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# Cast into Hell

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## Satan, Universalism, and Contemporary Eschatology

A MOVEMENT TOWARD UNIVERSALISM is one of the clearest trends in theology over the last two centuries: Schleiermacher,<sup>1</sup> Barth,<sup>2</sup> Bulgakov,<sup>3</sup> Rahner,<sup>4</sup> and Balthasar,<sup>5</sup> five of the most significant names in theology over the last two hundred years, from Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic confessions, all at least open up a space for the possibility of universal salvation in their theology. In many ways, regardless of one's opinion about universalism in its variegated forms, this is a fortunate happening, insofar as it reasserts a primacy to the eschaton, which, regardless of its content, is the end for which God has been working from the beginning—a primacy that may have been lost in the past, and about which some hasty assumptions may have been made. At the very least this universalist turn raises significant questions, even for those “infernalists” who take it as axiomatic that some number of creatures will meet eternal misery: questions about the purpose of God's creation, the scope of his providence (is he even *able* to save all?),<sup>6</sup> and the place (or lack thereof) for a pocket of everlasting rebellion and un-love within God's creation. It is also fortuitous, we might say, because it resurrects the situation of the early Church, which, although the historical record is notoriously

difficult to capture in any satisfying precision, was not in total agreement on this question.<sup>7</sup> There were Basil,<sup>8</sup> Chrysostom,<sup>9</sup> and Augustine<sup>10</sup> to promote the so-called “infernalist” position, and Origen,<sup>11</sup> Gregory of Nyssa,<sup>12</sup> and Gregory of Nazianzus<sup>13</sup> to defend a doctrine of universalism.

“Universalism” is the doctrine that, in the end, every rational creature will enjoy everlasting beatitude in heaven, seeing God “face to face” (1 Cor 13:12). We can make a further division between the so-called “hopeful universalism” that has most famously been unfolded by Hans Urs von Balthasar, according to which we possess only the *hope* (and never the sure knowledge) that all will be saved;<sup>14</sup> and what might be called “dogmatic universalism,” lately given its most vigorous defense by David Bentley Hart—called “dogmatic” because, as Hart argues, anything less than absolute certainty about the salvation of all would be outside the limits of Christian faith, universalism being on par with the dogmas of the Trinity and Incarnation as cornerstones of the faith.<sup>15</sup>

But in reality only Hart’s thinking conforms to the above definition of universalism, insofar as he is willing to assert the final salvation of *all* rational creatures, while Balthasar restricts his hope to human beings alone.<sup>16</sup> Although Balthasar holds out a hope for the salvation of all *men*, he never actually entertains the possibility of a genuine universalism in which every rational creature is saved; in fact, he explicitly rejects it.<sup>17</sup> So we can make a further division between “absolute universalism,” which includes every rational creature, including the devil and the other fallen angels, and a “limited universalism” (yes, an oxymoron) which includes only those human beings for whom Christ shed his blood. The question is, as is now becoming clear, the extent to which we can assign salvation (whether in the mode of hope and possibility or of certainty) to the demons and the devil.

In this article, I intend to answer two questions: first, whether it is a fact of Revelation that the devil is consigned to hell everlastingly, and, if so, how we know; and second, what the answer to the first

question tells us about the possibility of the salvation of all human beings. I conclude that it is impossible for a Christian theologian to hold to the possibility of the devil's salvation without violating the principles by which theological thought must operate, meaning that an absolute universalism is antecedently prohibited by Revelation, before theology proper can even broach the question. Then, however, I argue that this fact does not rule out the tenability of Balthasar's hope for a limited universalism, which extends only to human beings, although it does weaken it in a certain respect.

### *I. Setting the Stage: Satan's Salvation in History*

Although the purpose of this article is not historical, it remains worthwhile to consider briefly the historical origins of the question surrounding the devil's salvation. This extremely brief overview is in no way exhaustive, but merely suggestive.

It is well known that the most scandalizing aspect of Origen's eschatological speculations involved less the idea that all men might be saved than that this salvation would include the devil. At times, Origen writes hesitantly and leaves both possibilities open: "But whether among those orders that live under the chieftainship of the devil and conform to his wickedness there are some who will one day in the ages to come succeed in turning to goodness by reason of the power of free will which is in them . . . you, reader, must judge."<sup>18</sup> In other places, though, Origen is less ambiguous. Jerome makes this clear in one of his letters: "[Origen teaches] that, after many ages and one 'restitution of all things,' it will be the same for Gabriel as for the devil, for Paul as for Caiaphas, for virgins as for prostitutes."<sup>19</sup> Despite the apparent confidence with which Origen sometimes writes on this matter, it is still the case that he never attributes anything like dogmatic certainty to this particular *theologoumenon*.<sup>20</sup> In a letter to his friends, Origen even remarks, "According to them [those 'who take pleasure in accusing their neighbors'], I say that the father of malice and perdition, and of those who are

excluded from the kingdom of God, that is, the devil, will be saved. Not even a deranged and manifestly insane person can say this.”<sup>21</sup> Gregory of Nyssa is less ambiguous, affirming that God has healed “even the introducer of evil himself.”<sup>22</sup>

So, on the historical record, it is clear that the salvation of the devil was included in the universalist speculations of theologians as noteworthy as Origen and Gregory of Nyssa: the former the most important theologian of the ante-Nicene period and a major influence on all later patristic thinking, especially in the realm of biblical interpretation; the latter a doctor of the Church and a leading architect of trinitarian dogma. This teaching, as Origen’s letter shows, caused a certain amount of scandal in those who encountered it. It seems safe to assume that a similar response of shock would be received by any preacher today daring to assert the same. And although a certain amount of weight ought to be given to an opinion entertained by theologians as titanic as Origen and Gregory, it nevertheless remains to be seen whether we have any good reason to support such a teaching, at least in the mode of possibility, today.

