

Retrieving the Goat for Azazel: Balthasar's Biblical Soteriology

RICHARD BARRY
Providence College
Providence, RI

Aaron shall take the two he-goats and let them stand before the Lord at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting; and he shall place lots upon the two goats, one marked for the Lord and the other marked for Azazel [the “scapegoat”]. Aaron shall bring forward the goat designated by lot for the Lord, which he is to offer as a sin offering; while the goat designated by lot for Azazel shall be left standing alive before the Lord, to make expiation with it and to send it off to the wilderness for Azazel.

—Leviticus 16: 7–10 (New Jewish Publication
Society *Tanakh*)

The question is: Was he the one, great and final scapegoat for mankind? Did mankind load him with all its guilt, and did he, the Lamb of God, carry this guilt away?

—Hans Urs von Balthasar

Balthasar's Biblical Soteriology

HANS URS VON BALTHASAR'S SOTERIOLOGY, including especially his theology of Christ's descent to hell, is one of the most biblical theologies of the cross to be written in the last century. Balthasar retrieves themes from ancient Jewish and Christian theological traditions that are essential to an adequate understanding of Jesus's saving work, even though these themes have been underappreciated (at least, in Catholic theology). While his approach is sometimes eccentric, no doctrine of atonement can wholly neglect the profound truths re-dis-

covered and re-articulated in Balthasar's great trilogy precisely because these teachings are so deeply woven into biblical revelation. Because Balthasar's theology of the Cross is often identified as one of the most problematic aspects of his theological legacy, my assertions may themselves seem eccentric. I hope to support them by first enumerating the metaphors and images that Balthasar uses for sin and then appealing to the recent studies of Gary A. Anderson and Jacob Milgrom to outline the necessary role of the "two goats" in priestly atonement theology, after which I will finally show how Balthasar retrieves the essential work of the "goat for Azazel" for modern Catholic theology.

Unspeakable Sin

Sin creates special problems for language. Of course, a great army of theologians is in place—now and always—ready to emphasize the challenge of "God-talk" and the related importance of an apophatic approach to theology. Even as academics spin their words into tome after tome, an infinite God is never caught in linguistic webs; this point is always worth repeating. But David Bentley Hart reminds us of another essential truth: "God's speech in creation does not, then, invite a speculative *nisus* toward silence—the silence of pure knowledge or of absolute saying—but doxology, an overabundance of words, hymnody, prayer."¹ The same God who spoke our world into being invites us to join the angelic choir, even becoming the incarnate Word for us. In this sense, nothing is more natural than to speak joyfully of God. Creation has a doxological origin and destiny.

But sin is a special problem for language. Every word that tries to understand the meaning of "sin itself" is a word in mourning because all such words speak to a loss, to what might have been. None of them come close to the thing itself because—from the traditional metaphysical perspective—sin has no substance of its own. It is being inclined toward nothingness, and "nothing" is the truly unthinkable thought. Yet the psalmist says "my sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:3): sin is our constant companion, and we have a pressing need to talk about it.

Especially in this unhappy situation, we lean on metaphors.² Thus, in *Sin: A History*, Gary Anderson begins by pointing out how

¹ David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 298.

² While there are those today who argue that all truth claims are, at some level, metaphorical, assessment of the meaning or accuracy of this claim is not essential here.

unavoidable metaphors are in the quest to portray sin and how the metaphors we choose affect the way we conceive of corresponding positive ideas, such as forgiveness. As examples, he points out that “stained hands are *cleansed*, burdens are *lifted*, and debts are either *paid off* or *remitted*.”³ By way of metaphor, words and images are given on loan to abstract and impossible subjects like “sin” so that we might discuss what is literally unspeakable. Anderson’s study, therefore, tracks the metaphors used for sin in the Bible and in the early Church, ultimately showing that, within the scriptural canon itself, there was a transition from emphasis on the metaphor of sin as a burden to sin as a debt and that this transition had a corresponding effect on the way human salvation was conceptualized.

Modern writers are no less reliant on metaphors when talking about sin. It is also still true that, when we do not pay attention to which images are being used, we can fail to notice how these metaphors shape understanding. No modern Catholic theologian has had more to say about soteriology—and especially the theology of Christ’s passion—than Hans Urs von Balthasar. While many books and articles have appeared describing, defending, or disapproving of Balthasar’s doctrine of Christ’s Cross and descent to hell, commentators do not typically focus on his understanding of sin. From Anderson’s perspective, if one wants to understand why Balthasar depicts the solution to sin the way he does, one must first survey his hamartiology: “To understand what sin is, one must begin with the terminology deployed by a particular writer.”⁴ As we follow these instructions, it immediately becomes clear that Balthasar uses a rich array of images when talking about sin. Reflection on these images will make it easier for us to understand the decisions Balthasar makes in other areas of his theology.

Balthasar mixes and matches his metaphors for sin freely, without drawing attention to the fact that he is doing so. Nevertheless, it is possible to observe certain tendencies. Therefore, the metaphors considered in this essay will be divided into two broad categories. First, there are metaphors that correspond especially to particular sections of Balthasar’s great trilogy on beauty, goodness, and truth or specific volumes within the trilogy: in developing a theological aesthetics, Balthasar will speak of sin as ugliness; in the book focus-

³ Gary A. Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

ing on the Old Covenant, sin is infidelity; in the volumes grouped under the heading *Theo-Drama*, Balthasar describes sin as a misuse of freedom; when he turns to his *Theo-Logic*, sin is presented as “the lie.”⁵ Second, there are other metaphors that are so common that they cannot be associated with any particular volume or group of volumes. For example, sin is chaos. It is also (false) distance. And most importantly of all, sin is a burden. Each metaphor will be described in turn.

