

God's Mercy for the Damned*

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“Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Lk 13:24). Many people understandably recoil at the idea of a populated hell, especially one that is heavily populated, and theologians have developed theories to support claims to the contrary—including the claims that all will necessarily be saved; that we cannot know whether any human being will be damned; and that only Satan, his demons, and a few extremely wicked human beings will be damned.¹ Because I am convinced that the passage just quoted and similar affirmations in the New Testament must be taken at face value, I consider those claims mistaken, but

* I am grateful to the late Germain Grisez, who first articulated the hypothesis this article defends. We discussed it many times during our work together, and he summarizes elements of the theory in the 1999 draft of the first chapter of the proposed vol. 4 of *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, titled *Clerical and Consecrated Life and Service*, 154–57 (available at twotlj.org/OW-4-Ch1.pdf).

¹ See Richard Schenk, “The Epoché of Factual Damnation,” *Logos* 1, no. 3 (1997): 122–54, at 124–25: “The hermeneutical situation of any possible discussion, then, is marked today by an already completed, widespread shift in mainstream Catholic attitudes, prior to any conceivable efforts in systematic or biblical theology, a shift away from the existential conviction that there really will be any kind of final loss.” So too, Avery Cardinal Dulles: “Unable to grasp the rationale for eternal punishment, many Christians take it almost for granted that everyone, or practically everyone, must be saved. The Mass for the Dead has turned into a Mass of the Resurrection, which sometimes seems to celebrate not so much the resurrection of the Lord as the salvation of the deceased, without any reference to sin and punishment. More education is needed to convince people that they ought to fear God who, as Jesus taught, can punish soul and body together in hell (cf. Mt 10:28)” (“The Population of Hell,” *First Things*, May 2003, firstthings.com/article/2003/05/the-population-of-hell).

it is not my purpose here to argue against them.² Rather, I wish to respond to the concerns that motivate theologians who make such claims. Although they no doubt have various concerns, the most theologically significant is that if some people miss out on salvation, God seems to “lose the game of creation,”³ because insofar as people are damned, evil—even if it does not permeate the kingdom of God, but is locked away forever in hell—seems to be victorious. And if evil prevails, even just by remaining forever in hell, it seems fatuous to say that God has united and reconciled “all things” to himself through Christ (Eph 1:10 and Col 1:20) and become “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). A proper resolution of this problem does not require that one posit universal salvation or even admit it as a practical possibility. I propose instead the hypothesis that Jesus will overcome hell’s evil such that no permanent residue will remain, and that therefore, even though many end in hell, “all manner of thing shall be well.”⁴

The Elimination of Evil

St. Paul seems to teach that evil will be completely eradicated from the definitive kingdom in 1 Cor 15:22–28, where he says that Christ will destroy all enemies, the last being death, and deliver the kingdom to the Father, so that God may be all in all. The affirmation of verse 27, “All things are put in subjection under him” except the one “who put all things under him,” is especially significant. The fact that Paul sees the need to state explicitly that the Father is an exception makes it clear that Paul really means that all created things without exception are subjected to Christ. If there were any evil at all in creation, not all things would be subjected to Christ. Paul says all enemies will be overcome—“every rule and every authority and power” (1 Cor 15:24)—and he plainly means absolutely all enemies, since otherwise not all would be subjected. The enemies being overcome are evils and sources of evil. If the damned remained evil, God would be in them, but only inasmuch as he sustains them in being; he

² I have done so elsewhere: see Germain Grisez and Peter F. Ryan, S.J., “Hell and Hope for Salvation,” *New Blackfriars* 95 (2014): 606–15, at 612 (available at onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/nbfr.12050).

³ Geoffrey Wainwright, “Eschatology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 113–30, at 124–25.

⁴ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Grace Warrack (1901; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), chap. 31 (emphasis original). She says Jesus communicated these reassuring words to her in a private revelation.

could not be “all” in them. So, for God to be all in all, there either must be no damned or they must be entirely good despite being damned.

Certain Church Fathers argued that evil cannot last forever. Although some assumed without warrant that the elimination of evil entails universal salvation, their arguments that evil cannot endure are worth noting, and Gregory of Nyssa's arguments are especially noteworthy. Morwenna Ludlow points out that, in his commentary on 1 Cor 15:28, Gregory concludes that “the nature of evil will pass into non-existence.” Gregory argues that Paul “asserts the unreality of evil . . . in saying that God who is everything to each thing will be in everything. For indeed it is not proper for God to be in evil. So either he will not be in everything, when something evil is left in beings, or, if it is truly necessary to believe that he will be in everything, the existence of nothing evil is demonstrated together with this belief about him.” Ludlow explains: “Coupled with the premiss that God is totally and infinitely good (a theme that runs throughout Gregory's theology) and the logical premiss that the perfect good can in no way be in anything evil, this assertion that God will be in everything thus proves to Gregory's satisfaction that there will be no evil left.”⁵

Henri Crouzel points out that Origen uses 1 Cor 15:23–28 as the basis for suggesting that even the demons and the damned will eventually be converted, though Crouzel says Origen does not firmly hold that view and in other places rejects it, and so may be offering it only as a possibility for which one can hope.⁶ Joseph Ratzinger lists several Church Fathers who affirmed universal salvation because they held that evil will be eliminated:

Origen could not wholly let go of his hope that, in and through this divine suffering [i.e., the Passion of Christ], the reality of evil is taken prisoner and overcome, so that it loses its quality of definitiveness. In that hope of his, a long line of fathers were to follow him: Gregory of Nyssa, Didymus of Alexandria, Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Evagrius Ponticus, and, at least on occasion, Jerome of Bethlehem also.⁷

⁵ Morwenna Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 86, translating and commenting on Gregory of Nyssa's *In illud tunc et ipse Filius* 13. 22–14. 7 and 17. 13–21.

⁶ See Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. A. S. Worrall (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 257–66.

⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein, ed. Aidan Nichols, O.P. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 215–16.

Cyril of Alexandria also held that Christ will overcome evil so thoroughly that no permanent residue will remain even in hell. However, as Daniel Keating points out, Cyril's teaching "cannot with accuracy be used by those seeking to provide support in the Christian tradition for a universalist account of salvation,"⁸ despite statements to the contrary by otherwise perceptive commentators.⁹ Keating explains why there is confusion on this point: Cyril, aware that "because of Adam's sin the entire race without exception was 'bound' by Satan through the power of death," wants to emphasize that Christ's descent "utterly nullifies the devil's claim on Adam and the human race. . . . Consequently, for Cyril Christ did not merely come to ransack Satan's dungeon by rescuing a portion of those who were held there (namely, the righteous and the worthy); rather, he 'bound the strong man,' emptied Hades entirely, leaving no prisoners, and thereby established himself as 'Lord' over both the living and the dead."¹⁰

Cyril's statements about the "complete and universal emptying of Hades" should not be confused with universal salvation, because, while all are freed and raised from the dead, "some will rise to share in the life of God while others will rise to experience God's judgment."¹¹ Cyril makes this very clear in his discussion of the resurrection of the dead:

But there will be at that time an important difference among those who are raised, and very widely distinct will be their destiny. For those who have gone to their rest with faith in Christ, and who have received the earnest of the Spirit in the appointed time of their bodily life, will obtain the most perfect grace, and will be changed to the glory which shall be given from God. But those who have not believed the Son, and have deemed such an excellent reward of no account, shall be once more condemned by his voice, and, sharing with the rest in nothing save in the restoration to life, shall pay the

⁸ Daniel Keating, "Christ's Despoiling of Hades: According to Cyril of Alexandria," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2011): 253–69, at 268.

⁹ For example, Keating, "Christ's Despoiling of Hades," 254, notes that Bishop Hilarión Alfeyev, in his "magisterial work" *Christ the Conqueror of Hell: The Descent into Hades from an Orthodox Perspective* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir Seminary Press, 2009), 77–78, concludes his review of several of Cyril's texts on Christ's descent with the claim, "Cyril clearly emphasizes the universality of the salvation given by Christ to humanity." Keating objects that such statements imply "that Cyril, like Origen before him, is a proponent of universalism in salvation, that in the end 'all will be saved'—but this is quite clearly not the case."

¹⁰ Keating, "Christ's Despoiling of Hades," 256–57.

¹¹ Keating, "Christ's Despoiling of Hades," 258.

penalty of such prolonged unbelief. For they shall depart down into Hades to be punished, and shall feel unavailing remorse.¹²

Keating then asks: "But if Hades is completely emptied and Satan left barren, how can Cyril still speak of Hades as the place where the faithless and disobedient will be punished, as he does in the selection cited above?"¹³ Keating's answer makes it clear that Cyril envisages a hell that is both very real and entirely without evil: "Hades now becomes simply and solely the place of final punishment. Therefore, Hades is not simply abolished by Christ's descent, but rather reconstituted; it ceases to be the place of Satan's dominion over all the dead and becomes instead the place *under Christ's lordship* where those who refuse to believe in him reach their final destiny."¹⁴ Although "all without exception are liberated from Hades as it was constituted as the prison-house of the devil, and all will rise to life in the resurrection of the dead," some do not "rise to true life in communion with Christ."¹⁵ Instead, they end in hell, which, though purified of evil, remains a place of "unavailing remorse." So, although the damned will not be included in the kingdom insofar as it is the *communio* of the blessed, they will be included in the kingdom insofar as they are part of the universe that is entirely subjected to God's will and gathered up in Christ, and in which God is all in all.