## *II. Satan’s Salvation in Scripture*

Given that the purpose of the New Testament is to announce the Good News of the world’s redemption through Christ, it is not surprising that scant positive information about Satan and the other demons is given. They do come in tangentially, however, as in Jesus’s saying, “Then he [the king] will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels [εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον τὸ ἡτοιμασμένον τῷ διαβόλῳ καὶ τοῖς ἀγγέλοις αὐτοῦ]’” (Mt 25:41). Obviously every Christian universalist is familiar with these words which seem, if not to announce forthrightly, at least to threaten that some number of human beings will be consigned to the same eternal fire that contains the devil and his angels. That this fire already contains the devil seems presupposed. There are, of course, ways of getting around this appearance

to construct some sort of doctrine of universal salvation, since, presumably, no Christian theologian can arbitrarily reject certain clear assertions of Scripture.

One of these ways is to remove denotations of everlastingness from English translations of this phrase (and its parallels, Mt 25:46 and 2 Thess 1:9).<sup>23</sup> At first glance, this seems reasonable enough, since the Greek term *aiōnios*, rendered as literally as possible, would not correspond in any exactitude to the English *eternal*, if understood as a period of endless duration. Related to the noun *aiōn* (Latin, *aevum*; English, *eon*), *aiōnios* most literally would mean *age-long*, or *of/pertaining to the/an age*.<sup>24</sup> And although it certainly *could* refer to a kind of endlessness in the usual sense of *eternal*, it does not have to. What this quasi-prophetic saying of Christ could refer to, then, is not an endless experience of punishment, but rather a temporally limited process of purgation that might be quite long and quite painful—fire, even when it symbolizes purification, certainly also connotes intense pain<sup>25</sup>—but not endless.<sup>26</sup> These apparent threats of eternal punishment can then be synthesized with the more universalist-sounding passages of the New Testament (Jn 12:32, Rom 5:18–21, 1 Cor 15:22–28, 1 Tim 2:4) by subsuming the former under the latter, representing “two different moments within a seamless narrative, two distinct eschatological horizons, one enclosed within the other.”<sup>27</sup>

The purpose of this article is not primarily exegetical, and so I have no intention of considering the reasonableness of this interpretation in the detail that it ought to be given.<sup>28</sup> Since it is an undeniable fact that *aiōnios* does not have to mean eternal, we can support it as an interpretation for the time being. So, at this juncture, it seems that we have uncovered a certain exegetical seed for a doctrine of universalism that includes the demons (since nowhere else does Scripture speak explicitly about God’s desire to save them), on the supposition that *aiōnios* can reasonably be interpreted to signify something less than everlastingness. It is a reasonable assumption that if “hell” for human beings is medicinal and purificatory punishment that necessarily comes to an end, the same can be applied to “hell” for the

devil.<sup>29</sup> This interpretation, of course, relies on a certain reading of the word *aiōnios*, which might, after all, mean just what the typical interpretation thinks it means.

Yet any comfort in this kind of interpretation, at least with respect to the devil, is quickly complicated. Hart insists that if the New Testament wished to speak about eternal punishment, it would use a word like *aīdios*, which contains none of the ambiguities of *aiōnios*.<sup>30</sup> Yet the epistle of Jude refers in seemingly unambiguous language to the “eternal chains” (v. 6) of the fallen angels, using a term (*aīdios*) that properly means *eternal*.<sup>31</sup> This saying now seems to undermine any attempt to create a system of an all-embracing universal salvation. If the *apokatastasis pantōn* is understood as the restoration of all rational creatures to a state of supernatural union with God, then it must include every last creature who is capable of seeing God, including the devil.<sup>32</sup> Yet this passage seems very clear in its assertion that the chains currently binding the devil and his angels are nothing short of everlasting.

In his translation of the New Testament, Hart notes that this passage “is the one place in the New Testament, incidentally, in which an image of otherworldly punishment (though only of fallen angels and demons) is accompanied by the Greek word that properly means ‘eternal’ . . . though here the phrase seems to mean only that the chains are infrangible, inasmuch as they are ‘everlasting’ only *until* the day of judgment.”<sup>33</sup> But this interpretation fails to persuade, unless one is so convinced by speculative arguments for universalism that it is the only interpretation one is willing to see.

Such an interpretation only makes sense if one has good reason to believe that there will be a restoration of the fallen angels to a state of union with God after this “judgment of the great day.” If one has good reason to believe this, that reason surely does not come from within Scripture. Thus, the assertion that the angels are confined “in eternal chains unto the judgment of the great day” should hardly be construed as suggesting that they will be released from their imprisonment after this day. For one thing, phrases such as “unto the judgment

of the great day” do not necessarily say anything about what comes *after* the time in question. The classic example is Jesus’s words at the end of Matthew’s Gospel: “And behold, I am with you for all days until the completion of the age.”<sup>34</sup> If we are to construe a saying like this as suggesting that Jesus will only be with his disciples until the end of the age, but not afterward, it would hardly be the message of encouragement it is meant to be. But this difficulty need not bother us, as such language asserts nothing of the time after the “completion of the age.” The same standard can be applied to this passage from Jude. Just because language of “up to [a time]” is used, does not mean that anything is asserted about the time *after* the judgment. Second, the very term *krisis* denotes separation; thus, to suggest that the time after this *krisis* would dispel all separation of the unrighteous angels from the righteous would be fairly far-fetched. Last, since the very term *aïdios* denotes unlimited temporal persistence, and thus deals explicitly with *time*, it is another implausible interpretation that the term connotes in this instance only infrangibility. If the author intended to signify infrangibility instead of everlastingness, he surely would have avoided a word whose clear definition involves unlimited temporality.

