10.1111/moth.12255.
 8. *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 2, *The Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990) 250; originally published as *Theodramatik*, Band II: *Die Personen des Spiels*, Teil I: *Der Mensch in Gott* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1976) 227 (hereinafter cited as *TD*; German texts cited as G).

terms, he speaks generically of finite freedom in relation to infinite freedom and habitually conceptualizes the former solely in terms of its relationship to the latter.⁹ He certainly intends to take human (or even creaturely) freedom on its own terms: “[God] allows [human] freedom to act in its own part according to its nature—and this is the greatest mystery of creation and of God’s direct creative power.”¹⁰ Or at least he thinks it may be a good idea to do so; unfortunately, he fails to do so adequately. He does not develop, as might be expected, a theological anthropology on the basis of phenomenological reflection on the data of human experience, particularly, how the human being experiences itself and its own freedom in relation to the divine. And he does not wish to enter into the pedantic quibbles of neo-Scholasticism.¹¹ It would be detrimental to the universalist trajectory of his eschatology to take Scholastic distinctions seriously. He treats human freedom from the perspectives of trinitarian freedom, christological freedom, and Marian freedom. His goal is to “see how finite freedom has been established inside the infinite freedom of God.”¹² Certainly, there is nothing wrong with such a goal, and yet it alone cannot provide the whole picture of human freedom in its created integrity.

The closest he comes to considering human freedom on its own terms is to consider it from the prototypical perspective of Mary’s own freedom.¹³ But, according to Catholic dogma, her freedom was not wounded by original sin and, therefore, cannot be a completely accurate representation of how grace and freedom actually interact in the rest of humanity, even though she is the exemplary model of how they were originally intended to interact.¹⁴ In addition, Balthasar sometimes equates

-
9. Margaret Turek’s defense of Balthasar on this point seems disingenuous. See Turek, “Dare We Hope ‘That All Men Be Saved’ (1 Tim 2:4)? On von Balthasar’s Trinitarian Grounds for Christian Hope,” *Logos* 1 (1997) 104–5, doi:10.1353/log.1997.0028. She concedes, however modestly, that “some few of [Balthasar’s] own reflections are not entirely invulnerable to the criticism that sees human freedom, at least with respect to its fundamental decision, in danger of being trivialized” (113). But then she proceeds to make an appeal to love versus justice, as if the relationship between freedom and grace, nature and the supernatural, the human being and God, can be so simplified. Ultimately, she relies upon Rahner’s argument (119n50), which will be addressed below when Sachs’s article on universalism is critiqued.
 10. *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988) 646; originally published as *Theodramatik*, Band I: *Prolegomena* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1973) 605; quoting Theodor Haeker approvingly.
 11. Hence, he follows up quickly his earlier comment in vol. 2 with, “We need to keep ever before our eyes the way in which infinite freedom was pleased to appear in the midst of finitude, if we are not to be drawn into abstract (and hence falsely posed) speculative problems.” *TD* 2:251, cited by Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Continuum, 1997) 228.
 12. Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption* 228.
 13. See Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption* 252–56.
 14. For Balthasar’s comments on Mariology in the *Theo-Drama*, see, e.g., *TD* 2:365–82 [G 334–50]; *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 3, *The Dramatis Personae*:

femininity with receptivity,¹⁵ and thus his view of the creature as essentially receptive (or feminine) is not entirely satisfactory precisely because a creation that is free, like femininity, cannot be relegated to the purely receptive. Yes, the free activity of creatures, like all being, is received from God, but creatures also author non-beings (e.g., evil acts), which are not created (strictly speaking), and thus God is capable of making Godself receptive to such nonentities (including privations, for instance); in other words, the entitative qualities (or “positivity”) of every finite act are created, but all “negativity” comes from the creature alone (as constituted by being and nonbeing together—hence the chasm between God who is *ipsum esse* and essences that are other than *esse*).

Moreover, approaching human freedom from a christological perspective, while providing much insight into the perfection of finite freedom and graced human nature, does not shed light on the dark reality of human resistance to divine grace, from which the God-man was necessarily exempt. Nevertheless, although fallen human nature is perpetually inclined toward sin, his finite being exists as it does precisely because God willed to permit his fall (i.e., the “original sin”) from a state of habitual grace. Maintaining this delicate balance between a free creature’s capacity for evil and the rootedness of its freedom in God’s is not something Balthasar does well.¹⁶ Hence, even a devoted Balthasarian like Edward T. Oakes states, “Balthasar is very much like Barth in this respect: he is bursting with confidence in the power and victory of grace. True, he criticizes Barth for over-confidence in the outcome of this victory, but perhaps that [criticism] holds true for him too.”¹⁷ If Balthasar had a more integral view of human freedom, he could have escaped such overconfidence.

It is all too optimistic to view human freedom from the top down, so to speak, a temptation that inevitably leads to an over-systematization that does not take seriously enough the reality of moral evil:

Thus, finally, it becomes clear why finite freedom can really fulfill itself in infinite freedom and in no other way. If *letting-be* belongs to the nature of infinite freedom . . . there is no danger of finite freedom, which cannot fulfill itself on its own account . . . becoming alienated from itself in the realm of the Infinite. It can only be what it is, that is, an image of infinite freedom, imbued with a freedom of its own, by getting in tune with the (trinitarian) “law” of

The Person in Christ, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993) 283–360 360; originally published as *Theodramatik*, Band II: *Die Personen des Spiels*, Teil II: *Die Personen in Christus* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1978) 260–330.

15. See, e.g., *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 5, *The Final Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998) 91; originally published as *Theodramatik*, Band IV: *Das Endspiel* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1983) 80. There is an abundance of secondary literature on this, but see Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) chap. 6.
16. I suggest that Maritain, Ratzinger, and Lonergan, each in their own ways, present a more integral vision of human being’s relation to God and to evil. Regarding Ratzinger, see my “Damnation and the Trinity in Ratzinger and Balthasar,” *Logos* 18(2015) 123–50, doi: 10.1353/log.2015.0020.
17. Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption* 247–48.

absolute freedom (of self-surrender): and this law is not foreign to it—for after all it is the “law” of absolute Being—but most authentically its own.¹⁸

It is true, human “freedom and choice are not infringed by the freedom of God.”¹⁹ But, at the same time, human freedom was created by God with the real potential for rejecting its full actualization, for contradicting its own deepest desire, and for refusing the higher freedom offered as a divine reward. Hence, it is problematic to treat the immanent presence of infinite freedom within finite freedom without also addressing the created power of finitude to resist its operative fruition. In other words, if finite freedom is conceived simply in terms of its relationship to infinite freedom, rather than being considered also on its own terms, we have on our hands a covertly predestinarian understanding of human freedom, which inevitably inclines one who believes in the universal salvific will of God toward a universalist “solution” to the problem of hell (i.e., the *aporia* between God’s infinite love and the free creature’s capacity to refuse it).