Cyril's account is consistent with what I am arguing. Since God allows evil only as incidental to goods that cannot be unless he allows the evil,¹⁶ he will allow no evil in the definitive kingdom. Of course, certain goods

¹² Cyril of Alexandria, commentary on John 10:15, in *Commentary on the Gospel According to St John by S Cyril, Archbishop of Alexandria*, vol. 2, trans. Thomas Randell (London: Walter Smith, 1885), 73–74, quoted in and adjusted by Keating, "Christ's Despoiling of Hades," 259. This distinction in status between those in the netherworld is reminiscent of 1 Enoch. As Jon D. Levenson explains: "Texts in the pseudepigraphical book of 1 Enoch evidence a belief that the dead are in the netherworld, though in different chambers in accordance with their different moral characters; not all of them currently dwell in the place of torment to which the wicked will finally be dispatched" (*Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006], 186). See, for example, 1 Enoch 22.

¹³ Keating, "Christ's Despoiling of Hades," 259–60.

¹⁴ Keating, "Christ's Despoiling of Hades," 259–60 (emphasis original). Keating points out that, in Cyril's discussion of 1 Pet 3:18–20 and Christ's preaching to the spirits in prison, Cyril "gives some indication of a twofold, contrasting response" (264), and in at least one place "seems to indicate that how one lived one's life on earth has an important bearing on how one then hears Christ's proclamation of the gospel in Hades" (265).

¹⁵ Keating, "Christ's Despoiling of Hades," 266–67 (emphasis original).

¹⁶ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 2, a. 3, ad 1.

in the kingdom could not be if God had not allowed evil in this age. For example, Christ as victor over sin and death obviously presupposes those evils, and repentant sinners and martyrs could not be such without the evils they overcame in Christ. But the continued existence of those evils is not necessary for the permanent goods of Christ and the saints. It will hardly do to suppose that the saints will be better off if the damned remain evil.

Julian of Norwich, like most Christians of times past, accepted as a truth of faith what many recent theologians deny to be one, namely, that many human beings will be damned. She reports that Jesus assured her: "I may make all thing well, I can make all thing well, I will make all thing well, and I shall make all thing well; and thou shalt see thyself that all manner of thing shall be well."¹⁷ Jesus repeats this promise to her: "For like as the blissful Trinity made all things of nought, right so the same blessed Trinity shall make well all that is not well."¹⁸ The Lord did not tell Julian that all human beings might well be saved or that only a few would be lost; rather, he told her that, just as the Trinity created all things good in the beginning, the Trinity would make all things well in the end. Julian understandably wonders how all things can be well if, as she is clearly convinced faith requires her to hold, many will be lost. I will call this problem *Julian's aporia*.¹⁹ She expresses her quandary poignantly:

Our Faith is grounded in God's word, and it belongeth to our Faith that we believe that God's word shall be saved in all things; and one point of our Faith is that many creatures shall be condemned: as angels that fell out of Heaven for pride, which be now fiends; and man in earth that dieth out of the Faith of Holy Church: that is to say, they that be heathen men; and also man that hath received christendom and liveth unchristian life and so dieth out of charity: all these shall be condemned to hell without end, as Holy Church teacheth me to believe. And all this [so] standing, methought it was impossible that all manner of things should be well, as our Lord shewed in the same time. And as to this I had no other answer in

¹⁷ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chap. 31 (emphasis original).

¹⁸ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chap. 32. Jesus tells Julian that the Trinity will accomplish this by doing a "Great Deed on the Last Day . . . only known to Himself." He gave her this revelation, Julian says, "for that He would have us the more eased in our soul and [the more] set at peace in love—leaving the beholding of all troublous things that might keep us back from true enjoying of Him."

¹⁹ I use this term as a handy way of referring to the central problem this article addresses, not to suggest that Julian's private revelation in itself bears theological weight.

Shewing of our Lord God but this: *That which is impossible to thee is not impossible to me: I shall save my word in all things and I shall make all things well.* Thus I was taught, by the grace of God, that I should steadfastly hold me in the Faith as I had aforehand understood, [and] therewith that I should firmly believe that all things shall be well, as our Lord shewed in the same time.²⁰

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) §313 cites Julian's testimony with approval by treating it as part of the "witness of the saints" to the truth "that in everything God works for good for those who love him" (Rom 8:28). After quoting St. Catherine of Siena and St. Thomas More, the *Catechism* adds Julian's words: "Here I was taught by the grace of God that I should steadfastly keep me in the faith . . . and that at the same time I should take my stand on and earnestly believe in what our Lord shewed in this time—that 'all manner [of] thing shall be well.'" ²¹ Pope Benedict XVI quotes the same words. He points out that "God can draw a greater good even from evil," and endorses Julian's message: "God's promises are ever greater than our expectations. If we present to God, to his immense love, the purest and deepest desires of our heart, we shall never be disappointed. 'And all will be well,' 'all manner of things shall be well': this is the final message that Julian of Norwich transmits to us and that I am also proposing to you today."²²

Julian's two beliefs—that many will be lost and that all shall be well—are compatible if the Lord Jesus will overcome even hell's evil so that the whole of creation will be integrally good, as it was in the beginning. Such a state of affairs does not require universal salvation, and Julian of Norwich was careful not to endorse that doctrine.²³ All that is required for all to

²⁰ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chap. 32.

²¹ CCC §313, which refers to Julian of Norwich, *The Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. James Walshe, S.J. (London: 1961), 99–100 (chap. 32).

²² Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, December 1, 2010.

²³ However, more than a few theologians, equating all things being well with universalism, have claimed that Julian is a universalist. For example, Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment From the New Testament to Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 824–25, concludes her immense study with a discussion of Julian that identifies her as a "supporter of the apokatastasis doctrine" because Jesus revealed to her that "Christ-God will transform evil into Good." Ramelli's assumption that this transformation means that everyone will participate in the inner life of the Trinity is reflected in her treatment of Julian's reference to "the oneing of *all mankind* that shall be saved unto the blessed Trinity" (825; emphasis original). Ramelli does not notice that the words "that shall be saved" modify "mankind" and limit Julian's claim to only

be well in the end, and for God to be all in all, is for hell to include no permanent residue of evil—meaning intelligible evil.

Intelligible evil must be distinguished from sensible evil. The former, which is evil in the strict sense, is privation—the lack of a good that ought to be present in someone or something. Intelligible evil extends to physical realities (a hole in a tire is a privation preventing it from holding air and fulfilling its purpose; disease is a privation undermining healthy bodily functioning); logical and intellectual realities (errors in math and philosophy are privations in the thinking needed to calculate and philosophize properly); and moral realities (a bad choice is the privation of the choice's conformity to one's properly formed conscience). Sensible evil is evil only in a secondary sense; it refers to what is repugnant to the senses, which may or may not also be intelligibly evil.

St. John Paul II explains that “the vocabulary of the Old Testament . . . did not have a specific word to indicate ‘suffering.’ Thus it defined as ‘evil’ everything that was suffering.” But the Greek language, and so too the New Testament, “use the verb *paschō*” to express “‘I am affected by . . . I experience a feeling, I suffer’; and, thanks to this verb, suffering is no longer directly identifiable with (objective) evil, but expresses a situation in which man experiences evil and in doing so becomes the subject of suffering.”²⁴ As we shall see, to deny that hell will include intelligible evil is entirely consistent with holding that hell will include sensible evil—that is, suffering—and that the damned will suffer from past intelligible evil.

Hell will include no permanent residue of intelligible evil only if not having the beatific vision and the good of human *communio* are not privations for the damned, and if their wills are brought into harmony with the will of God. The hypothesis that hell will be entirely free of intelligible evil may seem incompatible with faith, but I will show that it includes all the elements that faith requires: those dying in mortal sin do not repent after death; they lose intimate friendship with God (*poena damni*) and experience suffering (*poena sensus*); and that loss and that suffering never end²⁵—and thus the hypothesis resolves Julian's aporia.

a portion of the human race. While Julian does indeed affirm that God will transform evil into good, she does not say that all mankind shall be saved, but that those who will be saved will be united to the Trinity.

²⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris* (1984), §7.

²⁵ See Denzinger-Hünermann [DH] (43rd ed., Ignatius Press, 2012) nos. 76 (*Quicumque*), 839 (Lyons I), and 780; see also CCC §1033.

Is Not Having the Beatific Vision a Privation?

The definition of hell is well captured in CCC §1033: "To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called 'hell.'" This section and the next consider, respectively, these two aspects of definitive self-exclusion from communion and explain why, despite constituting hell itself, they are not privations.

If intelligent creatures naturally required the beatific vision for their fulfillment, it would be a privation for any of them permanently to miss out on it, in which case there would be a permanent residue of evil within God's creation. However, although intelligent creatures were created for life in God's kingdom, no creature is by nature capable of intimacy with God, much less due such intimacy. For each and every one of the blessed, sharing in beatitude is pure grace, and even the merits of the blessed are divine gifts, as Trent teaches.²⁶ And, while living faith is a gift that everybody ought to accept with joyful gratitude, and while beatitude is a merited crown for the blessed, beatitude is not due those who, by sinning, refuse living faith or fail to cherish it. So, although the damned will miss out on a great gift, they will not on that account lack what they ought to have, and so there will not on that account be permanent evil.²⁷

The same point can be made by speaking of natural desire: if intelligent creatures have a natural desire for the beatific vision—understood as either an innate desire or an unconditional elicited desire—then permanently missing out on it by any of them would be a privation. Human beings do have a natural desire for harmony with God, and that desire is fulfilled at least minimally inasmuch as the damned will understand that their situation is what is due them, and that God who raised them from the dead wills their good. But the claim that human beings have a natural desire for the beatific vision is untenable because it is inconsistent with the gratuity of that vision. If human beings had a natural desire for the beatific vision itself, then, had they not sinned, God would be obliged to offer it to them, since the alternative would be for him to act capriciously by creating persons inevitably consigned to everlasting frustration.²⁸ However, human

²⁶ See DH no. 1548.