Glory of the Lord: Sin as Ugliness

Compared with the other metaphors to be considered below, Balthasar speaks less frequently of sin as ugliness. Nevertheless, in the context of theological aesthetics, the metaphor stands out, and it therefore merits attention. In the first volume of *The Glory of the Lord*, Balthasar shows how the (kenotic, crucified) form of Jesus Christ reconfigures our understanding of beauty such that the image of the Cross becomes the paradigmatic expression of God’s glory. Therefore, he speaks of “the inclusion in Christian beauty of even the Cross and everything else which a worldly aesthetics. . .discards as no longer bearable” and then adds that this “inclusiveness. . .embraces the most abysmal ugliness of sin and hell by virtue of the condescension of divine love, which has brought even sin and hell into that divine art for which there is no human analogue.”⁶ Here we can perceive the first stirring of a theme that will reoccur frequently. Jesus does not save us from our ugly, lying, twisted freedom by merely reasserting (Platonic) beauty, goodness, and truth, but by suffering creaturely brokenness as fully as possible so as to reverse it from the inside out.⁷ By any human criteria, the brokenness

⁵ Once again, because Balthasar feels free to mix and match his metaphors, there are many examples within the volumes of the *Theo-Drama* in which he speaks of sin as a “lie,” to give just one example. It is notable that different metaphors take prominence in different volumes, but this observation is not a hard and fast rule.

⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, *Seeing the Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 124. For further reflection on the divine aesthetic, worldly aesthetics, and “the element of the ugly, of the tragically fragmented, of the demonic,” see *ibid.*, 460.

⁷ See Balthasar’s treatment of St. Augustine’s theological aesthetics for additional examples of this complex approach to beauty and ugliness. For example, he quotes Augustine’s commentary on 1 John: “By taking flesh, he took to himself, as it were, your ugliness, to make himself like you and suited to you, and to spur you to love inner beauty”; in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 2, *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 136.

of the cross is scandalously ugly, but it is also the very icon of God's most glorious love. It is such love that is the true measure of divine beauty, and everything which revolts against such love should be identified as the spiritual "ugliness" of sin.

Glory of the Lord, The Old Covenant: Sin as Infidelity

In Balthasar's covenantal theology, which is developed in the sixth volume of *The Glory of the Lord*, he simultaneously emphasizes both the "one-sidedness" of the grace of the God who chooses Israel in love and the trusting "mutuality" that is established between God and the chosen people.⁸ Balthasar emphasizes the "inner richness, light, and warmth"⁹ of this relationship and the idea that the covenant is intended as an intimate dialogue.¹⁰ It is precisely out of the intimacy of this love that the "uniqueness of Israel's concept of evil" emerges.¹¹ Balthasar says that sin "appears essentially and formally as infidelity, whatever the precise contents of the trespass may be,"¹² and he therefore draws upon nuptial imagery to describe the nature of sin in the context of the ancient covenant. He clarifies that, for Israel, sin cannot be "rooted" in God, who has revealed himself as all-holy. Nor could the early Jewish theologians ground sin in a "demonic sphere" because Satan is a late addition to Jewish theology. Consequently, "Israel is alone with its God and has sufficiency of all things in its God; evil arises precisely at the point where this God seems insufficient to Israel, which therefore turns away from him to look for other gods. Evil is this very act of turning away."¹³ For Balthasar, this approach to sin is wholly theological. While he acknowledges that metaphysical investigation does have a place—later biblical writers take advantage of Greek ideas such as "μὴ ὄν [nonbeing] and στέρησις [depravation]"—"it does not reach the distinctive essence of theological guilt, which consists in the incomprehensible refusal of an answer of love to the incomprehensible offer of eternal love."¹⁴ The covenant is "made with a view to mutual fidelity,"¹⁵ and therefore Israel's explicit *infidelity* stands in sharp relief.

⁸ Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 6, *Theology: The Old Covenant* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 155.

⁹ Ibid., 162.

¹⁰ Ibid., 207.

¹¹ Ibid., 215.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 215–16.

¹⁴ Ibid., 216.

¹⁵ Ibid., 222.

Theo-Drama: Sin and Freedom

In Balthasar's mind, theo-aesthetics and theo-drama are inseparably related. It is the divine action at the center of the theo-drama—the total self-giving of the Son in an expression of infinite obedience in love—which is the true form of divine love. Those who have the “eyes of faith,” who by the grace of the Holy Spirit are drawn toward the beauty of Christ, are themselves called forward in freedom: they are inspired by God's beauty to take up their personal role in the theo-drama. But even though the relationship between theological aesthetics and theo-drama must be recognized, it is also true that the focus shifts as we move from one to the other. Now, in the context of a theological dramatics, the key concept is “freedom”—the infinite freedom of God and the analogous finite freedom of human beings. With this shift, there is a corresponding shift in the terminology used for sin.

The language used in these volumes to describe sin relies heavily on inter-personal metaphors of invitation and refusal and political metaphors of rebellion and usurpation. In the big picture, Balthasar is very attentive to human teleology: finite freedom was made to participate (freely!) in infinite freedom; human beings were made for communion with God, who is goodness itself. It is only in the context of such participation that we can play our proper role in the divine drama. God has made us for such freedom and invites our participation, and yet what we see throughout the scriptures, and even now in the daily news, is refusal, lack of acknowledgement, separation, and attempted autonomy. Balthasar calls it the “pathos of the world stage.”¹⁶ He says: “[human finite freedom] can only *be* itself by being oriented *beyond* itself, to the absolute good. . . . If created freedom chooses itself as the absolute good, it involves itself in a contradiction that will devour it: the formal object that informs [created freedom]—which is in fact absolute, self-positing freedom—is in constant contradiction with finite freedom's pretentious claim to be infinite.”¹⁷ Therefore, sin is choosing the self as the absolute good, which is portrayed with metaphors that imply a violent political coup. Human beings were given the power of finite freedom, an analogous form of autonomy, so that we might freely take up the “vocation to trinitarian love,”¹⁸ so that we might return God's gift of love in

¹⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 4, *The Action* (hereafter, *TD4*) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 160.