Sachs defends the universalist perspective on created freedom common to Balthasar and Rahner, two of the most formidable theologians of the twentieth century. He wants to acknowledge with Ratzinger that “God has created human beings as free creatures and respects human freedom unconditionally,”²⁰ and yet he places such harsh restrictions on this freedom that it nearly loses all significance. Taking Balthasar’s position as a point of departure, he gradually drifts further toward indicative universalism on the basis of some texts from Rahner. He begins to undermine the relative autonomy (i.e., the natural integrity) of created freedom when he quotes the following assertions of Rahner: “God can establish freedom as good or as evil freedom without thereby destroying this freedom. The fact that as subjects of a freedom still coming to be we do not know whether or not God has so established all freedom that it will reach a good decision, at least finally and ultimately.”²¹ This quasi-Calvinist estimation is followed by the optimistic statement, “God has not created freedom as the possibility of the creative positing by a subject of what is good and evil but as the possibility of creatively positing what is good.”²² In other words, God has, in fact, “so established all freedom that it will reach a good decision.”²³ This judgment is the result of reflection

18. *TD* 2:259 [G 235].

19. Balthasar, *Theology of History* 58, cited by Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption* 221.

20. Sachs, “Current Eschatology” 234.

21. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1978) 105, cited by Sachs, “Current Eschatology,” 234n28.

22. Karl Rahner, “Guilt–Responsibility–Punishment within the View of Catholic Theology,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6 (New York: Seabury, 1974) 210, cited by Sachs, “Current Eschatology” 241.

23. At the same time, however, Sachs argues, on the basis of Rahner’s “hermeneutics of eschatological assertions” (see *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4 [Baltimore: Helicon, 1966] 323–46), against the idea that scriptural texts such as Matt 25 can be used to say that some will be condemned in the end because “the free response of human beings is not predetermined,” as “[the Church condemns] theories of double predestination.” See “Current Eschatology” 238.

on the so-called asymmetrical possibilities of human freedom for saying “yes” or “no” to divine grace, where the latter contradicts the very nature of the human being as imbued with the supernatural end of final union with God.

Sachs invokes another place where Rahner, like Balthasar, conceptualizes the infinite–finite freedom relationship in terms of a power struggle: “contemporary theology stresses the fact that, because of God’s action in Christ, human freedom exists concretely in the realm of grace, which undergirds and carries it. Thus Rahner suggests that it would be wrong to view human freedom as ‘so autonomous that it cannot be seen as embraced by God’s more powerful freedom and his mercy.’”²⁴ Apparently concerned with preserving divine sovereignty over against any creaturely claim to autonomy, a legitimate concern likewise overemphasized by the (neo-)Bañezians, Sachs turns to Balthasar’s theory for how God may in fact convert every soul without violating human freedom:

[Balthasar suggests that] God, in the visage of the crucified Son, may have ways of moving even the most obdurate human will, not in a way which would deny or overrun human freedom by force, but could in weakness persuade and compel “in his solidarity from within with those who reject all solidarity.”²⁵ For Balthasar this is possible because human freedom is not absolutely autonomous but relative: it is founded upon, and exists within, the mystery of Christ’s freedom, in particular, his free self-identification with sinners. Thus what seems for finite freedom to be a definitive rejection of God need not be evaluated by God as definitive.²⁶

Indeed, everyone should share the hope that in the moment of death the crucified Christ may confront in weakness the heart of each sinner and the sinner may respond by yielding to such divine mercy. Not only is there no such guarantee, but it is also important not to turn a blind eye to the terrible reality that God (presumably, for a greater good) ordinarily permits free creatures the enduring power to resist grace, however defective such a “power” may be. No doubt, God may make grace irresistible, and yet the fallen angels certainly resisted and there is little or no evidence that human beings do not also refuse to submit to the weakness that is divine power in all its majesty and beauty.

Yielding to the optimistic temptation to doubt whether any human being would actually reject divine love in the end, that for which all free creatures have been made to enjoy, Sachs pushes the universalist impulses in both Rahner and Balthasar to its logical limits (without openly contradicting the church’s faith):

Both Balthasar and Rahner, for example, have insisted that the human “yes” and “no” to God are not on the same level. . . . I would like to focus on human freedom and push these insights further by asking whether or not there are reasons for doubting that human freedom can truly

24. Sachs, “Current Eschatology” 242, citing Rahner, *Our Christian Faith* 121.

25. “33 • Mysteries of the Life of Jesus (V): Jesus’ Death on the Cross—Substitution and Descent to Hell,” *The Von Balthasar Reader*, ed. Medard Kehl and Werner Loser (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 153.

26. Sachs, “Current Eschatology” 245–46.

reach final, that is eternal definitiveness in the state of rejecting God. I believe that there are. And if there are good reasons to question the presuppositions concerning human freedom which lie behind the Church's doctrinal pronouncements regarding the existence of hell, it may be possible to speak to the issue of apocatastasis in a new and positive way.²⁷

Considering it not an object of faith that "human freedom entails a capacity to reject God definitively and eternally," despite acknowledging that such a "presumption enjoys the weight of the authority of Scripture and tradition" (ibid. 253), Sachs attempts to shed doubt on the possibility of a finite bodily creature making an eternal decision. He concludes, "faith [in the salvation of Christ] expresses itself most consistently in the hope that because of the gracious love of God, whose power far surpasses human sin, all men and women will in fact freely and finally surrender to God in love and be saved" (ibid.). Without entering into disputes about the time-quality or mutability of human moral determinations, even in the moment of death (traditionally understood as the separation of soul from body), it is sufficient to note that Sachs confesses to deriving this conclusion from "Rahner's own insistence that human freedom's 'no' to God cannot be simply a parallel alternative to a 'yes' to God" (ibid. 247). But the fact that God's universal causality encompasses every created instrumental causality is not a reason to suppose the unlikelihood of the free creature persistently resisting its own origin.²⁸

Despite the similarities between Balthasar's and Rahner's universalism, Sachs fails to note that Balthasar explicitly rejects his assertion regarding human freedom, imputing Rahner with, at least, a tendency toward *apokatastasis*, stating, "Rahner's soteriology lacks the decisive dramatic element. Thus God's 'wrath' is always, *antecedently*, overtaken by his will to save men, a will that is always ahead of all human resistance to God (in the direction of *apokatastasis*)."²⁹ In the note to this text, Balthasar quotes the same words of Rahner's *Foundations of Christian Faith* invoked by Sachs (in which he

27. Ibid. 247.

28. One might argue that the underlying issue here is Rahner's transcendental anthropology, which builds upon Joseph Maréchal's attempt to synthesize Thomistic and Kantian epistemology. But that cannot be investigated here. It is a common criticism that Rahner's theology is unduly determined by his antecedent philosophy, rather than by the data of revelation, and yet such a criticism must not yield a naïve biblicism or an a-philosophical theology, as both fideist and rationalist tendencies must be avoided such that history and being are related to one another in a coherent way that is true both to human experience and divine revelation. For development of this problem and a cursory attempt to harmonize the elements in tension, see Joseph Ratzinger, *Fundamentals of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987) 153ff.; see also John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (September 14, 1998), http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html.