By all accounts, then, it requires a certain amount of exegetical elasticity in order to dispel the suggestion of this passage that the fallen angels are everlastingly withheld from salvation. If one feels so inclined, nothing stops him from holding onto such an interpretation. But it is clearly a forced interpretation, coming more from the will of the interpreter than the literal meaning of the text.

Now, it remains true that biblical “proof-texting” is a rather infantile method of exegesis, especially for informing a speculative theology, insofar as it antecedently overrides any nuance that might be present in the texts of the Bible. But it is also true that there is very little nuance to the information that the New Testament provides about the possible salvation of Satan and the other demons, simply because there is such scant information provided; so it seems fairly reasonable to cling to this one seemingly unambiguous statement. If

the content of Revelation really is the foundation of all theological reflection, it seems eminently reasonable to receive this apparently simple assertion as the clear stance of Revelation on this matter. A doctrine of absolute universalism would flatly reject the straightforwardly simple reality that this statement relates. To resort to this passage in Jude as a proof-text (understood pejoratively) against a universalism that includes the devil is no different from using 1 John 2:2—"He is the expiation of our sins, and not of ours alone but also of the whole world"—as a proof-text against that insidious doctrine of limited atonement. So, no matter how reasonable a doctrine of universal salvation that includes the devil might appear,<sup>35</sup> it is undeniable that this sort of doctrine is antecedently excluded by the very content of Revelation. No matter how difficult it might be to rationalize, it remains a fact of Revelation that the fallen angels are excluded from salvation.

### *III. Lex Orandi Lex Credendi*

It would be prudent to bolster this argument if a hasty exploration of the New Testament does not persuade. The question at hand is how the theological principle of *lex orandi lex credendi*—that the Church's manner of praying is a sign of the content of her belief—relates first to the question of the devil's salvation, and second to the question of universal human salvation.

This principle enjoyed a certain high status in the early Church. Irenaeus, for example, considered it a persuasive argument against the Gnostics that the corporeal reality of the Eucharist disproved, so to speak, the Gnostic claim of the immateriality of Christ's body.<sup>36</sup> Basil, recalling the ancient baptismal formula (Mt 28:19), saw that such a formula implicitly asserted the equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and Son, even if this reality had only remained implicit in the liturgy of the Church prior to the trinitarian controversies of the fourth century.<sup>37</sup> And Cyril of Alexandria saw that, if Nestorian Christology were true, then the Eucharist would be cannibalism,



which is absurd; so, Nestorian Christology must be wrong.<sup>38</sup> Even some heretics held the principle in high esteem, as Gregory of Nazianzus sought to answer the charge of the *Pneumatomachi* (“Spirit-fighters,” those who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit) that no one has ever worshipped the Holy Spirit.<sup>39</sup>

If we allow this principle to guide our thoughts about the salvation of the devil and its significance with respect to the possibility of the salvation of all men, the rather brief exegesis of the pertinent New Testament passages explored above is merely confirmed. Not only is there no single prayer for the salvation of the devil or other fallen angels, but the Church, in both the past and the present, has prayed precisely for the opposite: “Cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits,” she prays to St. Michael. Perhaps the Church has just “gotten it wrong,” and is simply unaware that the hell into which she prays the devil be cast is really just an incomprehensibly excruciating purgatory. But, if we say as much, we formally depart the boundaries of properly theological logic. And, if we do this, a certain kind—indeed the most incoherent kind—of rationalism threatens to come about, inasmuch as we need simply to be provided with some necessary information that Revelation provides (for example, that Christ has died for all, that God wants all to be saved) and then proceed to our own conclusions from such information (all creatures must be saved), irrespective of other pertinent aspects of Revelation (language of judgment and separation, the Church’s prayers, and lack thereof). There seems no coherent way of avoiding this conclusion without compromising the principles that make theology what it is: an absolute universalism, construed as including even Satan, cannot be held without obscuring the clarity of Revelation on this matter.

#### *IV. Balthasar's Hope*

##### A. THE CHARGE

As was discussed in the introduction to this article, this “absolute universalism” is not the only kind. A “limited universalism,” understood as including all human beings, is not yet ruled out. So the kind of “hopeful universalism”—a better name would be “universalistic hope”—represented principally by Hans Urs von Balthasar is still on the table. As already mentioned, Balthasar rejects the possibility of salvation for the devil: “The sphere to which redemption by the Son who became man applies is unequivocally that of mankind.”<sup>40</sup> This fact potentially has great significance for Balthasar’s speculations. The primary question for Balthasar is the content of God’s will.<sup>41</sup> But if God is perfectly “willing” to allow Satan and the other rebellious angels to fall into eternal punishment, it seems likely that he would be just as willing to let men do the same. Having been given this insight into the will of God, and supposing that there is not some radical disjunction between God’s saving will for men and for angels, which would make him seem somewhat arbitrary and even anthropomorphic (weighing options and picking one over the other), we now have better reason to think that the two emphases of Scripture (human sinfulness and the divine salvific will) can be synthesized, with the latter subordinated to, or conditioned by, the former. It seems reasonable to suppose that God also desired that all angels be included in his heavenly banquet. Since we know that this desire was not accomplished, then we are forced to make some sort of distinction within God’s saving will, at least in the case of the devil and the other demons. Having been forced to make this distinction, there appears no reason why we should not make a similar distinction with respect to the salvation of human beings.