¹⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 5, *The Last Act* (hereafter, *TD5*) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 301.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 302.

thanksgiving. Instead, we have imagined our autonomy and power as an end in itself, and Balthasar interprets this as an usurpation of power: "In seeking to arrogate this power to itself, finite freedom does two things: it separates power from self-giving goodness, and it sets itself up against the absolute good—thereby incurring the judgment of the latter."¹⁹

Similarly, Balthasar also sees finite freedom's rebellion as a refusal to acknowledge God. He says, "The creature can refuse to acknowledge that it owes its freedom to the Creator. . . . Man's refusal reveals that abyss in the creature whereby it contradicts its own character as analogy and image."²⁰ Once more, he expresses the same idea in slightly different terms: the human desire "to be autonomous without acknowledging its origin"²¹ is conceived as our No to God. But even as Balthasar articulates the problem of sin in terms of false autonomy and an overall orientation expressed in the word No, he also frames his soteriology in corresponding language: we must locate this No "within the Son's all-embracing Yes to the Father, in the Spirit."²² Jesus's proper exercise of freedom, this divine autonomy that freely gives itself away, is (again) seen in Christ's Cross and descent to hell. Vividly, Balthasar says that "the creature's No is merely a twisted knot within the Son's pouring-forth; it is left behind by the current of love."²³

¹⁹ *TD4*, 165.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 329.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 330. Before moving on from this section about sin as a misuse of finite freedom, it is appropriate to mention the section entitled "The Analogy of Sin" in *TD4*. Here Balthasar points out that the word 'sin' is used analogously when speaking of Gentiles, Jews and Christians. For the Gentiles, who have not been blessed with the Law, sin is understood in the terms we have been exploring in this section: failure to acknowledge God, the source and *telos* of our finite freedom (*ibid.*, 168). Again, Balthasar affirms that, although pagans have sinned, they "have not infringed a positive law issued by God, like that given to Adam in paradise and to the people of Israel ever since Moses. For that reason, the sins of the pagans are not to be weighed in the same way as those of Adam and the Jews" (*ibid.*, 172). Turning to the sin of Israel, we can no longer look to the "purely anthropological, horizontal plane" because of the covenant to which Israel has been elected. For this reason, Balthasar says, "*in the whole of history, Israel is the place where the nature and the burden of sin is most directly manifested*" (*ibid.*, 173; emphasis in original). Here, in addition to the theme of sin being a failure of finite freedom, Balthasar adds one we considered earlier: covenantal infidelity. Finally, Balthasar addresses the problem of

Theo-Logic: Sin as The Lie

As noted before, the transition to the three volumes focusing on truth does not represent a sudden change in subject. Ben Quash says, “There cannot be reflection on the truth of the Christian revelation until one is a player in its midst—living it out and *partaking* of it in committed action[drama], and this is something that happens only when revelation elicits the necessary [aesthetic] *desire* to partake.”²⁴ Reflection on God’s truth, therefore, properly takes place only in the context of theo-dramatics and theo-aesthetics. Nevertheless, the volumes on theo-logic do represent a shift that corresponds to a change in the primary metaphor for sin. Sin is now seen as “the lie”: “being the Word pure and simple, [Christ] is also the truth pure and simple, the contradiction of him is also the untruth, the lie pure and simple . . . in John’s language, sin is defined as hatred of the truth that is Christ.”²⁵ To put the case another way, he writes: “In the face of the Logos, in whom all sense and reason dwell, lying hatred can only be a ground-less abyss devoid of sense.”²⁶

What is the relationship between Jesus Christ—the Logos made flesh—and “the lie”? Can there be any relationship at all? Following the pattern established in previous sections, Balthasar insists that Christ must, in some sense, experience the contradiction of untruth. But he first stipulates that “the negativity of hatred and lying cannot be integrated in any way into the truth as one of its transitional ‘moments.’ The only attitude the truth can adopt toward it is unqualified rejection, that is, judgment.”²⁷ In saying this, Balthasar is separating himself from any Hegelian scheme in which sin is imagined

sin in the New Testament, which he says is difficult to discuss: “Here sin is portrayed, on the one hand, as a final intensification of the Old Testament No to God’s Word (now made flesh). On the other hand, the New Testament takes as its vantage point the post-Easter vanquishing of sin and the reconciliation of the world to God” (ibid., 177). In each case, there is an analogous experience of sin, because God discloses himself to all, but it is an analogy, and not identity because of the dissimilarity between disclosures in ‘nature,’ in the Old Covenant, and in the New Covenant.

²⁴ Ben Quash, “Hans Urs von Balthasar’s ‘Theatre of the World’: The Aesthetic of a Dramatics,” in *Theological Aesthetics after von Balthasar*, ed. Oleg V. Bychkov and Jim Fodor (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008), 21.

²⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, vol. 2, *Truth of God* (hereafter, *TL2*) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 317. As mentioned above, Balthasar mixes his metaphors freely. Even though the metaphor of ‘the lie’ comes to the fore in the final three volumes of his trilogy, Balthasar had introduced the concept much earlier. As an example, see *TD4*, 164, 329.

²⁶ *TL2*, 318.

²⁷ Ibid., 322.

as one (necessary) pole within a dialectic: sin is not a contradictory stage through which God must pass for the sake of greater self-actualization. And yet, Balthasar says, “abstractly speaking, real (not Hegelian) negativity, contradiction of God, must be experienced within the truth understood as the exposition of God in the flesh.”²⁸ Balthasar’s explanation of the “experience” of the lie within the truth corresponds to his understanding of the cruciform No and Yes, ugliness and beauty. He writes, “In the Cross the contradiction of sin, its lie, and its un-logic are taken into the logic of the love of the Trinity. Not, however, in order to find a place there, but in all truth to be ‘damned in the flesh [of the Son]’ (Rom 8:3).”²⁹ Without unpacking this further, it is sufficient to conclude that, as Balthasar meditates on Christ as Beauty, then Goodness, and then Truth, the metaphors he uses for sin undergo a corresponding shift, and the different metaphors draw our attention to different aspects of Christ’s great confrontation with sin.

Additional Metaphors: (False) Distance, God-lessness, Chaos

Before moving on to the most important and most controversial metaphor that Balthasar uses throughout his *corpus* (sin as burden, load, thing), three additional images should be mentioned. First is the idea of sin as distance. According to Balthasar, distance is not foreign to God’s own being. He speaks of an “absolute, infinite distance” between the Father and the Son—within, of course, the perfect, eternal union of the Holy Spirit. After stipulating a primordial Trinitarian distance, however, Balthasar also identifies a false distance: “This divine act that brings forth the Son, that is, the second way of participating in (and of *being*) the identical Godhead, involves the positing of an absolute, infinite ‘distance’ that can contain and embrace all the other distances that are possible within the world of finitude, including the distance of sin.”³⁰ Second, along similar lines, Balthasar also refers to an inter-Trinitarian God-lessness, whereby “inherent in the Father’s love is an absolute renunciation: he will not be God for himself alone.”³¹ In this kenotic move of self-renunciation, the Father hands himself over to the Son, and this “handing over” of divinity (the Father lets the Son “be”) is eternal. Trinitarian God-lessness is different from, though not entirely unrelated to, the godlessness of human sin: (divine) God-lessness “must

²⁸ Ibid., 324.