29. *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 4, *The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994) 283–84, originally published as *Theodramatik*, Band III: *Die Handlung* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1980) 262 (emphasis added).

states that the free creature's "yes" and "no" are not on a par with each other since the latter involves it in a contradiction) and proceeds to outline Rahner's "radically 'Scotist' point of view" with a quote from the tenth volume of the *Schriften zur Theologie*, wherein Rahner concludes that "sin in the world is only permitted as the condition whereby God's all-embracing and undergirding relationship to the world can be radicalized."³⁰ And yet, as in the case of Balthasar's criticisms of Barth, Balthasar also does not entirely escape his own critique here.³¹ Because of his desire to view salvation history through the prism of drama, Balthasar's universalism is more "subjunctive" than is Rahner's, which might be characterized as "indicative" in comparison. Nevertheless, whether it be due in part to his understanding of drama (that is, his literary theory) or not, his dramatic approach is not entirely adequate to treat the dynamic relationship between divine grace and human freedom with all its eschatological significance.

The Need for an Adequate Theological Anthropology

What is needed in order not to undermine creaturely freedom or to rationalize the utter unintelligibility of moral evil in itself is a more adequate theological anthropology than is present in either Balthasar or Rahner. But beyond any particular theologian, there is a need for some moderation between the optimism regarding the human being's relationship to God to which Balthasar and Rahner are prone and the pessimism regarding human nature and divine judgment in which others seem to languish (e.g., predestinarians who deny God's universal salvific will).

Just as it appears most fitting for the God of infinite love to elevate the human being to supernatural dignity, even though there cannot be any "necessity" for God to do so, it would also seem rather unfitting for God to abandon human beings to inevitable self-destruction simply because the first man and woman decided to turn away from divine grace. The overarching theme of divine revelation is not how God came to save the few from a torturous hell to which the rest are unfortunately destined by virtue of the fallen natures they inherited, but that "where sin abounded, grace abounded more" (Rom 5:20; my translation). Affirming that God cares for every free creature with infinite compassion in Christ does not imply, however, that God will not allow human beings to reject the offer of glory on their own accord.

Smith confronts this approach to the divine salvific will and human resistance to divine grace as it appears in Maritain's treatment of the origin of moral evil in the free creature's nihilating initiative.³² She concedes his distinction, following Thomas, between the two ontological moments of *negatio* (or nonconsideration of the rule) and *privatio* (or the election of an evil deed), but she discerns an over-emphasis on the first moment as cause of the second moment such that human beings' collective culpability

30. *TD* 4:284n55 [G 262n55].

31. See, e.g., *TD* 4:229 [G 211].

32. H. Rosalind Smith, "Man's 'Conquest of Liberty' and the Problem of Evil: A Study of the Meaning of Salvation in the Writings of Jacques Maritain" (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, 1979) chaps. 5 and 7.

for the “primordial sin” is diminished and the role of divine judgment for sin, manifest in concupiscence, is not taken sufficiently into consideration. Although at points apparently siding with Jean-Hervé Nicolas’s rebuttals of Maritain’s proposed metaphysical alternative to the theory of infallible antecedent permissive decrees,³³ she criticizes Maritain’s Thomistic metaphysics of moral evil for focusing too much on the inevitable failure of finite freedom to consider the rule of reason and not enough on the evil election itself, toward which the human being is inclined by nature (after the Fall), such that the possibility of God justly abandoning human beings to themselves, according to Thomas’s understanding of guilt and punishment for sin, is not considered. Preoccupied with defending divine innocence in the face of the great moral evil plaguing the modern world, “Maritain tends to postulate of every evil act the conditions proper to the primordial act” and demonstrates an “unwillingness to admit that God could in any way will to abandon man to himself alone.”³⁴ She concedes that “Maritain follows St. Thomas very carefully in his answer to this problem [of the metaphysical root of evil acts]. What Thomas says, essentially, is that the defect or deficiency which is the root of the evil act is in the will itself, but in the will *as not acting*.”³⁵ She even states that “Maritain succeeds in establishing the absolute innocence of God, within his metaphysics of the evil moral act.”³⁶ She sums up Maritain’s Thomistic reasoning thus: “The defect cannot be in the nature of the being (in this case, the will), for the resulting evil action would then not be free and voluntary. The defect must be in the will itself, but not in the nature of the will” (ibid. 280). But, at the same time, she relates a number of texts of Thomas that seem to undermine Maritain’s emphatic defense of divine innocence,³⁷ and she seems to conclude from these that the distinction between *negatio* and *privatio* really does not provide an explanation for the origin of moral evils, given the human being’s connatural inclination to sin.

Without delving into exegesis of Thomas’s comments on these questions, it may be conceded that Maritain does not broach the detailed analysis of the *psychological* causes of human sin in the present state of concupiscence, and yet the implication that his *metaphysical* analysis is therefore not in accord with a Thomistic view of fallen nature is not substantiated. She argues that there is in Maritain an “undue isolation of the cause of sin in the first ontological moment of the free evil act” to the neglect of the particular internal and external causes of sin, analyzed by Thomas in the *Prima Secundae*.³⁸ But why would a focus upon the metaphysical cause of moral evil detract

33. See her footnotes on 287–89, 292–94, 301. For Jean-Hervé Nicolas’ arguments, see his “La Permission du Pêché,” in *Revue Thomiste* 60, no. 1 (1960) 5–37; 60, no. 2 (1960) 185–206; and 60, no. 4 (1960) 509–46. Nicolas later conceded to Maritain regarding the essence of the question (concerning divine permission of moral evil); see his “La Volonté salvifique de Dieu contrariée par le pêché,” *Revue Thomiste* 92 (1992) 177–96.

34. Smith, *The Problem of Evil* 252.

35. Ibid. 280 (emphasis added).

36. Ibid. 284.

37. I will have to address the proper interpretation of Thomas on this question in a separate essay.

38. Smith, *The Problem of Evil* 285.

from the psychological mechanisms of sin in the present world? Perhaps Maritain should have addressed this aspect of the question as well, but his neglect to do so does not negate in any way the conclusions obtained regarding the power of nihilation that belongs to creaturely freedom and the problems with the contrary theory of infallible permissive decrees.

