

**Saving Finite Freedom:
On the Meaning of Freedom in Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theology of Redemption**

**Candidate: Daniel A. Drain
Director: Dr. Nicholas J. Healy
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Dissertation Abstract

This dissertation takes up the related questions of Christian hope and the meaning of redemption through an exploration of the role of divine and human freedom in Hans Urs von Balthasar's theology of redemption. Its fundamental claim is that in the Paschal Mystery, Christ's saving work both presupposes and discloses the innermost meaning of the freedom of the creature (finite freedom) in and as the glorious freedom of God as triune love (infinite freedom).

Chapter One engages two enigmatic and emblematic critics of Balthasar's theology (Thomas Joseph White and David Bentley Hart), who critique Balthasar on the basis of his eschatological conclusions. **Chapter Two** serves two essential purposes. First, it elucidates the content of Balthasar's account of finite freedom with respect to its metaphysical foundations, and highlights its essentially dramatic character as both gift and task so as to adequately understand the nature of creaturely freedom in light of the Church's entire metaphysical tradition (with extended reference to Balthasar's usage of the Thomistic tradition). This helps to clarify finite freedom's relationship to infinite freedom, its inherently participative-cum-dramatic unfolding (freedom as consent, *Sein-Lassen*), which is necessary for communion between God and man to be possible. Second, this chapter explores Balthasar's Christology and the place of freedom therein. **Chapter Three** moves from an account of the actors to the drama itself. Its chief task, in and through an exposition of Balthasar's theology of the descent of Christ into hell on Holy Saturday, is to show how the meaning of freedom is presupposed and disclosed through his soteriology. **Chapter Four** draws out the sense in which the response to the mystery of the drama of freedom that Balthasar demands is hope and not guarantee.

The dissertation ultimately claims that Balthasar's understanding of freedom espouses something beyond the familiar categories of infernalism, universalism, traditional Thomism, and the perennial danger of Pelagianism. This exaltation of human freedom in the Son thereby indicates that God, in infinite freedom, has willed to raise man up to the status of a partner in the *drama* of salvation, precisely in order for *real communion* with God to be possible.