²⁹ Ibid., 326.

³⁰ *TD4*, 323.

³¹ Ibid., 324.

not be confused with the godlessness that is found within the world, although it undergirds it, renders it possible and goes beyond it.”³²

Finally, third, in a number of places, Balthasar draws a parallel between the chaos from which the world was created and sin as chaos: “God once fashioned the world from chaos, but man, through sin, imported a second chaos into it.”³³ This amorphous chaos of sin is one way that Balthasar depicts sin as it exists separated from human beings, and this idea of disembodied sin leads directly into the final, but most important, metaphor employed by Balthasar.

Sin as Burden, Load, Thing

Balthasar often speaks of sin as a “reality” that has a weight or density or thingness. It is a burden that has crushed human beings, but it can also be transferred or “loaded” onto the “sin-bearer.” The imagery is highly physical, highly substantial. For example, “the one who abandoned himself can be utterly and completely determined by the will of the Father, who loads on him the burden of the reality that is ‘the sin of the world.’”³⁴ This is anything but an isolated statement; it is repeated over and over again. Balthasar says, “the Father—*cooperante Spiritu Sancto*—loads the Son with the sins of the world,”³⁵ and adds that “Jesus takes upon himself the entire sin of the world.”³⁶ Thus, the Father loads what the Son freely and kenotically accepts.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 316.

³⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 7, *Theology: The New Covenant* (hereafter, *GL7*) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 208.

³⁵ *TD4*, 335. Balthasar says this after he had already affirmed that it is human beings who load sins upon the willing Son:

If, once the Incarnation has taken place, we ask who burdens the Son, the “Lamb of God,” the “Lamb as though it had been slain,” with the unimaginable load of the world’s No to divine love, the answer—a preliminary answer, but nonetheless real—must be: men themselves in their darkness. . . . But it is equally clear that nothing would be achieved by men unloading their sin if the one onto whom they load it were incapable of receiving it in its totality, as *what it is*: it presupposes he is both willing and able to bear sin (ibid., 334).

Therefore, it is true to say that the Father loads the sins of the world onto the Son, and it is also true to say that we also load our sins onto the Son, and at the same time the Son actively opens himself to the burden.

³⁶ *TD4*, 180. Or again, “The surrendered Son, in bearing sin, that is, what is simply alien to God, appears to have lost the Father” (ibid., 320).

When confronted with statements like these, theologians who rightly accept the Augustinian doctrine that evil or sin is a privation of the good immediately challenge Balthasar on his apparent belief that sin is somehow a substantial reality, capable of being transferred from one person to another.³⁷ Given his overarching commitment to the great tradition, it may seem surprising that Balthasar refuses to retreat from the claim that sin has some kind of being. He nevertheless argues, "Because of the energy that man has invested in it, sin is a reality, it is not 'nothing.'"³⁸ Later, in the second volume of the *Theo-Drama*, he elaborates: "The question concerning the essence of sin cannot be positively answered, for sin is the lie and, hence, neither truth nor being, and yet men have lent it something of their personal being in order to make it possible. Herein lies the self-contradiction

³⁷ When it comes to sustained criticism of Balthasar's theology, Alyssa Lyra Pitstick is without equal, and she is, unsurprisingly, very critical of Balthasar's interpretation of sin. Reviewing his work, she says, "The 'God-lessness' of the divine love 'undergirds' sin, 'embrace[s]' it, 'renders it possible and goes beyond it.' The greatest suffering and forsakenness (and so all lesser sufferings) are also embraced by the Trinitarian 'distance' and have their archetype in God. Note that both sin and suffering are conceived here as positive realities"; see Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent Into Hell* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 121–22. A few pages later, she says, "although Balthasar denies that the Trinitarian 'super-kenosis' is the archetype of sin, it is difficult to see how his assertion (and it is only that) can be consistent with other essential aspects of his own theology, such as his positions that sin is not nothing, but a reality, and that God is the source of all being. . . . If the Trinity is not sin's archetype, what is?" (ibid., 128). Here, Pitstick does not give Balthasar the best possible reading. Balthasar does not say that "sin and suffering are positive realities." Yes, the (warped, unnatural) distance that human beings put between themselves and God is dependent—in a sense—on inter-Trinitarian distance. But this is true because it is *only* within a universe in which there is "space" for the other to be other that the advent of self-centered-otherness becomes conceivable. If God were a perfect monad, there would be no space for genuine otherness (every distance would be collapsed), and there would be no space for finite freedom (every freedom would be overwhelmed), and thus there would be no sin; and there would be love. The false distance of sin is in no way a positive reality, though it is a possible reality only because of distance within the Trinity. Significantly, Pitstick also endorses Alberto Espezel's findings when he "straightforwardly rejects the concept of sin-in-itself on the grounds that it lacks sufficient foundation in Scripture and Tradition. . . . It is noteworthy of Espezel's treatment that the majority of his concerns about Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday relate to Scriptural exegesis" (ibid., 395n154). In this section I will especially call into question these conclusions.

³⁸ *TD5*, 314.

that makes sin at once abstract and concrete, so that it can be experienced only ‘unrealistically,’ only ‘negatively.’”³⁹ In this second quote, Balthasar makes it clear that sin does not have being in the same way that creatures have being. Nonetheless, both quotes indicate that sin is not mere privation of the good; it obtains some form of existence of its own, though (apparently) parasitically, feeding on our “energy” and “personal being.”⁴⁰

If Balthasar was willing to reexamine aspects of privation theory, it was only because he was convinced that there was biblical warrant for such a move, and he puts special emphasis on two scriptural passages. The first biblical motif, which we will explore in much greater detail in the third section of this paper, is the idea of the scapegoat, first mentioned in Leviticus 16:7–10. He says: “Here the God-man drama reaches its acme: perverse finite freedom casts all its guilt onto God, making him the sole accused, the scapegoat, while God allows himself to be thoroughly affected by this, not only in the humanity of Christ but also in Christ’s trinitarian mission.”⁴¹ Immediately after Balthasar says this, he again refers to Jesus as the “sin bearing Son.” It is this enactment of the scapegoat ritual, whereby the sins of Israel are loaded onto the goat who must bear them away, that Balthasar calls the acme of the theo-drama. With the Levitical Day of Atonement ritual, sin is depicted as a burden that is transferred from one party

³⁹ *TL2*, 350.