While Thomas does analyze how one sin may be the origin of another in terms of efficient, material, and final-formal causality,³⁹ Smith seems to confuse the ontological and psychological orders when addressing how “one sin can be the cause of another sin.”⁴⁰ Even though sins may prepare the way for other sins in various manners, there is still only one ultimate deficient reason for the emergence of the morally evil act, namely, the nonbeing that has its origin in finite freedom. Hence, much of Smith’s difficulty with Maritain’s explanation of the ultimate metaphysical origin of morally evil acts has to do with her lack of a metaphysics of nonbeing, which ought to be founded upon a phenomenological taxonomy of diverse kinds of absence.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the core of her critique directly concerns the question of concupiscence potentially inclining human nature always to negate or not consider the rule of reason, in which case we are dealing with an essentially theological question, namely, whether concupiscence is a wound in human nature that brinks on total corruption.

Behind whatever “accidental efficient cause” of sin (e.g., ignorance, debility, passion) is the ultimate deficient cause existing in the human will, and since human nature is not totally corrupted by the effects of the primordial sin, it maintains the power either to nihilate divine grace or not in any given moment, resulting either in the privative election of a finite good over the infinite good or in reception of the divine power whereby good acts are performed.⁴² The fact that Maritain does not address the contingent factors influencing election of the evil act does not deter from the truth that every moral privation ultimately originates in a prior ontological negation. Instead of locating the ultimate reason for moral evil in the nonacts of the created will, according to which sin is a surd (i.e., intrinsically unintelligible), the neo-Bañezian school (with which Smith seems to sympathize in Nicolas) subscribes to the idea that God’s free will must be the ultimate reason for every evil act and thus whenever a human being sins it is because that human being has been abandoned by God’s inscrutable designs. Smith does not openly defend the system of infallible permissions as such, but it is the logical conclusion for one who asserts (without argument) that “theologically speaking, it is impossible that any divine motion not attain its effect or its term infallibly,”⁴³ which is implicitly to exclude the very possibility of frustrable grace or conditional

39. See *ST* I–II, q. 75, a. 4, cited by Smith, *The Problem of Evil* 325n49.

40. Smith, *The Problem of Evil* 286.

41. For a detailed account of such a requisite metaphysics, see Jesús Villagrasa Lasaga, *Realismo metafísico e irrealidad. Estudio sobre la obra “Teoría del objeto puro” de Antonio Millán-Puelles* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 2008).

42. Hence, the conflation of the ontological and psychological orders is apparent in Smith, *The Problem of Evil* 290.

43. Smith, *The Problem of Evil* 230.

divine decrees (that is, “promotions” that can be impeded by created obstacles generally permitted).

Smith, therefore, (with Nicolas) entertains doubts about how divine providence could be trusted as efficacious, if every nihilation that actually occurs is not planned by God.⁴⁴ Leaving aside difficulties in explaining divine foreknowledge, which William Most treats in much more detail than does Maritain,⁴⁵ it may be affirmed that every evil that occurs in some sense belongs to divine providence both because God could will to prevent any and all evils (by the divine “extraordinary will”) and because God wills precisely that the free creature determine the “evil specification” of the privative realities enacted. Divine providence need not entail divine predetermination of every action, negation, and privation, and yet all things are permitted in view of some future known only to Him. Hence, Maritain can paraphrase St. Paul thus: “grace and mercy superabound there where, through the free nihilation of the human will, frustrating God’s ‘antecedent’ will, the offense abounded.”⁴⁶ Thus, it would not be exactly correct to state (as Smith puts in the mouth of Maritain): “in the ordinary course of events, it is *not* ‘both man who raises an obstacle, and God who of his own accord withholds His grace,’ that is the cause of the loss of grace, but only man who raises an obstacle by his free nihilation, his nonconsideration of the rule.”⁴⁷ Every proposed evil crosses the desk of the Creator for “approval,”⁴⁸ as it were, and yet God does not plan for sins *x* and *y* to be committed—at least ordinarily, that is the work only of the fallible free creature. Smith charges that, according to this view (of Maritain’s), “the free nihilation itself, is not subject to the consequent will of God, either as willed, or as permitted.”⁴⁹ On the contrary, the consequent will of God encompasses everything, beings and nonbeings alike (even if the two are encompassed in diverse manners). It is indeed true that “everything that is is ordered to drawing man to God” (ibid. 334), but that is precisely missing the point—*negatio* is not, by definition, and yet it has real repercussions, namely, moral evil (or privation), another kind of nonbeing.

Smith seems to think that although the metaphysical distinction between *negatio* and *privatio* is correct, fallen human nature is in need of infrustrable (or infallible) grace in order to avoid “not considering the rule,”⁵⁰ in which case Maritain’s explanation applies only to the primordial sin since concupiscence inclines human nature

44. See, e.g., Smith, *The Problem of Evil* 307n30.

45. See William G. Most, *Grace, Predestination, and the Salvific Will of God* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom, 1997) pt. 4.

46. See Maritain, *Philosophy of History* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1959) 90, cited by Smith, *The Problem of Evil* 249.

47. Smith, *The Problem of Evil* 313.

48. Of course, the analogy is imperfect because divine knowledge of evils, in a sense, precedes their actual existence precisely insofar as the divine intellect knows all (contingent) nonbeings in God’s eternal comprehension of all beings.

49. Smith, *The Problem of Evil* 298.

50. See, for example, Smith, *The Problem of Evil* 305n28.

perpetually in the direction of not considering the rule (ibid. 292–94). Although Smith reports many good questions raised by Nicolas in his debate with Maritain, the latter’s approach, which centers around the “dissymmetry between the line of good and the line of evil,” need not be infallible in its particulars. Maritain’s brief treatments of the question are a mere introduction to the voluminous writings of Marín-Sola on the matter, whose familiarity with both Thomas and the great many Thomistic commentators on the issue is unmatched.⁵¹ Regardless of whether the “point of entry” for moral evil is precisely nonconsideration of the rule or simply “negative nonresistance” (as in Most), Marín-Sola answers every possible objection regarding the impedibility of sufficient grace, and he provides a keen analysis of the Catholic balancing act with respect to the impact of concupiscence upon human nature.⁵² While Jansenists and Calvinists hold that human nature is totally corrupt consequent to the original sin such that it is incapable of performing any good without the aid of irresistible (or infallible) grace and the Pelagians hold that the human being in its present state is capable of performing all good acts without special divine aid, the Catholic teaching is that human nature is only wounded, not destroyed, such that everyone is capable of performing any particular good act by the natural power of free will, but people are in need of divine grace in order to persevere in such good to the end and in order to avoid venial sins habitually.⁵³ Smith certainly seems to be endorsing (albeit unwittingly) the Jansenist-Calvinist notion of total corruption when she states: “That the reason *can* fail to consider the rule is a consequence of fallible created nature. That it *does fail* to do so—infallibly, without grace—is a result, not only of fallible created nature, but of *fallen*, wounded nature.”⁵⁴