²⁷ This paragraph and the last two paragraphs of this section are slightly adapted versions of paragraphs from Grisez's *Clerical and Consecrated Life and Service*, 154–55 (chap. 1).

²⁸ For a more detailed explanation, see Peter F. Ryan, S.J., "How Can the Beatific Vision both Fulfill Human Nature and Be Utterly Gratuitous?," *Gregorianum* 83 (2002): 717–54,

beings do not naturally desire the beatific vision.²⁹ The blessed developed a human desire for it insofar as they loved Jesus and wished their friendship to reach the intimacy of knowing his person, which would in fact be the divine intimacy of the beatific vision. By contrast, none of the damned were concerned enough about their relationship with Jesus to remain open to intimate friendship with him. Some had accepted the Gospel but did not love Jesus enough to avoid or repent of mortal sin. Others who had not received the Gospel received graces sufficient for salvation, but failed to do God's will—as his revelation or, at least, as their consciences made it known to them—and so were not open to intimate friendship with Jesus, who perfectly did and does the Father's will.³⁰ The lack of something for which one had no innate desire and no elicited desire strong enough to motivate one to do what is necessary to fulfill it is not a privation.

Someone might argue that the lack of divine life in the damned must be a privation, for original sin certainly is a privation, and the essence of that sin is the lack of divine life in human beings that resulted from its loss by the sin of the first human beings. These two lacks, however, are not analogous. Coming to be without sanctifying grace is a privation for human persons because God gave divine life to them as a family, rather than only as individuals, and that first human family could and should have cherished the gift and handed it on to all their descendants. In coming to be without sanctifying grace, human beings lack something they are capable of receiving. The damned, by contrast, lack divine life because they have forgone that gift by sinning mortally and never repenting—that is, by freely determining themselves in a way incompatible with intimacy with God. Having made themselves incapable of receiving divine life, the damned are not deprived of anything they ought to have and enjoy.

esp. 740–42. Some theologians try to avoid this problem by saying that human beings naturally desire not the beatific vision itself, but absolutely perfect beatitude—which, however, is said to be possible only in the beatific vision. But this claim is likewise untenable, because some people have two or more ultimate ends simultaneously, and therefore do not regard either as so absolutely fulfilling that its attainment would leave nothing to be desired: see Ryan, “Must the Acting Person Have a Single Ultimate End?” *Gregorianum* 82 (2001): 325–56.

²⁹ Lawrence Feingold, in his masterful study *The Natural Desire to See God according to St. Thomas Aquinas and his Interpreters* (2001; repr. Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2010), traces the formation of a consensus that, according to Thomas, the natural desire to see God is neither an innate inclination (211–59) nor an unconditional elicited desire (261–76), and explains at length why it is impossible for such a desire to be innate or unconditional (397–428).

³⁰ See Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, §16.

Original sin is like a situation in which a fabulously wealthy man sets up a trust to support his descendants in perpetuity. They would suffer no privation had he instead left his wealth to the poor. But if his children, who should safeguard the principal, violate the terms of the trust and squander it, subsequent generations would be deprived of what ought to have been their heritage. By contrast, dying in mortal sin is like personally choosing not to meet the trust's requirements and thereby forgoing the income one otherwise might receive. While someone who did that would not enjoy the gift, he or she would not suffer any privation.

Is Not Having the Human Good of *Communio* a Privation?

While human beings have a natural desire for harmony with others, they do not have a natural desire for that harmony to be realized in the genuine friendship with others that constitutes *communio*.³¹ The intelligible good of harmony with others provides a reason for every action, morally good or bad, chosen with the intention of realizing, maintaining, or not harming one's relationship with any group or other person, just as each of the basic human goods provides a reason for its pursuit.³² Human persons have natural desires for each of the basic human goods, but those desires

³¹ St. Thomas, for very different reasons, agrees that not having the human good of *communio* would not be a privation. Whereas I hold that fulfillment in human goods like bodily resurrection and harmony with others are essential elements of human happiness in the kingdom, but that human *communio* per se is not, Thomas denies that any specifically human goods are essential to such happiness because "man's perfect Happiness consists in the vision of the Divine Essence" (*ST* I-II, q. 4, a. 5, corp.; cf. a. 8, corp.). Commentators on St. Thomas often follow him in this view; for example, Réginald Marie Garrigou-Lagrange distinguishes between "essential beatitude, which consists in the immediate vision of God and in the love which flows from this vision" and "accidental beatitude," which is "a joy in created good . . . found in the society of friends" and "in the resurrection and in the qualities of the glorious body" (*Life Everlasting and the Depths of the Soul*, trans. Rev. Patrick Cummins, O.S.B. [St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1952], 247 [pt. 5, chap. 31]).

³² Basic human goods are the intelligible goods that are in themselves diverse aspects of human well-being and full-being. In *Veritatis Splendor*, John Paul II calls them "the many different goods which characterize [the human person's] identity as a spiritual and bodily being in relationship with God, with his neighbour and with the material world" (§13). They are "goods towards which the person is naturally inclined" (§48), i.e., "indicated by the natural law as goods to be pursued" (§67), "the goods safeguarded by the commandments, which, according to Saint Thomas, contain the whole natural law [cf. *ST* I-II, q. 100, a. 1]" (§79). For a theological treatment of these goods, see Germain Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles*, vol. 1 of *The Way of the Lord Jesus* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), 121–25 (available at twotlj.org/G-1-5-D.html).

are for some fulfillment rather than for perfect fulfillment in those goods. People are naturally able to find increasing fulfillment in each of the basic human goods. Complete fulfillment with respect to the basic human goods is impossible, because human fulfillment, though always finite, is indefinitely open-ended.

The natural desire for harmony with others can be fulfilled by genuine friendships, but also can be fulfilled really, though less richly, in other ways. Fulfillment by genuine friendship depends upon morally good human free choices. Genuine friends intend a common good that includes each other's human fulfillment *simpliciter* and not just *secundum quid*. Unqualified human fulfillment includes moral uprightness. So, genuine friends intend each other's moral goodness. Small children and people with severe intellectual disabilities who cannot make free choices can enjoy innocent and good relationships with others but, being incapable of making free choices, are incapable of genuine friendship in the above sense. Even without intending genuine friendship, one can desire relationships with others that will provide some fulfillment in respect to the good of harmony with them. Self-interest often motivates people to seek harmony with others by bad means—controlling threats, dishonest promises, and so on—but self-interest also often motivates people to use good means to get along well with others. For example, self-interest often motivates people to avoid wrongly harming others, and avoiding such harm with that motivation is good in itself, not bad. Intelligent people whose self-interested behavior is in general determined by reason rather than by emotional motives untethered to reason usually get along quite well with others.

The damned cannot have the elicited desire for genuine friendship with others that constitutes *communio* with them. By contrast, people obdurate in mortal sin can nevertheless love some other people for their own sakes. For example, a priest with a mistress who admits that he is living in mortal sin might nevertheless provide pastoral service conscientiously for the sake of his people's salvation. This is possible because in this age people can and usually do have many ultimate ends simultaneously, so that those obdurate in mortal sin can nevertheless intend good ultimate ends in other choices.³³ When people die in mortal sin, however, their wills are not open to loving God for his own sake, and that lack of openness makes it impossible for them to love other people for their own sakes. Love of God and love of neighbor are in principle connected. The damned could love others for their own sakes only if there were a common good to share in with them,

³³ See Ryan, "Must the Acting Person Have a Single Ultimate End?," 339–48.

but the only common good available is that of the kingdom, in which one cannot share without loving God for his own sake. Being unable to love God for his own sake and being unable to will the common good of the kingdom, the damned will be unable to intend any common good. So, each of the damned will intend whatever fulfillment is available to him or her solely for his or her self.

Thus, not loving others as themselves, the damned also can have no truly intimate relationships with other people; but lacking such relationships is not in itself a privation, for they are instances of fulfillment in a basic human good that people can realize in various ways. Without having intimate relationships with others, the damned will be able to realize that good by relationships motivated exclusively by their mutual self-interest. People's capacity for fulfillment is open-ended, and nobody can be fulfilled in regard to every possibility. With respect to harmony with other people, harmony with God, and harmony within oneself, people's capacity for fulfillment is not determined by nature, but by their own free choices. The damned, by their free choices, have incapacitated themselves for human intimacy with the Lord Jesus and everyone else.

The damned have made themselves to be forever like small children and people with severe intellectual disabilities—able to enjoy some fulfillment in relationships with others, but utterly incapable of genuine friendship. The choices by which they incapacitated themselves for intimate communion with others were evil. The incapacity of the damned for intimate relations came about because those choices were tainted by a privation between the chooser's judgment about what could and should be chosen (or not chosen) and what he or she actually chose (which would, if unrepented, bring about that incapacitation). Given the present condition of the damned, however, their lacking intimate relations is not a privation, because now they are not choosing wrongly, but are simply incapable of choosing anything that will enable them to participate in intimate relationships. Indeed, because the damned, as I will explain, now regret their evil choices, and because God can motivate the damned to avoid willing anything evil at all, he can arrange for their relationships with others to be innocent and good.

The "Repentance" of the Damned

I have argued that a proper resolution of Julian's aporia does not require that everyone have the beatific vision or even that everyone enjoy the human good of *communio*, because lacking those blessings is not a

privation. But what about the privation of mortal sin, which is the very cause of damnation? Does sin not constitute a permanent privation that undermines the claim that all can be well even if some are damned? I shall argue that, although the damned can never repent, they can, out of self-interest, be motivated to regret their sins and will only good.

Once people have died, they can no longer freely reject sins and undertake to live uprightly, both of which are necessary for repentance.³⁴ To understand how it is that, without repenting, the damned will regret their sins, cease willing evil, and will only good, one must consider what the damned learn when they are judged and how they inevitably react to what they learn.