In his penultimate book, *City of God*, Augustine considers the various strands of universalism current in his day and refutes each one. The opinion that punishment is merely temporal, says Augustine, is motivated by a certain “tenderness of heart and human compassion.”<sup>42</sup>

But why should this tenderness not extend even to the devil and the other evil angels? “Why should this fountain flow as far as the whole of human kind, and then dry up as soon as it reaches the angels?”<sup>43</sup> Some of them, of course, will be so daring as to teach the liberation of the devil himself, but this is certainly an error that would “surpass all errors in its perversity, its wrong-headed contradiction of the express words of God.”<sup>44</sup> Augustine’s point is clear: for whatever reason we convince ourselves that all men will be saved, there is no good reason why the same salvation should not be extended to the devil. Since we know how perverse an opinion this is, we know also that the tenderness and compassion that motivates this superficial universalism is misguided. That God is willing to condemn the devil for all eternity suggests also that he is willing to do the same to wicked men.

Augustine’s argument has been used against Balthasar. Ralph Martin, for example, writes, “Balthasar’s concern that God will have lost his ‘gamble’ if anyone is lost is considerably weakened and, indeed, runs into the impasse of the fact that the same ‘gamble’ was already and definitively ‘lost’ with the fall of a portion of the angels, also created free.”<sup>45</sup> Kevin Flannery, citing Augustine, says something similar: “If God can, without contradicting his own merciful nature, consign an angel to hell, there would seem to be no logical reason why he could not do the same to a human soul.”<sup>46</sup>

#### B. IN DEFENSE OF BALTHASAR

Martin and Flannery, with Augustine, have a cogent point. Even Edward Oakes, one of Balthasar’s more vigorous defenders in this and all matters, remarks that Martin “does, it must be admitted, score a few direct hits,” of which this is the preeminent.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, if we reject this analogy between angelic and human damnation, we run the risk of anthropomorphizing God, as if he in his heavenly abode chooses to save all men out of some grand gesture of love while leaving the rebellious angels to rot.

So we can say that, if we are keeping score, Balthasar’s opponents

have certainly scored a point against him on this matter. But it does not quite have the force these theologians think it does. As far as I can tell, Balthasar never considered this objection explicitly, being completely willing to affirm simultaneously the impossibility of the devil's redemption and the possibility of universal (human) salvation. But we can respond to this argument in a Balthasarian vein. Flannery is obviously correct to say that there is no logical reason why God could not consign a man to hell, given that he has already done the same to some number of angels. But he misses the point: Balthasar's grounds for hope were never logical, but Christo-logical. So he wonders: "Can God really suffer the loss of even the least of the sheep in his fold? One of his own creation, one for whom the Lord has shed his blood and endured the agony of being abandoned by the Father?"<sup>48</sup> The analogy fails for one simple reason: God never shed his blood for the devil. God has gone to the most unexpected lengths to secure the redemption of all men, bearing our sins and iniquities in order to liberate us from them. The very fact that he has won this treasury of graces for all men is good enough reason to believe that he is willing to dispense it to all men. Evidently, God has been willing to abandon the rebellious angels after their one errant choice, but to pursue man constantly, even to the point of becoming one among men, indeed one utterly forsaken by those for whom he came, in order to bring at least some (perhaps all) of the wandering sheep back into the fold. Perhaps we could source this asymmetry in the nature of angelic being, which has become "fixed" in the state of their original choice.<sup>49</sup> And this might be the case, but it fails to persuade entirely: surely, if God wanted to save the devil, he could. Even if this understanding of angelic nature is true, it remains also true that God antecedently permitted the fall of the angels, knowing that those who fell would have no chance of redemption. Thus, the angelic nature does not constitute such a hurdle to God's saving will.

The Church's liturgy also attests to this asymmetry. Unlike her prayers against the devil and the other demons, the Church prays earnestly for the salvation of the whole world.<sup>50</sup> And beyond these

prayers within the Mass, we can also add prayers such as the Fatima Prayer (“lead all souls to heaven”) and the chaplet of divine mercy (“for the sake of his sorrowful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world”). It is surely one of Balthasar’s most persuasive arguments that, in light of the Church’s mandate to pray for the salvation of all (1 Tim 2:1–6), it would be nonsensical for the Church to thus pray while having knowledge at every instant that such prayers will go (indeed have already gone) unanswered: It “could not be asked of her if she were not allowed to have at least the hope that prayers as widely directed as these are sensible and might be heard. If, that is, she knew with certainty that this hope was too widely directed, then what is asked of her would be self-contradictory.”<sup>51</sup> At face value, this seems to be unavoidably true. Now, if one is convinced that Scripture reveals the facticity of eternal loss for at least some, then certain constraints will have to be put on this argument. But it remains the case that these restraints will be somewhat artificial, since it certainly seems that the words “lead all souls to heaven” cannot coherently be said alongside simultaneous knowledge that such an event is an impossible wish.