Despite the diverse interpretations of Romans 5–11 with regard to the consequences of the original sin upon human nature, it is safe to say with both Balthasar and Maritain that it is an excessively pessimistic view to think every sin following the original sin is predetermined by concupiscence.⁵⁵ One might say that, like questions of biblical

51. See Francisco Marín-Sola, “El sistema tomista sobre la moción divina,” *Ciencia Tomista* 32 (1925) 5–52; “Respuesta a algunas objeciones acerca del sistema tomista sobre la moción divina,” *Ciencia Tomista* 33 (1926) 5–74; “Nuevas observaciones acerca del sistema tomista sobre la moción divina,” *Ciencia Tomista* 33 (1926) 321–97. Many of his manuscripts addressing the matter in ever-more detail remain unpublished: see Michael Torre, *Do Not Resist the Spirit’s Call: Francisco Marín-Sola on Sufficient Grace* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2013) and *God’s Permission of Sin: Negative or Conditioned Decree? A Defense of the Doctrine of Francisco Marín-Sola, O.P. Based on the Principles of Thomas Aquinas* (Fribourg: Academic, 2009).

52. See, for example, “Nuevas observaciones” 324–29, 353–57, 366–67, 380–83.

53. Smith even endorses this view, at least in part, without realizing it when she quotes Thomas’s *De Veritate*, q. 24, a. 12. See Smith, *The Problem of Evil* 320.

54. Smith, *The Problem of Evil* 314 (emphasis original, with em-dashes added to the text).

55. Although Balthasar does not seem to take this pessimistic view of fallen human nature, he falls prey to the same problems as some Augustinian Thomists (e.g., neo-Bañezians) insofar as he agrees with Smith that even moral evils are planned by God as purposeful in the grand scheme of things (see Smith, *The Problem of Evil* 354). While she grants Maritain’s

interpretation, speculative debates surrounding the *de auxiliis* controversy are never-ending. But among many contemporary Catholic theologians, there is essential agreement on the particular question of how the divine permissive will relates to the emergence of moral evils. In addition to the perspectives common to Marín-Sola and Maritain (and to a lesser extent, Most), Lonergan critiques the Bañezian approach to grace and predestination on the basis of the notion “physical pre-motion” itself, which he demonstrates to be both essential to the Bañezian system and untenable as a metaphysical explanation of the efficacy of the divine will.⁵⁶ Robert Joseph Matava presents yet another approach to the question, agreeing with Lonergan’s critique of the Bañezian view (and with the broader rejection of infallible permissive decrees as an explanation of the surd that is moral evil),⁵⁷ but objecting to his interpretation of Thomas on fate and providence as obliquely deterministic, proposing in its stead an understanding of divine creation *ex nihilo* as all-pervasive. The details of the discrepant accounts (e.g., between Most and Marín-Sola, Lonergan and Matava) of how best to formulate the precise ways in which grace, freedom, predestination, and foreknowledge relate to one another cannot be resolved here (and may not even be resolvable). But one thing remains clear amidst all these analyses and others: God does not plan for free creatures to resist grace (at least, not in a definitive fashion) and there is no need for infallible antecedent permissive decrees (which the neo-Bañezians purport to be necessary).

While the thought of Maritain and of Balthasar appear to converge at particular points,⁵⁸ their systems clash over the relationship between grace and freedom, particularly the way in which the divine permission of moral evil is to be understood.⁵⁹ But

explanation of the entry of moral evil into the world, she apparently counteracts her rejection of his account of moral evil in fallen human nature with an optimism regarding divine providence with respect to the end of salvation, as if all sins are ordered to the human being’s fulfillment. Balthasar, not considering Maritain’s proposal, does not discriminate between divine permission in a pre- vs. post-lapsarian world and adopts the same optimism in order to avoid what appears to be the inevitable conclusion of metaphysical speculation on the grace–freedom dynamic, the (neo-)Bañezian position, which in general also does not discriminate between pre- and post-lapsarian contingency upon divine grace for meritorious deeds.

56. See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas: Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 1, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2000), the newest edition of his dissertation work in 1941.
57. See Matava, *Divine Causality and Human Free Choice* 98–99 (manuscript numbers). He focuses on the larger problem rather than the particular question of the divine permission of moral evil.
58. For Maritain’s quasi-Balthasarian comments, see *On the Grace and Humanity of Jesus*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969) 61, and “Beginning with a Reverie,” in *The Collected Works of Jacques Maritain: Untrammelled Approaches*, vol. 20, trans. Bernard Doering (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1997) 3–26 at 11n13.
59. Matthew Levering also acknowledges this point but critiques both approaches as excessively kataphatic (see *Predestination*, chap. 5).

despite Balthasar's reliance upon Maritain at some points, it is unclear whether he read any of these authors on the matter;⁶⁰ at least, he chose not to comment on the relevant twentieth-century conversations. At one point in the *Theo-Drama*, in an enigmatic section criticizing Karl Barth's angelology as "a way of re-Christianizing German Idealism, particularly Schleiermacher," he makes the following conspicuous comments, almost as if to nod toward Maritain's theory of nihilation (and/or Lonergan's treatment of sin as a surd rather than intelligible):

[I]n reality this "nothingness" [that, according to Barth, pervades creation] can only have its point of origin in the creature's free will . . . The theologoumenon of "nothingness," however, which is not explained with reference to creaturely freedom (of choice) but is seen as arising from the mere denial and rejection of what is "chaotic," "alien" and "hostile to God," is untenable.⁶¹

But Balthasar certainly did not develop this point since any such development would have wreaked havoc upon his proclivity toward universalism. In fact, in a later volume, he voices the concerns of Bañezian Thomists when he briefly comments on Nikolai Berdyaev and seems to hint at Maritain's defense of divine innocence: Nikolai Berdyaev "was attempting to relieve God of responsibility for evil and to preserve man's full autonomy; but this notion practically destroys the second pole of finite freedom (since man is no longer under a divine norm) and robs God of his omnipotence in order to preserve his goodness."⁶² Hence, it is precisely his inadequate treatment of the grace–freedom dynamic, particularly his deficient understanding of God's relationship to moral evil, that determines his eschatology in the direction of (subjunctive) universalism, according to which the trinitarian processions "undergird" even sin and hell.⁶³

60. Another piece of evidence besides what follows that Balthasar may have encountered something of what I have called the "new proposal" (regarding the grace–freedom dynamic) is his reference to the work of Marín-Sola on the "evolución homogénea" of Catholic dogma in *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, *Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982) 554.