When those dying in mortal sin are judged, they are confronted with the truth about their situation, about God, and about themselves. The individual who dies in mortal sin will be shown that many others will have a wonderfully fulfilling life of friendship with God and other people, and that he or she will not share in that *communio*. The individual will also be shown that God has always loved him or her and still does. More specifically, those dying in mortal sin will see that God created and sustained them, offered them a complete life of good deeds (see Eph 2:10)—and, in many cases, another (or more than one other) life of good deeds beginning with repentance³⁵—supplied sufficient grace for them to live out that life of good deeds, raised them from the dead, and will sustain them forever in a life as good as they are capable of living. They will be shown that,

³⁴ For a consideration of why and how death seals human destiny, see Candido Pozo, *Theology of the Beyond*, trans. Mark A. Pilon (Madrid: St. Paul's, 2009), 400, 402–404. Many non-Catholic scholars argue that for God to allow a person to miss out on salvation would be incompatible with his goodness. See, for example, Eric Reitan, “Eternally Choosing Hell: Can Hard-Heartedness Explain Why Some Remain in Hell Forever?,” *Sophia* 61 (2022): 365–82, who denies both that it is possible for a person to become so hard-hearted as to be utterly incapable of repenting after death and that a good God would design human nature in such a way as to make it possible for human beings to damn themselves. Also see David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 65–91. However, it is clear, even apart from the Church’s teaching on hell, that such arguments are insufficient to refute the point, concisely put by Richard Swinburne, that “it is compatible with the goodness of God that he should allow a man to put himself beyond possibility of salvation, because it is indeed compatible with the goodness of God that he should allow a man to choose the sort of person he will be” (“A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell,” in *The Existence and Nature of God* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983], 52).

³⁵ See Grisez, *Living a Christian Life*, vol. 2 of *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, 117–18 (chap. 2, q. E, no. 2.d; available at twotlj.org/G-2-2-E.html).

having done some thing(s) gravely wrong, knowing them to be so, they are responsible for not sharing in the life of the blessed. They will see that, by that unrepented sin, they have limited themselves in such a way as to be unable to share in that *communio*.

Confronted with the truth, the damned, although unable to repent, will inevitably regret having done what incapacitates them for sharing in the wonderful fulfillment of the blessed. Since the point of the present age is the creation of the selves we will be forever and the preparation of material for the kingdom, and since judgment is being confronted with the truth, the damned learn how they have limited themselves so that there is no possibility of choosing to be other than they are—no final option. The choice that put a damned person in this state is, as St. John Paul II puts it, “confirmed with death that seals his choice for ever. God’s judgement ratifies this state.”³⁶

Even now, unrepentant mortal sinners, seeing how their sins prevent them from living a richer life, can regret their sins and, out of self-interest, wish they had not committed them. For example, alcoholics who recognize their responsibility to choose available means to regain sobriety but repeatedly refuse to do so may nevertheless at times, on seeing how their drinking has undermined their own interests, wish they had never started drinking. In this age, unrepentant mortal sinners see more or less dimly the limitations they have brought upon themselves, but the damned see those limitations with perfect clarity and are under no illusions that their sins have benefitted them. Seeing that the blessed enter into a wonderfully fulfilling *communio* with Jesus and one another that they themselves are not capable of enjoying, the damned cannot help but regret that they have excluded themselves from that *communio* and missed out on that fulfillment, despite their inability to grasp that *communio*’s interior meaning. The Book of Wisdom vividly projects such regret on the part of the damned:

They will come with dread when their sins are reckoned up, and their lawless deeds will convict them to their face. Then the righteous man will stand with great confidence in the presence of those who have afflicted him, and those who make light of his labors. When they see him, they will be shaken with dreadful fear, and they will be amazed at his unexpected salvation. They will speak to one another in repentance, and in anguish of spirit they will groan, and say, “This is the man whom we once held in derision

³⁶ John Paul II, General Audience of July 28, 1999.

and made a byword of reproach—we fools! We thought that his life was madness and that his end was without honor. Why has he been numbered among the sons of God? And why is his lot among the saints? So it was we who strayed from the way of truth, and the light of righteousness did not shine on us, and the sun did not rise upon us. We took our fill of the paths of lawlessness and destruction, and we journeyed through trackless deserts, but the way of the Lord we have not known. What has our arrogance profited us?” (4:20–5:8)³⁷

The regret of the damned arises necessarily from their self-interest. Being a necessary act of the will and not a choice, that regret cannot be repentance properly speaking. St. Thomas teaches that the sacrament of penance cannot take away a sin if a person is not able to repent of sin:

The sins of demons and of damned men cannot be taken away by Penance, because their wills are confirmed in evil, so that sin cannot displease them as to its guilt, but only as to the punishment they suffer, on account of which they have a kind of repentance, but one that is fruitless, according to Wis 5:3: “Repenting, and mourning in anguish of spirit.”³⁸

I distinguish my position from Thomas’s as follows. Thomas assumes that the wills of the damned are “confirmed in evil,” because they are confirmed in willing—they have no choice but to continue to will—only a limited good for themselves rather than what he considers to be the true ultimate end. I am proposing that, while the wills of the damned *were* evil inasmuch as they willed unreasonably, they now are necessarily—not by free choice—willing all and only the good they can will. Although willing that is far less than willing the kingdom-as-communion-with-God-and-all-other-created-persons, which they could have willed had they repented before they died, there remains no evil in their willing.

Unlike regret, repentance is a free acceptance of God’s grace by those who have not yet settled who they are to be forever—by those who still have some life, however brief, to live before they die. But even the regret of the damned excludes from their wills the evil of their unrepented sins.

³⁷ Thomas, *Super Ioan* 17, lec. 5, no. 2250: “And therefore, the believing world, that is, the saints, will know by experience how much God loves us; but the lovers of the world, that is, the wicked, will know this by seeing and wondering at the glory of the Saints” (translation mine).

³⁸ *ST* III, q. 86, a. 1, corp.

This point can be clarified by considering how those who die in grace with unrepented venial sins may be freed from them in purgatory. Such persons are confronted with the truth about their sinfulness. They have the painful experience of seeing how their sins limited the glory they gave to God and prevented them from being more than they are and will be—"will be" because regret cannot change them so that they are not limited as they are. (They will experience initial suffering over this, but that suffering will be temporary, because their ongoing condition will be intensely joyful, and there will be nothing to keep reminding them of what might have been. Indeed, because they will the common good of the kingdom for God's glory, they will rejoice in the good that God brought out of the evils he permitted them to do and, loving others for themselves, will rejoice in the love that God and the blessed have for them.) Loving God and themselves, they spontaneously reject their sins. That rejection, being spontaneous rather than a free choice, is not, strictly speaking, repentance. Thus, without repentance, those who die in grace are freed from their venial sins.

In like manner, being good and contrary to the will to sin, the regret of the damned excludes from their wills the evil of their unrepented sins. The regret is good because it is entirely in accord with the truth and with what God wills. While the regret bears on self-limitation, the damned, confronted with truth, see that the self-limitation is really the same as, though different in *ratio* from, the will to sin. So, in regretting having limited themselves, the damned necessarily wish they had not sinned. That wish is good will contrary to the will to sin. Their wills, then, have been rectified—though that term must be properly understood. Since the damned are incapable of loving anyone other than themselves and therefore incapable of regretting their sins out of love of God—incapable of truly repenting their sins—their wills cannot be rectified in the way they could have been in this age when they were capable of receiving the grace of repentance. Regretting their sins only out of self-love and not at all out of love of God is a privation for those who are capable of true repentance. But the failure to repent by those utterly incapable of receiving the grace of repentance is no privation, even though the unrepented sin that, at death, brought about that incapacity was indeed a privation. Their wills are rectified in the sense that they are no longer tainted by any evil at all.

God can do more than bring about the "repentance" (the regret) of the damned by making their situation clear to them. He can also make it impossible for the damned to do or even will any further evil by eliminating, and making it clear to them that he has eliminated, every possibility for them to benefit themselves by doing or willing evil. He can provide the

damned with good possibilities and motivate them by their self-interest always to choose among them. He can motivate them to will what he wills insofar as that is the necessary condition for them to have all the good they can have.

Somewhat as those who die in the Lord but need purgation undergo it, the damned may well go through a painful process by which they learn to will only what is good so as to avoid the repugnant consequences of behaving and even wishing to behave otherwise. Until that process is completed, there will be intelligible evils in hell, especially hatred and other moral evils. In proposing my hypothesis of hell without evil and of the elimination of bad will without true repentance, I am more directly concerned with human beings who end in hell than with fallen angels, but there is no reason to think that this hypothesis could not also apply to them. Indeed, if it did not, evil would remain in hell. Throughout the course of history, God allows Satan and other fallen angels to remain wicked and do evil, and God brings great good out of that horrific but transitory evil. When the definitive kingdom is fully established, however, that evil will be useless, and so will be entirely overcome: Jesus will eliminate every evil, including that of the fallen angels, so that “all things” will be “in subjection under his feet” (1 Cor 15:27a).

Poena Damni and Poena Sensus

The following considerations make it clear that the damned can suffer the punishment of loss (*poena damni*) and the punishment of sense (*poena sensus*) without hell's involving any intelligible evil.