The asymmetry between God’s actions toward men and toward angels is rather inescapable, and although the reason for it remains hidden, the fact of it is clear. Although rejecting the analogy does run the risk of making God look somewhat arbitrary and voluntaristic, we must reject it either way. Of course, this is not to give any sort of full affirmation to Balthasar’s universalistic hope, either the conclusion or the means of arriving at the conclusion. But it is to say that the fact of the devil’s damnation does not explicitly rule out Balthasar’s limited form of “hopeful universalism.” What Hart calls “intellectual timidity”<sup>52</sup> is really just the proper exercise of the principles of theological logic which, if abandoned, threaten to topple the whole enterprise.

## C. AGAINST BALTHASAR

Although we have seen that Augustine's charge, reiterated in the contemporary scene by Martin and Flannery, does not succeed in entirely emptying Balthasar's hope of its force, it would be naïve to say that it leaves it unimpaired. One example can show this more concretely. Take Balthasar's consideration of the nature of the created will ("finite freedom" in his idiom)<sup>53</sup> and the indelibility of its orientation to God. Since "the good in itself" governs the will, it can only opt for a particular good "on the basis of this transcendental constitution,"<sup>54</sup> meaning that the kind of rejection of God that eternal punishment would seem to presuppose—becoming "entirely self-contained"<sup>55</sup>—becomes difficult to conceive: "These remarks are designed to shed light on the internal limitations and difficulties involved in the idea that man has absolute power and freedom to turn his back, totally, on God."<sup>56</sup> This is a profound argument that bears on certain fundamental issues, such as the soul's relation to the good and to God, and it is one put forth not only by Balthasar with respect to the problem of hell.<sup>57</sup> It is not our goal to consider this argument in all the detail it ought to be given, but only from the perspective of this article's topic, namely what the fact of the devil's damnation tells us about it.

Balthasar, as he introduces this difficulty, leaves aside the question of the devil's freedom.<sup>58</sup> At first glance, this is a peculiar remark. Although Christological arguments for universalism might apply to human beings without applying similarly to the devil, the same does not hold for an argument founded on the nature of created freedom as such. The "finite freedom" possessed by the angels, if not identical to human freedom, is surely analogous to it in a very close way. Just as God has "stamped [finite human freedom] with his branding iron"<sup>59</sup> in an utterly indelible way, so he has done the same with angelic freedom. And, really, the force of this argument is not that God just happened to choose to create human freedom in this way, but that he *cannot otherwise create it*, since the *causa secunda* cannot but be permanently marked by the *causa prima* that gives rise to it. The appeal to

Aquinas—“omnia naturaliter appetunt Deum implicite”<sup>60</sup>—stresses this very fact. Aquinas does not say, “omnes homines naturaliter appetunt Deum implicite” (although this is certainly true), but “omnia,” referring not only to rational creatures with willing capacities but created *things* as such.<sup>61</sup> This implicit striving for God is not just found in the created will, but in the very essence of created things *as created*. Thus, the thrust of the argument would apply not only to human beings, but to the devil and the other fallen angels as well. Since we know that, in spite of this transcendental constitution of the will, the devil managed to merit eternal damnation, the force of this argument is significantly minimized. Now, this is not a license to dismiss the argument entirely, since it does deal with fundamental issues that are crucial not just to the problem of hell, but to theology in general: the justice of God, the relation of creation to God, the nature of the created will. Yet, considered from this angle alone, the argument loses a certain amount of its strength.

#### V. Conclusion

By all accounts, a Christian theologian who holds to the possibility of the devil’s salvation is doing so in clear contradiction to the witness of Scripture and the principles of theological reasoning assumed throughout the tradition (*lex orandi lex credendi*, in particular). A certain amount of exegetical and theological manipulation can work to alleviate this appearance of tension, but it remains just that: manipulation. At the end of the day, the theologian must remain docile to the content of Revelation which, in this matter, is clear. Although the claim that the salvation of all human beings is a legitimate object of hope is indeed a defensible one, and one with many strong arguments, the larger claim that this hope might be extended to the devil is unjustifiable.

## Notes

1. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 2nd ed., trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1963) §§ 117–20, 536–60. “The merely gradual passage of individuals into the full enjoyment of redemption is for our race-consciousness just what the gradual process of sanctification is for our personal consciousness” (540).
2. Although Barth says in his *Credo* that a doctrine of apokatastasis would “eviscerate” the Creed (cited in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward Oakes, SJ [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992], 186), there is no doubt that the logic of his doctrine of election (see *Church Dogmatics* 2.2 [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957], 3–506) leads to apokatastasis as an almost unavoidable conclusion. As Barth says, “If the teachers of predestination were right when they spoke always of a duality, of election and reprobation, of predestination to salvation or perdition, to life or death, then we may say already that in the election of Jesus Christ which is the eternal will of God, God has ascribed to man the former, election, salvation and life; and to Himself He has ascribed the latter, reprobation, perdition and death” (CD 2.2, 162–63).
3. The theme finds its completion in the eschatological conclusion of Sergius Bulgakov’s *Bride of the Lamb*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 379–526. “The eternalization of hell would signify that the Divine Sophia, the ground of creation, is powerless to overcome the inertia, infirmity, and antagonism of creation. It would also signify either that good has a vindictive character or that evil is equal to good in power” (501). “Even for the righteous, heavenly bliss comes only after the expulsion of hell from the world” (519).
4. In *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1978), Karl Rahner remarks that “we are not obliged to declare that we know with certainty that in fact the history of salvation is going to end for certain people in absolute loss” (435). In *Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of His Life*, trans. Harvey Egan, ed. Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons (New York: Crossroad, 1990), Rahner says more clearly,
 

We do not know, but today we are permitted to hope that, in spite of all ideological differences and in spite of so much horror in the profane history of the world, many, perhaps even all human beings, belong to those in whom the free, gratuitous and overflowing grace of God is victorious. This is a conviction that one can and, indeed, must have. . . . I fear eternal damnation in particular cases and yet hope for the possibility of a final *apokatastasis panton* (salvation of all), in spite of the fact that this hope is constantly being undermined by our empirical evidence (167).