61. *TD* 3:483 [G 443–44]. This text is immediately followed by a rather obscure assessment of Barth's Christology.

62. *TD* 4:149 [G 136–37]. The just criticism of Berdyaev that immediately follows also indicates Balthasar's overall (implicit) tendency to reject as "infinitely improbable" the possibility that God's creative project may in the end be tragic (i.e., that some are condemned).

63. Hence, for all his speculations, divine kenosis serves as the infallible means through which the divine will ensures the attainment of the end for which God created: "It is as if he had wagered with himself that he could do the apparently impossible: create creaturely freedoms that subsist in themselves and yet not let them be lost." See *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 4, *Spirit and Institution*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995) 138.

Another Theodramatic Eschatology?

The theodramatic perspective as such need not be rejected since it does not necessarily involve neglecting the question of the relationship between divine and human action. Rather, one would think that applying the dramatic pattern of thought to God and free creatures in salvation history should involve precise examination of the relationship between divine and human freedom. Regarding such a relationship, twentieth-century discussions among Thomists have dissolved many of the false dichotomies developed by the Bañezian–Molinist divide. Maritain is the only one of these contemporary interlocutors to entertain the eschatological consequences of the resultant theology of the grace–freedom dynamic. Even though he may have lacked precision regarding the nature–grace problem,⁶⁴ his eschatological proposal is more promising a path than Balthasar’s subjunctive universalism.⁶⁵

While Balthasar makes a case for the depths to which God goes in attempting to convert human beings, he fails to take adequate account of God’s choice to condition divine grace upon the lack of human resistance. Thus, he cannot display how the supreme good of creation is attained not by infallibly ensuring the conversion of all human beings (i.e., the bestowal of the unconditionally efficacious grace of final perseverance), but by doing everything short of taking away the created power of free resistance to orchestrate the best possible outcome of all the efficacious graces God conditionally offers each human being through the mystical body.

Nevertheless, Matthew Levering makes the following incisive comments after examining Maritain’s treatment of divine innocence and before offering his own critique of Balthasar:

Even were Maritain right that not considering the rule of reason is entirely describable as a non-action, therefore, he could not avoid the basic dilemma as regards predestination (absent

64. Lonergan is one theologian who mediates between the neo-Scholastic and *Nouvelle* extremes on the dynamic relationship between human nature and divine grace (i.e., the natural desire to see God). See his “The Supernatural Order,” in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 19, *Early Latin Theology*, ed. Robert M. Doran and Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2011) 53–256; “Natural Desire to See God,” in *Collection: Papers by Bernard Lonergan, SJ* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967) 81–91, originally published in *Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Convention of the Jesuit Philosophical Association* (Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College, 1949) 31–43; *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 12, *The Triune God: Systematics*, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2007), app. 2B, sect. 24; and *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 18, *Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston College Lectures on Mathematical Logic and Existentialism*, ed. Philip J. McShane (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2001) app. C, sect. 5.

65. For fuller explanation of this proposal and its usefulness in response to the *aporia* between the divine salvific will and the power of finite freedom to refuse divine grace definitively that so plagued Balthasar, see my “Presuppositions of Balthasar’s Hope and Maritain’s Alternative Proposal.”

universalism). Namely, if God can move the created will in an infallibly efficacious manner, and if God's antecedent will truly is the salvation of all, then why does God *not* ensure that all are saved by means of infallibly efficacious outpourings of grace? The tension between God's super-abundant love for all and his permission of some to rebel permanently against his love remains, thereby further exposing the impossibility of finding a solution within causal-chain logic.⁶⁶

Maritain's position that it is more proper to the nature of our freedom for God to allow for "nihilation" is sufficient as far as it goes, but it does not exactly answer why God decided not to create us with the superior freedom of an impeccable created will like that of Christ (and the Blessed Virgin Mary). If we follow Most's development of the issue, God could (by "extraordinary will") overcome resistance to divine grace, or better, God could will antecedently a grace that is not conditional upon the absence of nihilation, but God does not do so very often because to do so would make ordinary what is extraordinary and make extraordinary what is ordinary. But this seems an inadequate response. Does God respect the distinction between the extraordinary and the ordinary more than the salvation of free creatures? Certainly not. Rather, God respects the natural integrity of the imperfect human freedom that God has willed in one way or another to exist as it is.

Leaving aside the hermeneutical questions concerning what sacred Scripture reveals with respect to the reality of hell, the church does indeed pray that all may come to know and love God, as God desires the same.⁶⁷ At the same time, because God's universal salvific will is not irresistible, but conditional upon the lack of persistent refusal, the hope for universal salvation is most likely *formally* unfulfilled (and therefore not properly theological), even if it is eminently fulfilled by the ultimate mysterious reconciliation of divine mercy and justice that is promised, the proper object of Christian hope. Only by developing an integral theological anthropology does it become clear that the specific manner in which God chooses to reconcile all

66. Levering, *Predestination* 162. Nicolas seems to adopt an apophatic approach akin to Levering's in his latest article on the topic in conversation with Maritain (see Nicolas, "La volonté salvifique"), but he also fundamentally accepts Maritain's critique of Bañezian permissive decrees (and less emphatically the consequent understanding of divine foreknowledge), even if he quibbles with Maritain's explanation of the point of entry for evil and expresses concern about the importance of defending the gratuity of election (contra any precise metaphysical explanation of nihilation). In other words, Nicolas capitulates to Maritain's defense of divine innocence, adopts a more apophatic posture toward divine foreknowledge than both Maritain and the neo-Bañezian view criticized, and prefers to leave the reconciliation of created freedom and divine election to faith instead of fully embracing Maritain's attempt to explain the dynamic of the human initiative and divine permission in terms of *negatio* and *privatio* because he does not see it in Thomas.

67. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1821, 1261, and 1058, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_index.htm. See also, for instance, *Weekday Mass I, Tuesday Offertory Prayer; Liturgy of the Hours, Tuesday, Mid-afternoon Prayer; Collect 22; Eucharistic Prayer III*. See also the "O my Jesus" prayer, given by Our Lady of Fatima.

things remains unknown to human beings in this life. In the end, theologians ought to recognize that amid all our speculations about how the good and the true may finally be manifest in an infinitely beautiful dynamism, we do not know precisely in what the “endgame” consists because God has not chosen to reveal the intricacies of such a mystery. The predestinarian is not willing to suspend judgment regarding the prospect of universal salvation. In light of the relationship between grace and freedom, a healthy skepticism with regard to such a “prospect” is demanded, and yet this does not impede the believer’s hope for the conversion of all human beings.⁶⁸

Hence, just as God allowed the human creature to fall from grace so that God might bring forth an even greater good than preservation from all sin (namely, redemption), likewise, God would permit some to choose condemnation only to manifest divine glory more fully. Now, the nonuniversalist predestinarians claim that the glory of God is fittingly manifest through the eternal display of divine mercy *and* divine “vindictive justice” in distinct manners (i.e., heaven and hell, respectively). But since God’s mercy and justice are inextricably united, the two attributes do not demand distinct manifestations, and it would seem improper for mercy alone to endure, as if mercy were to claim victory over justice. But it appears most fitting that the divine will bring forth the greatest possible good out of the evil God suffers precisely in voluntary receptivity to finite freedom such that justice is manifest but mercy “superabounds.” Would not God’s glory be most manifest if a final perfect hierarchy of created goods were brought about such that some human beings be permitted (inevitably, but not infallibly!) to exclude themselves from glory but granted respite from the intensity of such misery through the enjoyment of a natural knowledge and love of God in the new creation (i.e., the consummation of all things)?

Maritain’s eschatological proposal is precisely that the pain of loss and remorse of conscience eternally suffered by the damned is mitigated by an ever-growing natural knowledge and love of God granted by divine mercy following the final judgment.⁶⁹ Harvey Egan points out that William Hoye apparently agrees with Maritain’s exegesis of Thomas on the origin of evil as “an absence of consideration,” but he also holds that “sin is a lack of grace, not its opposite, and contains within itself its own punishment.”⁷⁰

68. Balthasar certainly wants to maintain a healthy abstention of judgment regarding how the director, producer, and chief actor of the play (to use his metaphor of drama) complete the “endgame,” that is, to specify with too much certainty or precision the details of the “last act” of salvation history. But he did not completely succeed in this endeavor. Together with a warranted total confidence in God’s infinite goodness, Balthasar does not wish to anticipate the sovereignty of divine freedom, and yet he assigns all relevant power to divine agency (neglecting the reality of creaturely nihilation) and therefore refrains from presumption without good reason (or else, his suspension of presumption is merely nominal): see, e.g., *TL* 2:359 [G 327–28].

69. See his “Beginning with a Reverie.”

70. Harvey D. Egan, “Hell: The Mystery of Eternal Love and Eternal Obduracy,” *Theological Studies* 75 (2014) 65, doi:10.1177/0040563913519034. According to Thomas, human beings cannot directly will evil and thus their own unhappiness, but only indirectly by willing it under an aspect of good (see *De malo*, q. 6, a. 1, and q. 16, a. 2; *SCG* III, 71 and 122; *ST* I, q. 19, a. 9, and q. 60, a. 5, ad 5; *ST* I–II, q. 1, a. 6; q. 27, a. 1, ad 1; q. 78, a. 1).

But Maritain's proposal cannot be reduced to Hoye's view that, due to the nature–grace distinction, hell is in itself mere limbo.⁷¹ It is certainly true that evil is not an entity existing in opposition to grace, but it is more than simply the lack of grace, since privation is precisely the lack of something that *ought to be* there; hence, *negatio* causally precedes *privatio*, which in the case of moral evil inheres in the entity of the particular human action as a negative quality.

Thus, due to the determinative role that theological anthropology plays in eschatology, evaluation of both the grace–freedom dynamic *and* the nature–grace problem would provide helpful distinctions with regard to the reconciliation of divine love and moral evil in the grand scheme of salvation history, a problem which plagued Balthasar so much. Leaving for another essay exploration of the nature–grace dimension of the question, it suffices to say that only by a moderation between extremes similar to that exhibited here with respect to the question of grace and freedom can one avoid the pitfalls of viewing hell either as limbo, simply speaking, or as the destructive frustration of human nature itself.

Conclusion

While I have argued against Catholic universalism here, I have done so on the basis of refuting Catholic predestinarianism. Rather than advancing any particular proposal regarding how precisely the realities of divine love and human resistance are to be reconciled in the new creation, the reflections offered in this article serve as a way to highlight the determinative role of theological anthropology in eschatology, the significance of which has been undermined as a great many have overlooked the enormous relevance of the relationship between grace and freedom to the problem of hell. But theological anthropology encompasses more than just the question of the relationship between grace and freedom; it also extends to the question of nature and grace in general. Certainly, one's conception of the relationship between the natural and supernatural orders also plays a significant role in one's eschatology. But I have focused here upon the more neglected, pointed, and decisive question of the particular relationship within this problem that obtains between divine grace and human freedom, treated by Balthasar in the dramatic terms of infinite and finite freedom.

A view of the grace–freedom dynamic that maintains the natural integrity of created freedom maintains that, while it is true that finite freedom is radically contingent upon infinite freedom and only by grace may sin (and thus damnation) be avoided, divine grace is ordinarily conditional upon the lack of a persistent obstacle posed by

Nonetheless, contrary to the universalists, I fail to see why, as did Thomas, this would make it unlikely that human beings actually persist in refusing supernatural glory.

71. William J. Hoye, *The Emergence of Eternal Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2013) 104–10. Although Hoye does not use the word “limbo,” he does speak of hell as the “objective punishment” of loneliness that is not “subjectively felt” and as “the fulfillment of an underdeveloped *desiderium naturale*” (108, 110). Hoye was purportedly inspired by C. S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*. For a brief critique, see Egan, “Hell” 64–66.

the creature and thus even the fallen creature is capable of waiting for the efficacious help of God rather than opposing it at every turn. This means that God may truly desire that all human beings cease from resisting divine grace, but that God permits some to persist in resisting its efficacy. On the other hand, if one holds that because infinite freedom undergirds finite freedom and God's love for each human being is infinite, it seems inevitable that each will eventually yield to divine grace, then there is evidently a need for a more profound theological anthropology. The Christian hope that is borne by the virtue of charity that all will convert could, in fact, be fulfilled in a manner unforeseen by human beings, not by the actual salvation of all, but by a reconciliation of divine mercy and justice that escapes comprehension in this life (which is not to say theologians cannot speculate intelligently about it). Hence, to avoid subjunctive universalism, there is the need for a more sophisticated theology of the interactive relationship between grace and freedom in the free creature, which just might yield speculations more in tune with the identification of justice and mercy in God.