Today there is a theological consensus approved by the magisterium that hell is not a punishment that God creates and inflicts on sinners; rather, their punishment is the necessary consequence of what they have made of themselves by unrepented sin. As we have seen, CCC §1033 teaches: “To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called ‘hell.’” The communion of the saved with *God* is the divine gift of the beatific vision, which they receive as children of God. Their communion with *each other* is a specifically human good. The exclusion of communion not only with God but also with “the blessed” thus defines hell as lack of fulfillment both as children of God and as human. After quoting the above passage from the *Catechism*, St. John Paul II, in a Wednesday audience, adds:

"Eternal damnation," therefore, is not attributed to God's initiative because in his merciful love he can only desire the salvation of the beings he created. In reality, it is the creature who closes himself to his love. Damnation consists precisely in definitive separation from God, freely chosen by the human person and confirmed with death that seals his choice for ever. God's judgement ratifies this state.³⁹

Even if it is no privation for the damned to miss out on the beatific vision or even to miss out on the good of human *communio*, the New Testament makes it clear that the damned will suffer, and while its graphic descriptions of their suffering may be metaphorical, there is no room to doubt that the suffering of the damned is real. But if suffering is the awareness of evil with repugnance, how can hell include real suffering unless it includes real evil? To understand the suffering of the damned and the evil that brings it about, we must once again consider how the damned inevitably react to what they learn when they are judged. Regretting their sins out of self-interest, and being aware of the palpable joy of the blessed, the damned suffer due to their awareness of both sensible and intelligible evils.

The sensible evil of which the damned will be aware is their not sharing the palpable joy of the blessed. That palpable joy will be an emotional joy, which is a sensible good. Being aware of the joy of others and one's own inability to share in it is emotionally repugnant, and therefore a sensible evil that results in sadness. The damned will experience unremitting suffering over what might have been. When the dead are raised, the damned will at once begin to perceive the boundless and unalloyed joy of the blessed, bursting forth in a never-ending chain reaction, as the saints rejoice in one another's joy. Loving only themselves, the damned will never rejoice in the joy of the blessed. Imagining themselves sharing in that joy, the damned will be aware of the discrepancy between that image and their actual experience, and feel sad. Since the joy of the blessed will resound forever throughout the new heaven and new earth and the damned will never share it, the emotional suffering of the damned over what might have been will be ceaseless; moreover, the damned will realize that their suffering will never end, and that awareness will itself be intensely painful. Inasmuch as

³⁹ John Paul II, General Audience of July 28, 1999. Pozo mentions, without passing judgment on, a theory that the pain called "fire" in Scripture "could be the psychological pain that man experiences in perceiving the opposition that he acquires, as an enemy of God, with respect to the whole of creation; the whole creation would exercise a painful influence on the condemned, caused by the psychological perception that the man would have of his true situation" (*Theology of the Beyond*, 402).

the damned were never due a share in the joy of the blessed, the suffering of the damned over what might have been will not be the experience of an intelligible evil, but only the experience of the sensible evil. While the damned will experience certain goods—bodily life and health, growth in knowledge, the appreciation of beauty, exercise of skills, and even, minimally, harmony with God and others—that experience not only will fall far short of the enjoyment by the blessed of those goods, but will always be accompanied by a painful sense of loss and regret arising from their awareness of their own foolish sinfulness in this life. The blessed will delight in those goods far more deeply inasmuch as they will experience them in intimate communion with others. The blessed also will delight in those goods more deeply because they will experience them as gifts of God, manifesting his great goodness and affection for them, and with the gratitude of children toward their loving Father.

The intelligible evil of which the damned will be aware is that of the mortal sins they committed. Realizing that those sins are what incapacitated them for sharing in the spectacular fulfillment of the blessed, the damned necessarily, out of self-interest, regret them. That is, they experience the evil of those sins with bitter repugnance, which is itself an intense form of suffering. However, unlike the blessed, whose realization that they could have responded better to God's grace will sadden them only temporarily, the damned will lack the consolation that the blessed have.⁴⁰ Unable to will the common good of the kingdom for God's glory,

⁴⁰ At the judgment, both the damned and the blessed must be shown how their free choices have limited them. This self-limitation is either compatible with life in the *communio* of the blessed (after purgation if necessary) or it is not; and those being judged will be either welcomed immediately into that *communio*, shown that they need purgation before they can enter, or shown that they have by their evil choices made themselves forever incapable of entering. In the latter case, their incapacitation lasts forever because Jesus will not be able to restore their capacity for communion with God and others without essentially changing who they now are. Those in need of purgation will become fully aware of the defects in their gratitude and love, and how those defects led to their self-limitation. The defects in their gratitude and love, and the resulting self-limitation, being evil, will be extremely repugnant to them; therefore, they will suffer. However, their awareness of Jesus's personal love for them will elicit love of him for his own sake, and they will no longer block the action of the Holy Spirit, who will overcome the defects in their love of God and neighbor. Jesus will manifest himself to them, and they will enter into the *communio* of the blessed. Although the self-limitation their choices caused will have an unalterable effect, sadness about it will be displaced by consoling gratitude for and joyful acceptance of the good self God has given them and the unique role his providential plan assigned them in the everlasting kingdom. The damned, confronted by the truth of God's love and Jesus's human love for them, will not hate or resent God

the damned will be unable to rejoice in the good that God brought out of the evils he permitted them to do. Unable to love others for themselves, the damned will be unable to rejoice in the love of God and the blessed for them. But because the wills of the damned, having been rectified by God, will no longer be evil, the intelligible evil that will cause the damned to suffer forever will not be an ongoing privation.

The suffering of the damned *over what might have been* is the worm that shall not die and the fire that shall not be quenched (see Isa 66:24, Mark 9:48). Church teaching makes it clear that there are two punishments—that of loss (of the beatific vision), which is the *poena damni*, and that of sense (the “fire” of hell), which is the *poena sensus*.⁴¹ St. John Paul II seems to merge the two in his Wednesday audience: “[Hell] is the ultimate consequence of sin itself, which turns against the person who committed it. It is the state of those who definitively reject the Father’s mercy, even at the last moment of their life. To describe this reality Sacred Scripture uses a symbolical language which will gradually be explained.”⁴² But John Paul II’s suggestion is consistent with previous Church teachings. The damned do not have the beatific vision, and so do have the *poena damni*. Yet, because having the beatific vision is not naturally required for the fulfillment of human beings, the damned do not experience not having it as painful. The human fulfillment of the blessed, especially in intimate human *communio*, leads to their manifest joy. It is *that* joy that the damned imagine themselves sharing in, perceive they do not share in, and suffer due to the discrepancy. Thus, the suffering of the damned over what might have been is not reducible to the *poena damni*, but includes the *poena sensus*.

Some will object that the fire “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41) cannot be reduced to the inevitable consequences for the damned of having missed out on the joy of the blessed on the ground that inevitable consequences are not a prepared punishment. However, while inevitable consequences as such cannot be a prepared punishment, the

and Christ, but will be compelled to acknowledge the truth about themselves and to regret their evil-doing. They will be resigned to their lot. They will be aware of the joy of the saved as they join the *communio* of the blessed, and the joy of that *communio* as it welcomes new members. The damned will find their self-limitation repugnant and will suffer due to that. But unlike those undergoing purgation and unlike the blessed, the damned cannot love God or anyone else for their own sakes. Therefore, they cannot regard their self-limitation from God’s point of view and rejoice in the part they will play in his providential plan, and so will never be consoled regarding their self-limitation.

⁴¹ For a discussion of the Church’s teaching on hell, see Pozo, *Theology of the Beyond*, 392–96.

⁴² John Paul II, General Audience of July 28, 1999.

suffering of the damned, though sensibly evil, is an intelligible good, for it is awareness of evil with repugnance, and thus the appropriate reaction of the damned to their past sins. Being intelligibly good, that suffering therefore is not only foreseen but also intended by God, and thus can be “fire” prepared by God for the devil and his angels.

This intense emotional suffering will surely have some repercussions of physical pain. If that pain were pointless, it would be bad suffering and an intelligible evil, but the pain motivates appropriate behavior for the damned to deal with their situation. Although it cannot motivate repentance, which is impossible for them, the pain does motivate them both to regret their sins and to concentrate their attention and spend their time exercising their human capacities in ways that fulfill themselves as much as they can be fulfilled. This focusing of attention on other matters mitigates their suffering by distracting attention from it. These considerations confirm that, fearsome though it is to contemplate the suffering of the damned, it is an intelligible good.

Can the Damned Belong to God’s Kingdom?

Despite having excluded themselves from the *communio* of the blessed, the damned will in other respects belong to God’s kingdom and contribute to his glory, for they will be saved from the evils they deserved and be enabled to share in undeserved goods compatible with their condition.

The Holy Spirit will transform the entire present creation into the new heavens and new earth, and this transformation will not only bring creation into a close union with God, insofar as he has united and reconciled “all things” to himself through Christ (Eph 1:10; Col 1:20), but also will maintain and promote created persons in their very otherness from God. This is necessarily the case because created persons are not absorbed into God; rather, their uniqueness is everlasting. How does this affect the damned? They, too, are transformed, like every other sort of thing, according to their capacity to participate in the new creation. The damned are raised from the dead and thus participate in Jesus’s resurrection life, which is the only resurrection life there will be. Being part of the new heavens and new earth, the damned are incorporated into Jesus. However, just as mortal sinners are “dead” members of the body of Christ during the present age, so those who die in mortal sin, when raised up, remain dead members.⁴³

⁴³ Aquinas, *ST* Supp., q. 75, a. 2, ad 3: “Both the good and the bad living in that life [i.e., the resurrection life] are conformed to Christ in things pertaining to the nature of the

As a result, in different respects, the damned are and are not in the kingdom of God. In its focal meaning, “kingdom” refers to the covenantal *communio* of the blessed, from which the damned have excluded themselves. Thus, they simply cannot receive the benefit of being functionally members of Christ and, with the blessed, members of one another. In that respect, as St. Cyril of Alexandria taught,⁴⁴ they are outside the new covenantal *communio* and will never be able to enter into the kingdom. Yet, remaining part of God’s good creation, which will be entirely gathered up in Christ, they will be parts of his kingdom, albeit as dead members of Christ. The reign of God is realized in the damned, for he has overcome all intelligible evil in them, and they will only goods that God wills. Thus, without intending to do so, they contribute to the kingdom and give glory to God. Although they do not abide in God, God enables them to be themselves, insofar as they have authentic selves, and unites them with himself as closely as they can be united with him given their now-immutable self-limitation.