Famously, also, he advocates a certain hermeneutic of the eschatological assertions of scripture according to which said assertions provide no anticipatory report of the eschaton’s content, and therefore no knowledge that anyone is in hell: see “The



- Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 323–46.
5. Most famously in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved”? With a Short Discourse on Hell*, trans. David Kipp and Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014). See also *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 5, *The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 191–321; “Some Points on Eschatology,” in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 1, *The Word Made Flesh*, trans. A. V. Littledale (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 255–77; and “Eschatology in Outline,” in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 4, *Spirit and Institution*, trans. Edward Oakes, SJ (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 423–67.
  6. The view that God is simply unable to save all has arisen in certain corners of Protestant analytic philosophy. See Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 29–64, and *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 164–95, for his peculiar doctrine of “transworld depravity,” according to which each free creature, theoretically, possesses the unavoidable defect that he will freely choose evil at least once, so that God cannot prevent such actions without impinging on the creature’s freedom. William Lane Craig has synthesized this view with the Molinist teaching of *scientia media* in what he calls “transworld damnation,” the same principle but applied to the unavoidability of damnation: see “‘No Other Name’: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ,” *Faith and Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (1989): 172–88. According to Craig, God creates both those who do and who do not possess transworld damnation, so that there be “an optimal balance between saved and unsaved” (184).
  7. Just consider the two largest monographs on the issue published in the last decade: first, Ilaria Ramelli’s *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Boston: Brill, 2013), which is uncompromising in its claim that universalism was the majority opinion of the early Church (even the early Augustine), and second, Michael McClymond’s *The Devil’s Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), which seeks to refute Ramelli’s book at every turn, and whose most significant argument sources “Christian” universalism in the second- and third-century Alexandrian Gnostics (a fact Balthasar himself observed in some part: see *Dare We Hope*, 185) as a sign, supposedly, that universalism is far from a Christian teaching. We might observe that it is not a coincidence that one of these authors is resolutely in favor of universalism and the other resolutely against it.
  8. See, for example, *Rules Briefly Treated*, q. 267 (William Jurgens, ed., *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, vol. 2 [Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1979], 25–26).
  9. See, for example, *Hom. in Matt. 23, 9* (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 10, ed. Philip Schaff [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995], 164). Hereafter all citations to the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* series will be given by the abbreviation *NPNF1* /2 followed by the volume number and page number, for example, *NPNF1* 10:164.

10. See, for example, *De Civitate Dei* 21; trans. Henry Bettenson, *The City of God Against the Pagans* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 964–1021.
11. See, for example, *Peri Archōn/De Principiis* 1, 6; translated as Origen, *On First Principles* [subsequently referred to as *PA*], trans. G. W. Butterworth (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2013), 69–75.
12. See, for example, *Catechetical Oration* 26 (*NPNF2* 5:495–96).
13. There is some ambiguity here. Gregory appears to reject the idea that God’s punishment is merely purificatory, distinguishing between a “cleansing” fire and an “avenging” one, but then leaves open the possibility that the fire might be purely cleansing after all. See *Or.* 40, 37 (*NPNF2* 7:373).
14. A form of this position, as already noted above, belongs to Karl Rahner as well. Balthasar also considers other major figures of contemporary Catholic theology to share his opinion, including Erich Przywara, Maurice Blondel, Henri de Lubac, Joseph Ratzinger, et al. (see *Dare We Hope*, 133–35).
15. So, in reference to Balthasar’s famous hope, Hart rejoins, “Christians dare not doubt the salvation of all” (David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019], 66).
16. Although Balthasar never wrote a book the title of which would be the German equivalent of “Dare We Hope That All Men Be Saved?” (the English edition is a combination of *Was dürfen wir hoffen* [1986] and the *Kleiner Diskurs über die Hölle* [1987]), the English title is fortunate insofar as it highlights the fact that Balthasar’s hope is restricted to human beings.
17. See *Dare We Hope*, 112–15 on Satan, esp. 113: “Let it be said at the outset that theological hope can by no means apply to this power. The sphere to which redemption by the Son who became man is unequivocally that of mankind.” See also 138 and footnote 10 on 37–39, an approving quotation of Gustave Martelet that the “absurdity of hell” attains at least in the case of the devil. Also, *Theo-Drama* 5, 205, on the analogy between reprobated men being “cast out” and the devil being done the same.
18. Origen, *PA* 1, 6, 3 (Butterworth, 73).
19. Jerome, ep. 84 “ad Pammachium et Oceanum,” 7 (*NPNF2* 6:179). Scholars are in general agreement that Rufinus cannot be trusted because of his attempt to tame many of Origen’s more unusual beliefs. Jerome also translated *Peri Archōn*, but his translation is unfortunately lost. Thankfully, there are still some extant letters in which Jerome discusses Origen, frequently supplying exact quotations as translated into Latin. For an exploration of these difficulties surrounding Origen’s texts, see John Cavadini’s introduction to Butterworth’s translation, lxii–lxix; or Jean Danielou, *Origen*, trans. Walter Mitchell (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), xi–xii; or McClymond, *Devil’s Redemption*, 238–39. Jerome’s translations of other works by Origen, such as homilies and commentaries whose original Greek is still extant, are substantially accurate. It is assumed that his presentation of *Peri Archōn* is likewise.
20. It is worth mentioning that in the preface to the first book of *Peri Archōn* (Butterworth, 1–7), in which Origen lists the dogmatic certainties of the faith as he received it