⁴⁰ Balthasar’s vague comments about the “not ‘nothing’” “reality” of sin call for further research, and it seems to me that, at the metaphysical level, “privation theory” remains theologically necessary. As Balthasar acknowledged above, from the perspective of Christian revelation, evil itself cannot be a participation in the Trinity, and it cannot be a product of some independent demonic god. Still, Balthasar points in directions that deserve our consideration. God invites humanity to join in his creative activity, and it seems that we can use this power in two especially fearsome ways: to cooperate in creating life (procreation) or to violently create corpses (by taking life). Through sin, in ways big or small, we create a corpse of our own still living body—to say nothing of the violence we perform against others. Or at least, we create lifeless amputations. These severed faculties—intended to be alive with virtue—are now the “not nothing” remnants of what might have been. Again, these faculties were meant to glide with us, helping us to joyfully live more and more freely in love, but now we carry them with us always as dead weight, and over time we are crushed under these sins more and more. As Balthasar says, we have “lent” our personal being to this hideous thing that is wholly our own, not of God, but nevertheless real. Again, this idea merits further consideration in dialogue with the metaphysical insights of privation theory.

⁴¹ *TD4*, 335.

to another, and this lends scriptural support to Balthasar's central metaphor for sin.⁴²

While the image of the scapegoat may be implicit in Balthasar's many references to sin as a burden, 2 Corinthians 5:21 ("For our sake he made him to be sin (ἁμαρτίαν)⁴³ who knew no sin") is probably the most quoted verse in Balthasar's soteriological texts.⁴⁴ From Balthasar's perspective, this verse shows the extent to which Christ was burdened with sins: he became identified with sin itself, though without ever committing sin. This further reinforces, for him, the idea that sin is a "something" that can be transferred from one person to another.

Balthasar's description of sin as a burden loaded onto the Son is even more nuanced than has been indicated thus far. On the Cross, Christ experiences the reality of sin *in solidarity* with human beings, but in his descent into hell, he experiences sin "as such," independent of individual human persons. Therefore, in the first moment, on the Cross, "God is solidary with us not only in what is symptomatic of sin, the punishment for sin, but also in co-experiencing sin, in the *peirasmós* [trial] of the very essence of that negation—though without 'committing' (Hebrews 4:15) sin himself."⁴⁵ Balthasar is adamant: "It is essential to maintain, however, that the Crucified does not bear the burden as something external: he in no way distances himself from those who by rights should have to bear it. (Indeed, he is *in* them

⁴² In *TD4*, Balthasar traces the history of Christian soteriology. In his telling, "Rupert [of Deutz (1075–1129)] was the first to apply to Christ the image of the scapegoat, an image that was to have such a long history" (*ibid.*, 292). (This is inaccurate; for example, we will later quote Tertullian saying that Jesus is our scapegoat. There are a number of other patristic examples of this.) Balthasar then traces the idea through Denys the Carthusian, John Calvin, and Theodore Beza, and also explores the modern adaptation of René Girard and Raymund Schwager.

⁴³ Balthasar is aware of the fact that this word in Greek can be—and, in the history of Christian biblical interpretation, very often has been—translated "sin offering." He says that 2 Cor 5:21 "can also be translated, seen from the standpoint of Jesus Christ: 'God . . . has made him a (voluntary) sin-offering'; but considered from the standpoint of the Father, the other translation, 'has made him to be sin,' is nevertheless correct" (*GL7*, 208). For additional interpretations, see *TD4*, 296.

⁴⁴ Followed, perhaps, by Galatians 3:13—"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us."

⁴⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter* (hereafter, *MP*) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 137.

eucharistically!).”⁴⁶ It seems that Balthasar interprets Christ’s Cross as a solidarity and a communion with sinners in which he suffers God’s wrath in union with us.

However, shifting attention to Holy Saturday, Balthasar pivots from the language of solidarity to the language of substitution. He asks: “what good [would] this solidarity do us if it did not have the potential of being intensified into a true substitution?”⁴⁷ This intensification is the descent into hell. Quoting Adrienne von Speyr, Balthasar says, “In this view . . . , hell would be what is finally condemned by God; what is left in it is sin, which has been separated from the sinner by the work of the Cross. . . . Sins ‘are remitted, separated from us, taken away from us. They are banished to the place where everything God does not want and condemns is hell. That is their place.’”⁴⁸ On the Cross, Jesus is united to all human beings and, as a corollary, to their sin. Through his solidarity with us, it becomes possible for our sin to be separated from us and for Jesus—the sin-bearer—to bear the sins away into hell.

In *Mysterium Paschale*, this is what Balthasar says Christ (passively) experienced on Holy Saturday: “the second death which, itself, is one with sheer sin as such, no longer sin as attaching to a particular human being, sin incarnate in living existences, but abstracted from that individuation, contemplated in its bare reality as such (for sin *is* a reality!).”⁴⁹ In the seventh volume of *The Glory of the Lord*, he says that, in the *visio (secundae) mortis* in Hell, Christ sees “the whole fruit of the redeeming Cross; . . . That is to say, sin in its ‘pure state’ separated from man, ‘sin in itself’ in the whole formless, chaotic momentum of its reality, was seen by Jesus.”⁵⁰ For Jesus, the initial fruit of the Cross is sin-in-itself, removed from sinners, to be taken away, as

⁴⁶ TD4, 338. He writes again, “The Son bears sinners within himself, together with the hopeless impenetrability of their sin, which prevents the divine light of love from registering in them” (ibid., 349).

⁴⁷ Hans von Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr, *To the Heart of the Mystery of Redemption* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 29.

⁴⁸ TD5, 314.

⁴⁹ MP, 173.

⁵⁰ GL7, 233. Similarly, and adding *even more* metaphors to the list, he writes, “The object of the *visio mortis* can only be the pure substantiality of ‘Hell’ which is ‘sin in itself.’ Plato and Plotinus created for this the expression *borboros* (mud, ordure) which the Church Fathers (and notably the Cappadocians) gratefully took up. Likewise the image of chaos is a natural one here. In another image still, Eriugena says that, in our redemption, ‘all the leprosy of human nature what thrown to the Devil’” (MP, 173).

far from the Father as east is from west.