God will enable the damned to exercise their natural (human or angelic) capacities in ways consistent with their self-deprivation of *communio* to realize some goods, for, as Thomas teaches, God “wills some good to every creature, even to the demons themselves, for example, that they live and understand and exist, which are certain goods.”⁴⁵ Because the damned have natural capacities and their condition does not require that exercise of them be excluded, and because God loves the damned, it is reasonable to suppose he brings it about that they exercise those capacities—for pursuing knowledge, enjoying beauty, and engaging in other activities worthwhile in themselves—to realize goods insofar as they are capable of doing so.

Eleonore Stump affirms that “God loves all human beings and desires union with them,” and points out that such a union is impossible “unless there are *two* persons and *two* wills to unite.”⁴⁶ Since even “an omnipotent entity [cannot] *make* a person freely will anything,” the question arises: How is the God of love to deal with “persons who *will* not will what

species, but not in things pertaining to grace. Therefore, all will be conformed to Him in the restoration of natural life, but not in the likeness of glory, except the good alone.”

⁴⁴ See text at notes 8–16, above.

⁴⁵ Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 14, lec. 5 (on John 14:21).

⁴⁶ Eleonore Stump, “The God of Love,” *Church Life Journal*, April 13, 2023, churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/can-hell-and-the-god-of-love-coexist (at note 5; emphasis original). This essay is a revised excerpt of the last chapter of her book *The Image of God: The Problem of Evil and the Problem of Mourning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

they need to will in order for God to be able to unite them to himself in heaven"?⁴⁷

Stump responds by imagining how Paula, a loving mother, would treat her son, Jerome, whose choices "have changed him from the companion he might have been for Paula into a person cold-hearted to others and focused ultimately only on himself." Stump surmises that "what might have been an active desire on Paula's part to have Jerome as an intimate part of her life will become an encompassing compassion, content to offer as much care as possible to a person who has walled himself off from love."⁴⁸ When such a state is definitive, as it is with the damned, this is the only way true love can be shown. But what care *can* God provide for persons in that state?

Stump says that such people "by their repeated irrational choices violating their nature have produced in themselves a second, vicious nature."⁴⁹ She defends "Dante's hell" by arguing that God shows his love for the damned by giving them the freedom to act according to that "evil nature" while also making it impossible for them to do further evil, and thus "prevents their further disintegration, their further loss of goodness and of being."⁵⁰ By allowing the damned to act according to the natures they have given themselves, Stump claims, God allows them "as much being, and thus as much goodness as [they are] capable of."⁵¹ But it is by no means clear how enabling people to act according to their very sinfulness can preserve their being and goodness.

I distinguish my position from Stump's by arguing that although the damned alienated themselves from God by sinning and are incapable of repenting after death, they cannot help but regret their sins out of self-interest when they realize that they have incapacitated themselves from participating in the rich human fulfillment the blessed enjoy. As a result, despite the irreversible self-limitation that makes it impossible for the damned to love, their wills are no longer evil. Their self-interest—their desire for what is truly good for themselves—is in itself not bad but good,

⁴⁷ Eleonore Stump, "Dante's Hell, Aquinas's Moral Theory, and the Love of God," *The Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16, no. 2 (1986): 181–98, at 195 (emphasis original); reprinted in *The Philosophers' Annual*, ed. Patricia A. Athay, Patrick Grimm, and Michael Simon (Ridgeview: 1988), 236–53.

⁴⁸ Stump, "The God of Love."

⁴⁹ Stump, "Dante's Hell," 195–96.

⁵⁰ Stump, "Dante's Hell," 196.

⁵¹ Stump, "Dante's Hell," 197. For observations by a Thomistic scholar sympathetic to Stump on how God "restores as much good to human nature as possible" by restoring even the damned to bodily life, see Michael Potts, "Aquinas, Hell, and the Resurrection of the Damned," *Faith and Philosophy* no. 3 (1998): 341–51, at 346–47.

and God loves them by enabling them to find the limited fulfillment in human goods of which they are still capable.

Although the damned, being incapable of loving others, cannot engage in the harmonious interaction with others proper to a relationship of love, they can, out of self-interest, interact harmoniously with others in lesser ways as they realize those goods, and can emotionally enjoy that harmonious interaction. Finally, because God loves them and wants them to experience all the good they are now capable of, he will provide the damned with a system of governance that they will exercise and conform to out of self-interest, a system that ensures that they will choose only good possibilities.

At this point, it might seem that I have painted an unacceptably rosy picture of hell. I will respond to that concern in the next section.

Is This View of Hell Like Limbo for Unbaptized Children?

Someone might say that hell as described here would be like limbo for unbaptized children in excluding the beatific vision but affording its occupants, who will for themselves what God wills for them, some fulfillment in human goods. While my hypothesis about hell resembles the theological hypothesis about limbo in that both include fulfillments proper to human nature but exclude intimacy with God, hell as I conceive it will be unlike limbo in three important respects. First, limbo was thought to provide the greatest possible fulfillment in the goods naturally available to human beings, while hell on my account would preclude all human intimacy, because the damned are incapable of loving God or anyone else for their own sakes. Second, limbo was thought to be a condition of real evil, because the lack of beatitude was regarded as a privation, but hell on my account would entirely exclude evil. Finally, while limbo involved no suffering, hell as I conceive it, though free of intelligible evil, would involve unending suffering.⁵²

Jacques Maritain's "Reverie"

The difference between my proposal and that of hell-as-equivalent-to-limbo can be further clarified by contrasting my view with that of a hypothesis about hell proposed by Jacques Maritain. He calls his essay about hell

⁵² Some sentences in this paragraph are adapted from Grisez's *Clerical and Consecrated Life and Service*, 155–56.

“conjectural”⁵³ and “a kind of poem,” rather than theology proper, because he is dealing with an area that “the lights of revelation leave in the dark, except on the outer edges.”⁵⁴ Still, he considers the “purely imaginary possibilities” he proposes consistent with the data of faith, and “attaches some importance to his reveries.”⁵⁵ Maritain maintains that, “by a miracle,” God can, in response to the prayers of the just, including Jesus and Mary, “change the will of a man or angel” and “raise up and rectify in its inmost being a will that is dead and confirmed in evil.”⁵⁶ He goes on to imagine God’s doing so with all of the damned, and he understands their transformed situation to be essentially like that of the unbaptized children in limbo.⁵⁷

Maritain’s hypothesis is innovative, and, in my judgment, his underlying insight is right. That is, he realizes one cannot reasonably hold either that hell might well turn out to be empty of all human beings or that only the completely depraved, very few in number, will end there.⁵⁸ He sees that to vindicate the claim that, in the end, all manner of thing will be well (or at least much better than traditionally conceived), one must instead be open to seldom-considered possibilities, compatible with the Church’s teaching, about the condition of the damned in hell. As Joshua Brotherton puts it, “the much lesser-known speculative opinion

⁵³ See Jacques Maritain, “Beginning with a Reverie,” in *Untrammelled Approaches*, Collected Works of Jacques Maritain 20, ed. and trans. Bernard E. Doering (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 3–26, at 3.

⁵⁴ Maritain, “Beginning with a Reverie,” 4.

⁵⁵ Maritain, “Beginning with a Reverie,” 3.

⁵⁶ Maritain, “Beginning with a Reverie,” 21 (emphasis original).

⁵⁷ In “Population of Hell,” Dulles describes and comments on Maritain’s theory: “In a ‘reverie’ circulated among friends but not published until after his death, the philosopher Jacques Maritain included what he called a ‘conjectural essay’ on eschatology, in which he contemplates the possibility that the damned, although eternally in hell, may be able at some point to escape from pain. In response to the prayers of the saints, he imagines, God may miraculously convert their wills, so that from hating Him they come to love Him. After being pardoned, they will then be delivered from the pain of sense and placed in a kind of limbo. They will still be technically in hell, since they will lack the beatific vision, but they will enjoy a kind of natural felicity, like that of infants who die without baptism. At the end, he speculates, even Satan will be converted, and the fiery inferno, while it continues to exist, will have no spirits to afflict. This, as Maritain acknowledged, is a bold conjecture, since it has no support in Scripture or tradition, and contradicts the usual understanding of texts such as the parable of the Last Judgment scene of Matthew. But the theory has the advantage of showing how the Blood of Christ might obtain mercy for all spiritual creatures, even those eternally in hell.”

⁵⁸ See Grisez and Ryan, “Hell and Hope for Salvation,” esp. 612.

of philosopher Jacques Maritain is a better way to approach the definitive reality of human freedom in relation to God's infinite love"⁵⁹ than "Balthasar's perspective on the prospect of universal salvation."⁶⁰ Still, Maritain's hypothesis can be criticized on several counts. I will explain why I do not think he resolves Julian's aporia.