(such as the divinity of the Son), *apokatastasis* does not appear, but only appears later, as Origen attempts to unfold the faith into a sort of theological system that includes many of his own speculations that are not afforded the weight of certainty, much less of dogmatic authority. Balthasar argues that Origen never attributed perfect certainty to this speculation in *Dare We Hope*, 42–45. Henri Crouzel agrees, arguing that *apokatastasis* could only have been a hope for Origen (*Origen: The Life and Thought of the First Great Theologian*, trans. A. S. Worrall [San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989], 265). Crouzel’s language of “hope” is a bit inappropriate since Origen himself never uses this kind of language. Nevertheless, the general point, that *apokatastasis pantōn* was never unambiguously held by Origen, appears true.

21. Henri Crouzel, “A Letter from Origen ‘To Friends in Alexandria,’” in David Neiman and Margaret Schatkin, eds., *The Heritage of the Early Church* (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1973), 140. In this case, Rufinus’s translation (cited here) exactly matches Jerome’s. McClymond, who only takes a negative view of Origen, sees nothing but verbal gymnastics in Origen’s words, since “the devil could not be saved as the devil . . . [but] might be saved and returned to God as *Lucifer*—that is, as a fallen angel who had returned to his original state of being” (*Devil’s Redemption*, 273). It is just as likely an interpretation that Origen was aware of this consequence within his theology and was tentative to affirm it.
22. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, xxvi (NPNF2 5:496).
23. Matthew 25:46: καὶ ἀπελεύσονται οὗτοι εἰς κόλασιν αἰώνιον, οἱ δὲ δίκαιοι εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον (“and these will go into eternal punishment, but the just into eternal life”; 2 Thess 1:9: οἵτινες δίκην τίσουσιν ὄλεθρον αἰώνιον . . . (“these will pay the price of eternal destruction”).
24. So David Bentley Hart, in his translation of the New Testament, renders *aiōnios* as *of the Age*. For explanation and defense, see *The New Testament: A Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), 537–43.
25. Gregory of Nyssa remarks that the separation of evil from our natures “becomes a blessing to that nature, though the separation is agonizing” (*Great Catechism*, 26 [NPNF2 5:496]).
26. Such imagery of fire, judgment, and salvation is used by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:10–15. Generally the two classes of the saved (those saved by fire and those whose edifices survive God’s judging fire) are understood to refer to a distinction among those are saved. Hart, on the other hand, understands this passage to refer not just to the saved as contradistinguished with the damned, but with all human beings as such. See *That All Shall Be Saved*, 105–106.
27. Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved*, 103.
28. Balthasar, it should be noted, calls this reinterpretation of *aiōnios* as signifying a temporally limited period of purgation “pointless” (*Theo-Drama* 5, 305; cf. 286–87). And this interpretation, simply on exegetical grounds irrespective of commitments to Catholic teaching, seems reasonable. One can glean the fact of hell’s eternity from those other sayings of the New Testament that need no qualifying adjective (whether

*aīōnios* or otherwise) to signify the fact that hell is definitive and final. For example, the “will not inherit” sayings (Mt 7:21, 1 Cor 6:9–11, Gal 5:19–21) seem clear enough: “will not inherit” means, according to the basic meaning of the words, “will never inherit,” which is satisfactorily absolute in its meaning. And although this conclusion might be avoided in reference to the Pauline sayings, inasmuch as idolaters, for example, will not inherit the kingdom of God as idolaters, but only having been purified beforehand, the same cannot be said of the *logion* in Matthew, in which Jesus states very bluntly that “not all will inherit the kingdom.” Similarly, Mark 9:44, for example, refers to the same fire not as αἰώνιος, but as the “unquenching fire [τὸ πῦρ τὸ ἄσβεστον],” another locution that seems to lack any ambiguity. One can avoid the absoluteness of these sayings, as Balthasar does, by interpreting them as minatory rather than anticipatory; but this hermeneutic still interprets such sayings as assigning eternity to hell, whether as the announcement of a fact or a future fact, or as threats.