Whether it be thanks to a direct inheritance of the late Augustinian theology of grace or to his appropriation of Barth's (revised Calvinist) theology or his engagement with Russian kenoticism or his flirtation with German idealism, each with their own deterministic proclivities,⁷² the exaggeratedly (or over-emphatically) anti-Pelagian position at least implicitly adopted by Balthasar cannot reckon adequately with the horrible reality of persistent moral evil. What is needed to discern an intelligible reconciliation between the realities of divine love and moral evil is a greater literacy in the theological developments regarding grace and freedom, particularly, twentieth-century Thomistic developments. Certainly, emphasis on the universal salvific will of God is truly necessary at a time when divine mercy is in such demand. But, no less is there a need for a robust theological vision of the human being as *imago Dei*, that is, as endowed with a radical freedom for which he must be fully responsible. In Balthasar's case, even though the particular means through which he seeks to

72. Karen Kilby and Thomas Joseph White both name Barth as the culprit influence on this question; see her *Balthasar* 25, and his "Von Balthasar and Journet on the Universal Possibility of Salvation and the Twofold Will of God," *Nova et Vetera* (English edition) 4, (2006) 650. In Edward Oakes's *Pattern of Redemption*, a passage from Balthasar's *Unser Auftrag* (85) is translated as follows: "Barth's doctrine of election, this brilliant overthrow of Calvin, attracted me powerfully and lastingly; it converged with Origen's views and thus also with Adrienne's [Adrienne von Speyr] theology of Holy Saturday" (306n10). Nicholas Healy also draws attention to Barth's influence on Balthasar's understanding of predestination, drawing on Margaret Harper McCarthy's dissertation, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Predestination" (PhD diss., Pontifical John Paul II Institute, Pontifical Lateran University, 1994); see Healy's "On Hope, Heaven, and Hell," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 1 (1997) 82 and 88, doi:10.1353/log.1997.0023. Hence, Balthasar retains with Barth a predestinarian approach to salvation, but together with him "overthrows" the restriction of election to a few, which Calvin extrapolated from the late Augustine. For Augustine's influence on Balthasar's implicit understanding of the grace–freedom dynamic, see my "The Possibility of Refusal: Grace and Freedom in Balthasar" 342–61.

dissolve the problem of hell is his eminently trinitarian understanding of the descent of Christ into hell, the ambivalent attitude toward the prospect of damnation that pervades his theodramatic project manifests an inadequate grasp of the grace–freedom dynamic.⁷³ Balthasar’s evident adherence to the late Augustinian theology of grace he inherited may simply result from his negligent attitude toward the *de auxiliis* controversy,⁷⁴ even while he is adamant that the “problem” of hell is not to be resolved by a restrictive view of election (as in Augustine).⁷⁵ Although the problem of hell can still arise for one who does not assume the “traditional” (i.e., Augustinian-Thomistic) posture toward predestination (or the grace–freedom dynamic), someone with a more “libertarian” perspective on the latter would not approach the problem of hell in quite the same way.⁷⁶ No matter how much Christ or even the triune God as such may be said to suffer, the conversion of a finite freedom that is not ultimately subordinate to an *infallible* influence of infinite freedom cannot be ensured by divine love any more than it would have been without divine suffering. Hence, Balthasar’s descent theology need not lead to universalism, if one maintains at the same time a position on the grace–freedom dynamic that does not succumb to the reactionary stance of an overemphatic anti-Pelagianism.

Thus, I have argued here that the lacuna in any system that makes universal salvation an object of theological faith (indicative universalism) or of theological hope (subjunctive universalism) is its implicit theology of grace and freedom, that is, the

73. For a critical appropriation of this aspect of Balthasar’s theology, see my “Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Redemptive Descent,” *Pro Ecclesia* 22 (2013) 167–88, and “God’s Relation to Evil.”

74. For his Augustinian perspective on the grace–freedom dynamic, see, e.g., *TD* 3:35 [G 32]; *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992) 129; *Epilogue*, 73–74, originally published as *Epilog* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1987) 56; *Dare* 209–10; Thomas G. Datzell, *The Dramatic Encounter of Divine and Human Freedom in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000) 138; Gerard O’Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Cambridge University, 2007) 160–61; *TD* 1:48 [G 44]; *TD* 2:312 [G 284]; *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 5, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, trans. Oliver Davies et al., ed. Brian McNeil and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991) 25–26.

75. See the tension between these issues, especially in *TD* 1:48–50 [G 44–46]. For his rejection of Augustine’s restrictive view, see *Dare* 65–69 [G 52–56] and *Razing the Bastions*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993) 58.

76. By the term “libertarian” I mean to include the Molinist system, according to which free creaturely causality is conceived as coordinate with divine causality instead of subordinate to the universal causality of *ipsum esse subsistens*. However, Robert J. Matava advocates “libertarian freedom” without subscribing to Molinism; see *Divine Causality* 247. Regarding the link between the grace–freedom dynamic and the problem of hell, recall that Balthasar briefly makes the connection as early as *A Theological Anthropology*, translated, no translator named. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967) 207–8, originally published as *Das Ganze im Fragment* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1963) 231–32; see also *TD* 4:318 [G 296].

predestinarian approach it presupposes. The particular theological anthropology underlying Balthasar's (and Rahner's) eschatological option is necessarily deficient and inadequate precisely because it lacks a robust and rigorous approach to the questions *de auxiliis*.

In light of a more contemporary Thomistic understanding of the latter (as seen in Marín-Sola, Lonergan, Maritain, Journet, Most, and many others), it is clear that it is both fitting that God respect perseverance in sin and that it be possible for God to become "omnia in omnibus" (1 Cor 15:28, Vulgate) without saving every human being from the eternal pain of loss. This remains true even if conversion in death is a theoretical possibility for all and agnosticism regarding the damned may be counseled, given that God created the human person with the freedom to reject divine mercy (and, therefore, participation in the order of glory). Although it is true that finite freedom is undergirded by infinite freedom, if the finite power to resist infinite freedom is "overcome" by divine grace (i.e., infinite freedom), then sin (and thus self-condemnation) is not treated as the "surd" that it is.⁷⁷ Divine revelation is more accurately interpreted when a more adequate metaphysics of nonbeing is employed to reckon with the persistent reality of moral evil. Certainly, all things will be reconciled to the Father in Christ and by the Spirit, but the particular form that reconciliation takes need not be the salvation of all human beings, and universal salvation appears to be an especially doubtful proposal. It ought to be recognized, then, that the hierarchy of goods in creation is an eternal reality that gives glory to the beauty of God's infinite love, both merciful and just!

Author biography

Joshua R. Brotherton completed his PhD in Systematic Theology at the Catholic University of America with a dissertation on potential revisions to Hans Urs von Balthasar's theodramatic and trinitarian eschatology. He specializes in various contemporary issues in Catholic theology, especially in eschatology and the theology of grace. He currently teaches Christian Ethics at Loyola University Maryland. He has published previously in *Theological Studies*, *Angelicum*, *Josephinum Journal of Theology*, *Pro Ecclesia*, *Logos*, and the *Irish Theological Quarterly*. Articles are forthcoming in both *Nova et Vetera* and *Modern Theology*.

77. See *TD* V 395 [G 361], which is presented as a recap of *TD* V 247–321 [G 223–93].