The claim that God can miraculously change the will of a created person raises the obvious question of how the transformed will can truly pertain to that person if the change is attributable to a miracle rather than to that person's own free choice. Although Maritain does not make the point explicitly, the miracle he envisages apparently refers not to God's changing the will of the damned person apart from that person's own free choice, but rather to God's changing "the order of nature" by which "the will of the damned is fixed in evil in an absolute and immutable manner,"⁶¹ so that it becomes possible, and even inevitable, for the damned person freely to change his or her own will. That interpretation is suggested by Maritain's statement, "And now, let this miracle be renewed at intervals of time as great as one would wish; since eternity exhausts all time, it will inevitably come about that at a certain moment the lower regions of Hades will be completely emptied."⁶² Brotherton explains:

The case Maritain wants to make seems to be this: (1) It is a law of nature that the final decision of a spiritual creature hardens into a static reality of eternal consequence. (2) But God is not bound by such ontological regularity. (3) Therefore, it is possible that God might respond to the prayers of the elect for the conversion of all by suspending such a law at some point, allowing those who have been eternally deprived of grace by their final refusal of salvation an everlasting opportunity to embrace the love of God that is natural to one's being. The possibility of embracing such natural love will in time be realized by every condemned being through the divine power naturally operative in the inevitable actualization of a created potency, given infinite time.⁶³

⁵⁹ Joshua Brotherton, "Presuppositions of Balthasar's Universalist Hope and Maritain's Alternative Eschatological Proposal," *Theological Studies* 76, no. 4 (2015): 718–41, at 719.

⁶⁰ Brotherton, "Presuppositions," 724.

⁶¹ Maritain, "Reverie," 21.

⁶² Maritain, "Reverie," 22–23.

⁶³ Brotherton, "Presuppositions," 733.

Critique of Maritain's "Reverie"

Problems remain, however, even when Maritain's proposal is thus interpreted. We create our identities as acting persons—our character—by our free choices, through which we either cooperate or fail to cooperate with grace.⁶⁴ That identity is inevitably fixed at death, when we are integrated around the choices by which we have made ourselves the persons we essentially are, persons either in communion with God and capable of being motivated by love, or out of communion with God and only capable of being motivated by self-interest. To claim that a damned person can be miraculously enabled to make a free choice to embrace God's natural love is either to hold that such a person could be enabled to change what is now essential to his or her identity while remaining the same person or to deny that one's essential identity is necessarily fixed at death. Since the former view is a contradiction, one can only conclude that Maritain presupposes the latter and tries to resolve the problematic notion of God that it implies. According to that view, people are not damned because they are fixed in a self-created identity that renders them forever incapable of loving God (and incapable of being made capable of loving him). Rather, God simply chooses death as the point beyond which he refuses to give people the grace to embrace his natural love. That conclusion implies that although God forever loves even the damned and could greatly benefit them, he is forever unwilling to do so. Maritain tries to repair this view of God by dreaming of his granting them the grace Maritain describes.

It is a truth of faith that one's destiny is settled at death.⁶⁵ Maritain

⁶⁴ As St. John Paul II puts it in *Veritatis Splendor* §71, quoting Gregory of Nyssa, "Thus we are in a certain way our own parents, creating ourselves as we will, by our decisions" (emphasis original). Also see John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), §34: "But man, who has been called to live God's wise and loving design in a responsible manner, is an historical being who day by day builds himself up through his many free decisions." Also see Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979), 169–74.

⁶⁵ Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961), 26, articulates with notable clarity the truth that death seals human destiny: A proposition of faith "affirms that with bodily death, man's state of pilgrimage (to employ the usual theological expression) comes to a definite end. Death brings man, as a moral-spiritual person, a kind of finality and consummation which renders his decision for or against God, reached during the time of his bodily life, final and unalterable." That one's destiny is settled at death is revealed in the New Testament (e.g., Luke 16:26; John 9:4; 2 Cor 5:10), solemnly taught by the Church (the Second Council of Lyons, *Professio fidei Michaelis Palaeologi* [1274; DH nos. 856–58]; also see the Council of Florence, *Decretum pro Graecis* [1439; DH nos. 1304–1306], and CCC §§393, 1021, and 1033), and witnessed to by the Church's constant and universal practice of urging the dying to be prepared

accepts that teaching in a general sense, for he insists that “we are concerned here with no more than a transfer *within* the infernal regions, a passage from the lower places to the higher places of Hades, from the abyss to Limbo.” But those two destinies are vastly different. Moreover, his hypothesis removes the ground of the teaching. The *reason* a person’s destiny cannot change after death is that the decisions that alienated a person from God cannot be repented once body and soul are separated at death. Maritain affirms that “it is by virtue of the order of nature” that the damned are unable to repent.⁶⁶ But he assumes without warrant that God can miraculously change that order of nature without changing something that has become essential to the very identity of those who would be affected by such a miracle.

Thomas argues that when the soul is “separated from the body, it will not be in a state of being moved toward the end, but of attaining rest in the end. Therefore, it will be immobile with respect to a desire for the ultimate end.”⁶⁷ One need not share all of Thomas’s convictions about desire for the ultimate end in order to endorse the underlying truth that one’s character becomes immutable when one is no longer embodied, and to affirm with him as well that this immutability will remain even after the person is re-embodied because, “in the resurrection, bodies will be disposed as souls require, but souls will not be changed by bodies.”⁶⁸ Thomas also explains that “the souls of the damned are entirely excluded from grace.”⁶⁹ They are excluded not because God refuses to offer grace, but because death has rendered the damned incapable of accepting it.

If we imagine that God could give a grace that would enable the damned freely to choose to repent and thus reverse their rejection of his natural love, the question would arise as to why he could not also give them the grace freely to reverse their rejection of the gift of divine intimacy itself. Brotherton raises this question and assumes Maritain would respond that God could indeed arrange that no one will ultimately reject divine intimacy, but that God would not do this because he “respects the freedom given to refuse full vision of divine glory.”⁷⁰ However, if God’s arranging

by confessing their sins and receiving absolution. In the constitution *Benedictus Deus*, Pope Benedict XII made it definitive Catholic teaching that death seals one’s ultimate destiny (DH nos. 1001–2).

⁶⁶ Maritain, “Reverie,” 21 (emphasis original).

⁶⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] IV, chap. 95, no. 5.

⁶⁸ Aquinas, SCG IV, chap. 95, no. 9.

⁶⁹ Aquinas, SCG IV, chap. 93, no. 4; cf. SCG III, chap. 57.

⁷⁰ Brotherton, “Presuppositions,” 734.

that no one will ultimately reject that vision would entail his failing to respect creaturely freedom to refuse it, then his arranging that no one will ultimately reject the natural love of God plainly would entail his failing to respect creaturely freedom to refuse that natural love. But the presupposition is of God's giving everyone the grace *freely* to accept the gift of divine intimacy such that, eventually, all will freely do so. If God could arrange for the damned ultimately to accept freely the grace of salvation, it is not clear why we should think it would be unfitting for him to do so, just as it would not be unfitting for him to give the damned the grace freely to accept his natural love if he could do so. But God's respect for the freedom of created persons to reject both his natural and supernatural love is manifested not in his refusing to offer grace but in his creating them with the radical freedom to refuse it themselves by constructing their own character in a way that renders them, once their choice is sealed by death, incapable even of being made capable of receiving the grace of repentance.

Maritain's reverie is also compromised by two other problems: his insistence that hell includes privation and his failure to account for the *poena sensus*. I will consider these in turn.

Maritain assumes that hell includes intelligible evil—that is, privation. It is true that Maritain envisages the will of the damned as being confirmed in evil only until it

is turned about miraculously, as toward the true end of all nature, toward God the author of nature. . . . Now it loves Him above all else, with that same natural love which, at the time of the resurrection of the bodies, wells up naturally in the souls of the children who died without baptism and which, in the case we are speaking of, the will now receives through a pure miracle.⁷¹

For Maritain, then, the will of the damned is rectified and no longer marred by privation. Nevertheless, hell on Maritain's account includes evil, though not moral evil, inasmuch as Maritain considers the absence of the beatific vision to be a privation: "True beatitude, beside which everything else is as nothing, they must never look to have, they will never see the divine essence; and this is an eternal privation."⁷² If, as Maritain imagines, the will of the damned were turned about so that, far from being confirmed in evil, the damned love God, then they would be capable of receiving the

⁷¹ Maritain, "Reverie," 21 (emphasis original).

⁷² Maritain, "Reverie," 23.

gift of the beatific vision, in which case their lacking that vision would indeed be a privation. However, if hell forever includes intelligible evil, Julian's aporia remains unresolved.

A related problem is that Maritain does not successfully account for the *poena sensus*, which the Church teaches to be essential to hell and everlasting. He understands the *poena sensus* to be caused primarily by hellfire, which "is real, not just metaphoric, something really physical or corporal, not purely moral or spiritual,"⁷³ even if different from the fire we experience in this life. He also says hellfire is everlasting. "But," he says, "if by a miracle the soul is drawn from evil, it is also freed from the pain of sense, insofar as it is caused by the Fire of Hell—there is nothing left now to catch fire."⁷⁴ This hypothesis does not account for the Church's teaching: "If anyone dies in mortal sin without repentance, beyond any doubt, he will be tortured forever by the flames of everlasting hell."⁷⁵ While one need not assume with Maritain that those flames are physical, it is necessary to hold that they refer to a pain of the senses that cannot be reduced to the loss of the beatific vision. Maritain tries to account for *poena sensus* by saying that the lack of the beatific vision causes sadness for the damned, but this claim is untenable, for although that lack would be a privation on Maritain's account, it would not be a lack of what is naturally desired, and therefore would not be a source of pain.⁷⁶

⁷³ Maritain, "Reverie," 10n11.

⁷⁴ Maritain, "Reverie," 22. He says the fire nevertheless "continues to burn without end in all the infernal regions distinct from Limbo."

⁷⁵ First Council of Lyons (DH no. 839).