29. It is worth noting that, for Catholics, the eternity of hell is a *de fide* dogma. See Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Patrick Lynch, ed. James Canon Castible (Charlotte, NC: TAN Books, 1974), 481–82.
30. Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved*, 123.
31. ἀγγέλους τε τοὺς μὴ τηρήσαντας τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἀρχὴν ἀλλὰ ἀπολιπόντας τὸ ἴδιον οἰκητήριον εἰς κρίσιν μεγάλης ἡμέρας δεσμοῖς αἰδίοις ὑπὸ ζόφον τετήρηκεν (“the angels who did not keep their station, but abandoned their proper dwelling, he has kept beneath darkness in eternal chains unto the judgment of the great day”).
32. It is worth noting that the term *apokatastasis* literally means *restoration* or *reinstitution*. *Katastasis* could refer, for example, to the institution of a politician into office. *Apo-katastasis*, therefore, signifies a re-instituting or re-restoration. The word could also be used in a medical context to signify a return to health. For Origen, the word is particularly fitting because it suggests a return to the original state of souls in unity with God and harmony with each other, whose ardor for God eventually “cooled off” (Origen etymologizes the Greek word for soul, *psychē*, with the verb *psychesthai*, which means *to blow* [as in wind] or *to cool*: see *PA* 2, 8, 3 [Butterworth, 156]), which precipitated God’s creation of the material world as a place for which these sinful souls could fall into bodies according to the weight of their sins: see, for example, *PA* 1, 4 and 2, 9. The faith as Origen received it contained belief in a soul, but nothing precise about its origin (see *PA* 1, pref., 5). Consequently, Origen felt free to explore various possibilities about the soul’s genesis, finding preexistence to be most cogent, probably on the grounds that a good and just creator would not fashion people into the outrageous situations of inequality that we find in the world (see *PA* 2, 9, 6). Needless to say, this idea came to be rejected by subsequent theologians, except the most rigid of Origenists. Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa, who were all profoundly influenced by Origen, rejected it. Therefore, to refer to universal salvation as *apokatastasis* is something of a misnomer, since it only strictly applies to an eschatology which is linked to the protological preexistence of souls. Salvation through Christ is not an *apo-katastasis*, construed as a return to an original state, but

rather a *hyper-katastasis*, a transcendence beyond the original state of justice in Eden to a properly supernatural beatitude.

33. Hart, *The New Testament*, 493.
34. “καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.” Here the preposition is ἕως, as opposed to εἰς in the Jude passage. Although there is a slight lexical distinction, the meanings are roughly identical.
35. Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 517. See 501–19 for Bulgakov’s whole treatment of the demons. According to Bulgakov, to eliminate the possibility of the demons’ salvation is “to limit divine love and the power of redemption, which have no limits” (505).
36. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5, 2, 2–3; in Hans Urs von Balthasar, ed., *The Scandal of the Incarnation: Irenaeus Against the Heresies*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 90–91.
37. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 10, 24 (NPNF2 8:16).
38. Cyril of Alexandria, *Five Tomes Against the Blasphemies of Nestorius* 4, §5.
39. *Or.* 31, “Fifth Theological Oration,” 12 (NPNF2 7:321–22).
40. Balthasar, *Dare We Hope*, 113. See also the whole chapter on Satan, 112–15.
41. See Balthasar, *Dare We Hope*, 6–7: “The question is whether God, with respect to his plan of salvation, ultimately depends, and wants to depend, upon man’s choice; or whether his freedom, which wills only salvation and is absolute, might not remain above things human, created and, therefore, relative.” And 118: “Thus, in the end, the divine will must become the root concept (‘For that alone is just which You will, and that is not just which You do not will’), and everything must consequently disappear into the incomprehensibility of God” (the quotation being from Anselm’s *Proslogion*, ch. 11). Of course, Balthasar’s “dilemma” is that he cannot understand how God’s saving will can be anything less than absolute (a serious problem indeed). So, when he introduces the question of eternal damnation in *Theo-Drama* 5, he remarks, “Amazingly, [the theology which consigns some men to hell] does not see this as diminishing the glory of God, whose justice is allegedly glorified in this lost portion of mankind just as much as his mercy is glorified in the portion that is to be saved” (191).
42. Augustine, *City of God*, 21, 17 (Bettenson, 995).
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*, (Bettenson, 995–96); cf. c. 23 (Bettenson, 1000–1002).
45. Ralph Martin, *Will Many Be Saved? What Vatican II Actually Teaches and Its Implications for the New Evangelization* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 164. When Martin puts “gamble” in quotation marks, he is referring not to Balthasar, but to Edward Oakes’s *Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Continuum), 314.
46. Kevin Flannery, “How to Think About Hell,” *New Blackfriars* 72, no. 854 (November 1991): 474.

47. Edward Oakes, SJ, "Saved from What? On Preaching Hell in the New Evangelization," *Pro Ecclesia* 22, no. 4 (2013): 383.
48. Balthasar, *Dare We Hope*, 202–203.
49. See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 64, a. 2.
50. Balthasar lists just a few examples of prayers from the liturgy in *Dare We Hope*, 23–25, fn. 3. For example, "Lord, accept the offering of your Church; and may what each individual offers up to the honor of your name lead to the salvation of all." And the positive quotation of Helmut Thielicke, "But prayer for the *apollumenoj* ["those who are perishing," see 1 Cor 1:18, 2 Cor 2:15, 4:3] can leave the legitimacy of the requested goal and the means to its attainment up to the hands to which this request has been entrusted. For this request, like all others, is included under the general proviso: "Thy will be done."
51. Balthasar, *Dare We Hope*, 23–24.
52. Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved*, 103.
53. This relation between infinite freedom and finite freedom is the main subject of the second volume of *Theo-Drama*. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 2, *Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), esp. 189–334.
54. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* 5, 300.
55. *Ibid.*
56. *Ibid.*, 304.
57. Robert Sachs argues similarly in his article, "Current Eschatology: Universal Salvation and the Problem of Hell," *Theological Studies* 52 (1991): 227–254, esp. 246–52; also Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved*, 160–95.
58. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* 5, 300.
59. *Ibid.*, 301.
60. "All things naturally strive for God implicitly" (*De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 4; cited by Balthasar in *Theo-Drama* 5, 300–1, fn. 1).
61. Cf. *De Veritate* q. 22, a. 2, ad 2: "In quantum aliqua desiderant esse desiderant Dei similitudinem et Deum implicite": "Insofar as things desire to be, they desire a likeness to God and God himself, implicitly."

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