In a footnote in the second volume of the *Theo-Logic*, Balthasar laments that *Mysterium Paschale* was written quickly and that students should now refer to von Speyr's thought directly. However, the only retraction Balthasar makes (though he does not use that word), is when he says, "The term 'solidarity with the dead' was a compromise that no longer appears in what follows."⁵¹ Of all the controversial things Balthasar said in *Mysterium Paschale*, this is the one phrase he made a point to correct. Why? Perhaps because of what we have just explained: Balthasar wants to limit solidarity with sinners to the Cross; the descent into hell is about bearing away the disconnected "sin itself" to the place God, in his grace, had prepared: Hell.⁵² This change in terminology late in Balthasar's life, mentioned only in a footnote, may seem irrelevant; it is not. To understand why Balthasar feels compelled to clarify his use of terms, it is helpful to review ancient Jewish atonement theology.

Balthasar and the Two Goats of Leviticus 16

This study began by following Gary Anderson's insight that, to understand a theologian's soteriology, it is essential to pay attention to the metaphors used for sin. I also mentioned that, in his book *Sin: A History*, Anderson tracks the main metaphors for sin within the Bible itself, showing that there was a transition from the metaphor of sin as

⁵¹ TL2, 345n75.

⁵² Thomas Aquinas made an argument that is not well received by modern Christians. Asking whether the "blessed in heaven will see the sufferings of the damned," he answers: "Nothing should be denied the blessed that belongs to the perfection of their beatitude. Now everything is known the more for being compared with its contrary, because when contraries are placed beside one another they become more conspicuous. Wherefore in order that the happiness of the saints may be more delightful to them and that they may render more copious thanks to God for it, they are allowed to see perfectly the sufferings of the damned," in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae, supplementum tertiae partis*, q. 94, a. 1, corp., in *Summa theologia*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 5 vols. (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1948). When von Speyr suggests that the "substance" of hell is the "sin of the world," disconnected from human beings on the Cross and born away by the Son to this place that has been prepared by the loving Father, perhaps in this context Aquinas's comment can be retrieved. Saints can certainly look at *that* hell and rejoice, because "sin itself" has been so thoroughly removed.

This paper has not reflected on von Speyr's concept of "effigies," though a more complete reflection on the metaphors Balthasar uses for sin would certainly include this idea; cf. TL2, 356–57.

a burden to the metaphor of sin as a debt. This shift was due in part to the growing influence of Aramaic in the Second Temple Persian period. The earlier Hebrew idiom “to bear [the weight] of sin” gave way over time to the parallel Aramaic idiom, which is literally “to assume a debt.”⁵³ This change in metaphors would have a profound effect on rabbinic and early Christian understanding of sin and forgiveness, leading ultimately to the classic Western soteriology of Anselm (which, Anderson argues, when contextualized within the latter perspective of sin as debt, makes perfect biblical sense).

Within Anderson’s book itself, and in most of the commentary on his book since it was published seven years ago,⁵⁴ the focus has been on the theological implications of this late-biblical idea that sin is a debt, and this research has been illuminating.

Much less effort has been put, however, into unpacking the contemporary consequences of the earlier Hebrew idea that there is a thingness to sin, “as if a weight was created *ex nihilo* and placed on [the sinner’s] shoulders.”⁵⁵ Perhaps this is because Anderson shows a linear historical progression in the images used for sin: the metaphor of sin as a burden is more or less isolated to an earlier period, while the metaphor of debt increasingly replaces it in the Second Temple and post-biblical period.⁵⁶ This history, however, does not detract from the permanent theological significance of the earlier mode of conceptualizing sin. After all, the earlier imagery remains canonical, and what’s more, it is essential for understanding ancient Jewish priestly and Temple theology.

Therefore, our focus must now turn to the images used in some of the earliest biblical texts. Anderson says, “What is most striking is the frequency of the idiom ‘to bear [the weight of] sin’ within the Hebrew Bible; it predominates over its nearest competitor by more than six to one. For Hebrew speakers in the First Temple period, therefore, the most common means of talking about human sin was

⁵³ Anderson, *Sin*, 27–28.

⁵⁴ This includes the symposium published in *Nova et Vetera* (English) 9.1 (2011).

⁵⁵ Anderson, *Sin*, 26. Similarly, he writes, “Crucial to this discussion is the notion that sin in biblical thought possesses a certain ‘thingness.’ Sin is not just a guilty conscience; it presumes, rather, that some-‘thing’ is manufactured on the spit and imposed on the sinner” (ibid., x). Echoing the earlier discussion, perhaps it is better to say with Balthasar that sin borrows its being from our personal being. It is hard to conceive how human beings could generate the reality of sin *from* nothing.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 7.

to compare it to weight.”⁵⁷ Most people, Anderson says, are surprised when they learn that this idiom is so common. This is because the Hebrew phrase “to carry away (the weight of) sin” (*nāsā’ ’āvōn*) is almost never translated literally; instead, translators render it simply “to forgive a sin.” The “thing” quality implicit in the Hebrew words themselves is lost.

As we have seen, the metaphor used to describe the problem of sin generally corresponds with the solution. To illustrate how the thingness of sin was solved in ancient Jewish thinking, Anderson turns to the cultic rituals that are at the heart of priestly theology: those performed on the Day of Atonement, which are described in the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus. In the words of David P. Wright, Leviticus 16 features “two main expiatory or purgative rites: the purification of the sanctuary and some of its sanctums with blood from priestly and communal *ḥaṭṭā’t* (purgation) sacrifices (vv 3–19), and the dispatch of the scapegoat, which bears the people’s sins (vv 20–22).”⁵⁸ We will be considering each of these rites in turn.

First are the offerings. While a large number of sacrificial rituals occurred daily at the Temple, *Yom Kippur* was the only day each year on which the High Priest ventured behind the curtain, into the Holy of Holies, to purify the Temple from the inside out with the blood of a bull and a goat. Why was this purification necessary in the Jewish religious imagination? What did these rituals accomplish? We should begin with the groundbreaking insights found in Jacob Milgrom’s work on Leviticus. For Milgrom, the *ḥaṭṭā’t* sacrifice in the Temple is not really a “sin offering,” as it is commonly translated, but rather a “purification offering.” He claims that this offering does not purge the personal sins or impurities of the offerer, but instead, the blood is a “ritual detergent” that cleanses the sanctuary itself.⁵⁹ Milgrom echoes what we have learned from Anderson when he says that, for Israel and surrounding cultures, impurity “was a physical substance, an aerial miasma that possessed magnetic attraction to

⁵⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁸ David P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 101 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), 131.