⁷⁶ Maritain sometimes speaks of a natural desire for the supernatural, but not an unconditional one. For example, speaking of the felicity of unbaptized babies in limbo, he says: "At the summits of the state of pure nature where they find themselves, they possess such a happiness that it eclipses for them the desire, natural in us, to surpass nature, and in them, as in the souls of Purgatory, there are not found the unconditioned aspirations of grace" ("Reverie," 16). Thomas's mature account of limbo implies that human beings' natural desire is only for fulfillment in natural goods and not for the beatific vision. He says that the souls who die with original sin only are without sadness because they do not know that they missed out on that vision: "Children dying with original sin are separated from God forever so far as concerns the loss of glory which they have no knowledge of, not however so far as concerns their participation in natural goods which they do have knowledge of" (*De malo*, q. 5, a. 3, ad 4; in *On Evil: Disputed Questions*, trans. Jean Oesterle [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995], 220). But if attaining divine goodness by the beatific vision were necessary to put to rest the human heart's desire for goodness, then those in limbo, even if kept in ignorance of what they were missing out on, would be sad, for they would have missed out on what is essential to their fulfillment and forever have restless hearts. Their lack of sadness

Realizing that it would be inappropriate for God to allow children in limbo to experience *poena sensus*, Maritain says they endure “neither fire nor punishment of the senses.” He adds that their not enjoying the beatific vision, which he calls their “punishment of damnation, of which they will suffer only a kind of melancholy, will in no way alter their purely natural happiness.”⁷⁷ By contrast, Maritain claims, “There will be Milky Ways of regret and sadness in the natural felicity of the pardoned.” They experience never seeing the divine essence as “a painfully felt privation because, unlike the children who died without baptism, they were called personally to the glory in which the three Divine Persons give themselves to the blessed and make of them ‘gods by participation’ and because they refused this glory. They know that they were made for this joy, and that they missed it through their own fault.”⁷⁸

But this hardly amounts to *poena sensus*. Even though it is a terrible thing for people to miss out on God’s plan for them to become “gods by participation,” it is by no means clear how the absence of supernatural beatitude, which is not naturally desired, could be painfully felt. The damned, taken out of physical hellfire, could experience *poena sensus* only if they are continually reminded that their own bad choices have forever prevented them from being able to enjoy a wonderfully rich fulfillment in the human goods they *do* naturally desire (as opposed to the relatively meager fulfillment in those goods that they are able to enjoy). It is therefore necessary to distinguish between the damned’s loss of supernatural fulfillment in the beatific vision and their loss of abundant fulfillment in specifically human goods, both of which the blessed enjoy in the kingdom. As noted above, the palpable joy of the blessed will be an emotional joy, which is a sensible good. To be aware of the joy of others and one’s own inability to share in it is emotionally repugnant; it is a sensible (not intelligible) evil that results in sadness. On the account I am proposing, the damned will experience unrelenting suffering over what might have been but which, through their own fault, can now never be. By contrast, Maritain’s reverie does not account for *poena sensus*, for he holds that the damned enjoy very rich human fulfillment; they experience “a state in which pure nature brought

confirms the fact that those souls do not lack something for which they have a natural desire (i.e., either an innate desire or an unconditional elicited desire) by being deprived of the beatific vision. So too, in lacking that vision, the damned would not lack what they naturally desire and so would not experience pain arising from such a lack despite their knowledge that they missed out on it.

⁷⁷ Maritain, “Reverie,” 16.

⁷⁸ Maritain, “Reverie,” 23.

to its highest level will receive forever all kinds of those joys to which the desires of the intelligent and free creature tend directly, according to the order of nature."⁷⁹

Maritain's affirmation that "spiritually, the pain of sense also continues for them" also warrants consideration. He explains: "The evil which they remember having done will no longer gnaw at them through fire but will continue to afflict them by the thought that they have not made up for that evil and that they have cut themselves off by their own accord from the order of the goods of grace, from the perfect accomplishment of the designs of the Father."⁸⁰ This effort to account for *poena sensus* presupposes not only that the damned suffer because they do not have the beatific vision, but that they have repented and are grieved by their sins. However, as noted earlier, that premise is incompatible with the truth that, at death, our character is forever set because we are immutably integrated around the choices by which we have made ourselves the persons we essentially are, persons either in or out of communion with God, and thus either capable or incapable of being motivated by love. Thus, Maritain's claim about "Milky Ways of regret and sadness in the natural felicity of the pardoned," notwithstanding their freedom from physical hellfire and their experience of the greatest possible natural happiness, remains uncorroborated.⁸¹

Brotherton identifies the underlying insight that distinguishes Maritain's effort to resolve Julian's aporia from that of theologians inclined to a universalist solution: "Instead of operating on the premise that the natural desire to see God is innate/structural and absolute/unconditional, he relies on a hard distinction between nature and grace."⁸² Although the problems just considered make it clear that Maritain does not resolve Julian's aporia, he points in the direction of a solution by emphasizing that distinction. Indeed, his effort falls short precisely because, in treating the absence of the beatific vision as a privation, he is not entirely consistent in applying the distinction.

Despite the Reality of Damnation, All Will Be Well

The joy of the blessed will not be diminished by their awareness of the suffering of the damned.⁸³ C. S. Lewis makes this point artfully in *The*

⁷⁹ Maritain, "Reverie," 24.

⁸⁰ Maritain, "Reverie," 23.

⁸¹ Maritain, "Reverie," 23.

⁸² Brotherton, "Presuppositions," 739.

⁸³ Without doubting this truth, even great saints have found it difficult to fathom. Teresa

Great Divorce.⁸⁴ As a character in his own dream vision of people from hell visiting heaven, Lewis witnesses a saintly woman trying to convince her husband to stay in heaven by putting aside his resentment and yielding to joy. He resists her entreaties, yet she remains joyful—and this does not sit well with Lewis, who questions his teacher and guide.

The other Bright Spirits came forward to receive her, singing as they came: *The Happy Trinity is her home: nothing can trouble her joy. . . .*

“And yet . . . and yet . . .,” said I to my Teacher, when all the shapes and the singing had passed some distance away into the forest, “even now I am not quite sure. Is it really tolerable that she should be untouched by his misery, even his self-made misery?”

“Would ye rather he still had the power of tormenting her? He did it many a day and many a year in their earthly life.”

“Well, no. I suppose I don’t want that.”

“What then?”

“I hardly know, Sir. What some people say on earth is that the final loss of one soul gives the lie to all the joy of those who are saved.”

“Ye see it does not.”

“I feel in a way that it ought to.”

“That sounds very merciful: but see what lurks behind it.”

“What?”

“The demand of the loveless and the self-imprisoned that they should be allowed to blackmail the universe: that till they consent to be happy (on their own terms) no one else shall taste joy: that theirs should be the final power; that Hell should be able to veto Heaven.”

of Avila observes: “If we see a person, whom in a special way we love here below, with a great trial or suffering, it seems that our own very nature invites us to compassion; and if their trial is great, we ourselves become distressed. Well, who is there who can suffer seeing a soul in the supreme trial or trials that has no end?” (*The Book of Her Life*, chap. 32, no. 6, in vol. I of *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. [Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1976], 215, quoted in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved”?*, with a *Short Discourse on Hell*, trans. David Kipp and Rev. Lothar Krauth, 2nd ed. [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014], 135).

⁸⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: MacMillan, 1946), chap. 13.

Still, when hell is conceived as involving intelligible evils and imposed physical torments, people understandably wonder, like Lewis in his dream vision, *how* the blessed can be unmoved by the misery of the damned, especially of those who had been near and dear to them.⁸⁵

Someone might argue that although hell as I conceive it does not involve intelligible evils and imposed physical torments, it still involves suffering that would detract from the joy of the blessed. No doubt, the awareness of the suffering of the damned because of what might have been will cause the blessed initial suffering, as will their realization that, had they themselves responded better to God's grace, they would be more than they now are able to be. But in the former case no less than the latter, that suffering will be temporary. The blessed will be consoled by the truth that God loves their damned loved ones and has freed them from intelligible evil. Realizing that the suffering of the damned corresponds to the reality of their situation—that their suffering just is their intelligibly good awareness, with repugnance, of the sins that put them in this situation, and that it motivates them to pursue the fulfillment in human goods that is still possible for them—the blessed will understand that this suffering is appropriate. And because the feelings of the blessed, unlike our own feelings now, will be fully integrated with their understanding and upright will, love for the damned will not detract in the least from the joy of the blessed.

In short, with intelligible evil eliminated and the damned provided for as well as their self-imposed limitations allow, the joy of the blessed will

⁸⁵ It is worth noting that the failure to distinguish between intelligible evil and appropriate suffering lends a seeming plausibility to the claims of universalists and quasi universalists alike. Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved*, holds that God's decision to create entails universal salvation because he assumes that the damnation of even one soul is an evil incompatible with God's goodness. But Hart does not show that hell necessarily involves intelligible evil; rather, he appeals to our natural revulsion at the prospect of intense and everlasting suffering, which he assumes to be imposed gratuitously. One example: "A retribution consisting in unending suffering, imposed as recompense for the actions of a finite intellect and will, must be by any sound definition disproportionate, unjust, and at the last nothing more than an expression of sheer pointless cruelty" (44). So too, Balthasar, *Dare We Hope*, 202, appeals to a decent person's revulsion at the suffering of a loved one by imagining his own reaction "if I were to see, from my position in heaven, my mother or my best friend undergoing eternal torture." Both books abound with such appeals, but they do not lend true plausibility to claims about universalism or its possibility, because the authors neither show that hell involves privation nor justify their assumptions about what hell will be like. For a criticism of such appeals to emotion, see Adrian J. Reimers, *Hell and the Mercy of God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 229–38.

be undiminished. They will know and find everlasting peace in knowing that, as Christ promised Julian of Norwich, all manner of thing, including the suffering of the damned, are well. N.V