⁵⁹ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 306. For concerns over Milgrom’s translation from the perspective of rhetorical studies, see James W. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 79 ff.

the realm of the sacred.”⁶⁰ Baruch J. Schwartz adds, “It should come as no surprise that throughout the biblical literature, transgressions, once committed, are often objectified. They are depicted not as past events or actions but rather as odious, foul objects that come into present existence.”⁶¹ As Milgrom and Schwartz point out, these physical corruptions not only burden the sinners themselves, but they also pollute the sanctuary. In fact, the more severe the impurity or the offense, the deeper it penetrates into the sacred space. The most grievous acts—like “wanton, unrepentant sin”⁶²—infiltrate the Holy of Holies itself, thus endangering God’s presence among his people because the buildup of pollution makes the Temple an unsuitable house for an all holy God. *Yom Kippur* is the annual ritual by which the physical corruption created by sin is removed from the Temple.

Leviticus 16 therefore describes the various offerings made on *Yom Kippur*, including a ram as a burnt offering, and two sin offerings (or, for Milgrom, purification offerings): a bull offered for the high priest and his house and a goat offered for the people. As for the goat, a well-known feature of the liturgical rubrics is that two *identical* goats⁶³ are presented at the Temple and lots are cast to determine which goat will be offered as a sacrifice “for the Lord,” and which will be sent off “for Azazel.”⁶⁴ In the course of the rituals, the blood of the bull

⁶⁰ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 257.

⁶¹ Baruch J. Schwartz, “The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honour of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. David Pearson Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 7.

⁶² Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 257.

⁶³ The specification that the goats should be identical is stated explicitly in the *Mishnah Yoma*, which was recorded well after the fall of the Temple. It says that the two goats are to be “equivalent in appearance, height, and value”; see Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 274. This view is already attested in the earliest Christian authors, however, including Barnabas, Justin Martyr, and Tertullian; see Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity: The Day of Atonement from Second Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 29n53.

⁶⁴ The meaning of the word “Azazel” has been debated for centuries. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1020–21, for an overview of the different options. He concludes “that Azazel is the name of a demon who has been eviscerated of his erstwhile demonic powers by the Priestly legislators” (*ibid.*, 1021). In what follows, I prefer to identify this goat as the “goat for Azazel” or the “sin-bearing goat,” rather than using the common English translation “scape-goat,” partly because the latter has now become so inseparably linked with

and then the sacrificial goat are used to purify the space, starting with the most holy center and moving out. Thus, Aaron first brings the blood behind the curtain, into the Holy of Holies, and sprinkles it before the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant, then he brings it into the outer shrine and sprinkles it on the curtain, and finally it is manipulated on the horns of the burnt offering altar. Thus, the blood purifies the temple, progressively releasing and removing sin from each precinct.

After the priest has collected the sins, the second ritual movement begins. Schwartz explains:

Only after having purged the adytum, shrine, and altar of the impurities and sins may the priest place the latter on the head of the scapegoat, a transference accomplished by the verbal process of articulating them aloud (v. 21). The inference is clear: the sins can be transferred to the scapegoat at this point and not before, because only now has the priest acquired them himself. They have been accumulating in the adytum and the shrine, and he has just released them: now he transfers them to the head of the goat in order to dispose of them for good.⁶⁵

From this perspective, it is clear that the two (identical) goats—one a sin offering, the other for sending away—work harmoniously to remove every impurity and bear away every sin from the sanctuary. Thus, in the words of Leviticus, the goat for Azazel “shall be sent off to the wilderness through a designated man. Thus the goat shall carry on it all their iniquities to an inaccessible region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness” (Lev 16:21–22). Milgrom shows that there are analogous rituals in the neighboring cultures of the ancient Near East, and he explains that these rituals were intended to banish evil either “to its place of origin (e.g., netherworld, wilderness) or to some place in which its malefic powers could either work in the interests of the sender (e.g., enemy territory) or do no harm at all (e.g., mountains, wilderness).”⁶⁶

the thought of René Girard. Girard's thought is obviously not unrelated to the themes discussed in Leviticus 16, but it is necessary to first let the priestly writers define their terms in their own ways without the intrusion of more recent appropriations of these concepts.

⁶⁵ Schwartz, “The Bearing of Sin,” 17.

⁶⁶ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1042.

It is important to emphasize that the scapegoat is *not* a sacrificial offering. As it says in Leviticus, hands are laid on the scapegoat and, through this physical connection and the confession of guilt, sins are transferred from the high priest to the goat. Milgrom points out that “an animal laden with impurities would not be acceptable as an offering either to God or to a demon.”⁶⁷ Therefore, even though the two goats described in Leviticus 16 are presented together, they play very different roles in the *Yom Kippur* rites. The first goat must be kept pure as a holy offering to God, while the second is loaded with sin. Of the second, Milgrom says, “Instead of being an offering or a substitute, the goat is simply the vehicle to dispatch Israel’s impurities and sins to the wilderness/netherworld.”⁶⁸ Or again, in Anderson’s words, “once the sins of Israel have been borne away into the wilderness, they leave the domain of the habitable and enter a land that was thought to be God-forsaken.”⁶⁹

With this perspective in mind, we can now return to the beleaguered theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. We have seen that there are two distinct moments in Balthasar’s understanding of Christ’s relation to sin: one of solidarity and one of substitution (Christ does something that we cannot do).⁷⁰ As Balthasar describes it, when Jesus is on the cross, he is united in solidarity (Eucharistically) with all sinners—we are joined with him. Then, through Christ’s death, sin is removed from us and he bears away the sin-in-itself, the dead weight of disembodied human sin. In his descent, in other words, Christ brings sin into a true wilderness, an infinite distance from

⁶⁷ Ibid., 1021.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Anderson, *Sin*, 23.

⁷⁰ This interpretation of two moments is based on a reading of Balthasar himself, although it seems clearly supported in the writings of von Speyr, quoted by Aidan Nichols: “The Son took sin upon him in two senses. On Good Friday, up to the moment of his death, he carried it as the personal sin of each individual human being, bearing it atoningly in his divine-human Person, by an action that was, to the highest degree that he could make it, for the sake of sinners, the action of a subject. At that moment, every sin appeared in its connection with the sinner who had committed it, and bore his or her features. By contrast, on Holy Saturday, in his vision of the sin of the world from the standpoint of Sheol, sin loosed itself from the subject of the sinner, to the point that it became merely what is monstrous, amorphous, that which constitutes the fearfulness of Sheol, and calls forth the horror in the one who sees it”; see Nichols, “Adrienne von Speyr and the Mystery of the Atonement,” *New Blackfriars* 73, no. 865 (November 1, 1992): 551.

the Father (though, Balthasar claims, without sacrificing perfect unity-in-loving-obedience). In a radio sermon given on Good Friday, Balthasar asks, “Was [Jesus Christ] the one, great and final scapegoat for mankind? Did mankind load him with all its guilt, and did he, the Lamb of God, carry this guilt away?”⁷¹ The soteriology that he presents throughout his career makes it clear that Balthasar’s answer to this question is, emphatically, Yes. As Jesus offers himself on the cross, he mystically allows all the sinners around the world to “lay hands” on him, to transfer their sins to the sin-bearing-goat chosen by God.⁷² However, this is not where the ritual ends—after having received this great burden, the goat for Azazel must bear the sins into the wilderness,⁷³ beyond the sight of God, ultimately, into Hell. According to Anderson, “it is not enough for Israel to fast and repent; the physical material of the sin that had rested on the shoulder of every Israelite must be carted away into oblivion.”⁷⁴ For Balthasar, this is what Jesus does for Israel, and for all humankind. By understanding the work of Christ as the fulfillment of the Day of Atonement ritual, and especially by developing his theology of Holy Saturday in light of this connection, Balthasar’s soteriology proves itself to be thoroughly biblical.

After all of this has been said, two final points ought to be made. First, Balthasar’s soteriology covers a huge amount of ground, and theologians for centuries to come will be learning from it, evaluating it, challenging it, and developing it. However, a strong argument can be made that it is incomplete, based once again on Leviticus 16. After all, on the Day of Atonement, *two* goats are brought before the Lord, and one of them is presented as a holy offering in the Temple. This sacrificial goat, I argue, (re)establishes the unity between God and humanity: in the self-giving of this “goat”—which re-presents the primordial sacrifice of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah—the Edenic harmony between God and creation is once more realized.

⁷¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *You Crown the Year With Your Goodness: Sermons Throughout the Liturgical Year* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 82.

⁷² Commenting on Lev 16:8, Milgrom says, “The purpose of the lots is clearly to leave the selection of the animals to YHWH.” Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 168. For Balthasar, it is the Father who loads the sins on Jesus, even as sinners also load the sins on him; the two are not mutually exclusive.

⁷³ Which was, Anderson points out, “an area that was thought to be beyond the reach of God” (Anderson, *Sin*, 6).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Remember that this goat is destined for the Holy of Holies, the very heart of God's dwelling in Israel, but it is not always prominent in Balthasar's account of the Cross. Steffen Lösel says, "In fact, for Balthasar the notion of sacrifice plays a minor role as a soteriological category."⁷⁵

After reviewing Balthasar's incessant, almost oppressive, emphasis on separation, distance, and abandonment between Father and Son, Matthew Levering asks, "Does his theology fragment, by overstepping the limits of human language, the unity of God?"⁷⁶ This is a real concern. On page after page, Balthasar's crucified Christ is the goat led out into the wilderness, away from the Temple, into the place of exile and lamentation. The emphasis on this goat is so unrelenting that the other goat sometimes seems forgotten, and thus, as Levering suggests, there are real concerns over the status of divine unity. In response to Balthasar, we should insist that the spotless goat offered in the temple be given an equal place in Christian soteriology. Happily, the theology of the goat for the Lord has been articulated repeatedly in the Catholic tradition by advocates of satisfaction theory, especially in the writings of Anselm and Thomas Aquinas. More recently, David Bentley Hart offers a beautiful interpretation of Israel's sacrifice and the Cross of Christ, and his soteriology can offset the gaps in Balthasar (and vice-versa).⁷⁷ By bringing these theological voices together, perhaps the way Christ fulfills the works of both "goats" will be more fully appreciated.

Finally, the greater part of this paper has, appropriately, emphasized Balthasar's primary image: sin as burden. However, one must not forget that this is only *one* of many metaphors Balthasar uses. Sin is ugliness. Sin is infidelity. Sin is refusal of the invitation. Sin is the lie. Sin is a false distance. Sin is chaos. Even if some theologians insist that the metaphor of sin as burden does not have a future in Christian theology, Balthasar paints with many colors. Some of the other meta-

⁷⁵ Steffen Lösel, "A Plain Account of Christian Salvation? Balthasar on Sacrifice, Solidarity, and Substitution," *Pro Ecclesia* 13.2 (Spring 2004): 164. He later adds, "Nowhere does Balthasar develop his concept of sacrifice from the various Hebrew sacrifices in the context of the temple cult or even the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev 17). Rather, his notion of sacrifice builds on an existential interpretation of the term. For Balthasar, sacrifice is but an aspect of every loving relationship. Love, and certainly divine love, expresses itself as 'self-sacrificial' self-giving for the Other" (ibid., 165n126).

⁷⁶ Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 132.

⁷⁷ Hart, *The Beauty Of The Infinite*, 350–60.

phors are perhaps more amenable to the (indispensable) metaphysical discovery that sin is a privation of the good. By drawing on his alternative metaphors, there are theological riches in Balthasar available to all who are eager to reflect on Christian soteriology, even among those for whom his theology of Holy Saturday is found to be a step too far.⁷⁸ And yet, before dismissing Balthasar's controversial theory, theologians should still meditate on the two goats of *Yom Kippur* and consider whether the highest holy day on the Jewish calendar remains relevant to contemporary theological reflection on atonement. If *Yom Kippur* maintains its permanent relevance—and I believe that it must—then perhaps Balthasar can help restore the centrality of the Azazel goat for a Christian soteriology that is in deep dialogue with the Jewish theological tradition. N&V

⁷⁸ One example of this selective approach is Michele M. Schumacher, "The Concept of Representation in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Theological Studies* 60.1 (1999): 53–71. While she is critical of the idea that the Son bears the sins of the world, she finds great value in Balthasar's reflections on the relationship between "created freedom" and "trinitarian freedom."