

Eschatology and the Doctrine of God in St. Thomas Aquinas

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ESCHATOLOGY has become increasingly recognized as a subdomain of theology that must not be ignored. This has been discerned in the Protestant milieu at least since, about a century ago, Albert Schweitzer famously put forward the (at least seemingly new) paradigm of Jesus as eschatological prophet. Later, Karl Barth declared that a “Christianity that is not wholly and utterly and irreducibly eschatology has absolutely nothing to do with Christ.”¹ And in the opening line of an essay published not too many decades ago, Hans Urs von Balthasar could declare eschatology to be the current “storm center” of theology.² While these latter two statements might veer toward the hyperbolic in making a case for the systematic omnipresence or current relevance of eschatology, they cannot be too far off the mark for Christians, who believe that “if for this life only” we have “hoped in Christ,” we are “of all men the most to be pitied” (cf. 1 Cor 15:19).

There is no such limitation on hope in St. Thomas Aquinas’s teaching, which in fact is significantly, and even thoroughly, eschatological. The Angelic Doctor’s way of being eschatological involves, in part, his

¹ Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 2nd ed. (1922), cited in T. H. L. Parker et al., trans., *Church Dogmatics*, vol. II/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 634 (on Rom 8:24).

² Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Some Points of Eschatology,” in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 1, *The Word Made Flesh*, trans. A. V. Littledale with Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989; orig., 1957), 255–77.

use of Aristotelian causality as a major organizing principle. Such an appropriation of a philosophical category by theology is probably nearly the opposite of what Barth had in mind when he called for theology to be thoroughly eschatological. Indeed, some have accused Aquinas, in his eschatology as in other areas of his thought, of subjugating the God of revelation to a preconceived philosophical system; one theologian made just such an accusation when, in contrasting “logos” thought with that of the “promise,” he claimed that Aquinas’s way of conceiving of the end “replaces the biblical history of the promise with a finalistic metaphysic.”³ Our article will show that such concerns, well motivated though they may be, are not applicable to Thomas’s theology. I will show this mainly by reference to what Thomas says about *God* insofar as the judgment, common resurrection, renewal of the world, and personal fulfillment are concerned.

In this essay I will show, from a number of aspects of Thomas’s teaching, including his doctrine of God, that his theology is particularly eschatological, in that “the end” has a significant and systematic role to play in his theology, especially in that God himself is the end of all his creatures. I will also show that Thomas’s doctrine of God as discerned in his teachings on the eschaton is one in which the dominion or power of God is very prominent, primarily in his teaching that it is only God who brings creatures to their end. In this, it is not the case that Thomas “replaces” the God of revelation with a philosophical framework; rather, he puts philosophical categories to work for *sacra doctrina*. Finally, I will propose that these two teachings taken together (God as the end of all creatures, but an end that they cannot reach without God’s action) offer a conception of the divinity that is neither aloof nor pantheistic, but both transcending and loving his creation.

³ See Jürgen Moltmann, “Christian Hope: Messianic or Transcendent? A Theological Discussion with Joachim of Fiore and Thomas Aquinas,” *Horizons* (Villanova) 12, no. 2 (1985): 328–48, esp. 333, for the quotation concerning a “finalistic metaphysic”; on “Logos” thought vs. the “promise,” see Moltmann, “Theology as Eschatology,” in *The Future of Hope*, ed. Frederick Herzog (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 1–50, esp. 13n19; and Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM, 2002; orig., 1964), 26–28. See also Bryan Kromholtz, *On the Last Day: The Time of the Resurrection of the Dead According to Thomas Aquinas*, *Studia Friburgensia* 110 (Fribourg: Academic, 2010), 419–20n279.

Eschatology, God as End, and the Dominion of God

Before considering the relation in Thomas's theology between eschatology and the doctrine of God, we must note that something about the that eschatological dimension itself: it is present throughout Aquinas's theology. His eschatology, a kind of Christian version of Aristotelian teleology (with important differences from Aristotle's thought, to be sure), thoroughly penetrates his work. Indeed, in all Thomas's major theological works, the final end is a principal theme; this is true even of the *Summa theologiae* (even though its section on the final end was never begun).⁴ To state this is not to assert something contested in the discussion over how best to understand the structure of the *Summa theologiae*; in fact, the notion of finality is a common element in all the attempts to explain that structure. In addition to the renowned neo-Platonic-inspired *exitus/reditus* schema, the more well-known explanations have included a more Aristotelian causal plan, a kind of gradated nature-grace-glory sequence, et cetera.⁵ Despite the variety of emphases present in each of these ways of conceiving of the overarching theme of Thomas's most famous work, there is nevertheless remarkable agreement that the structure of the work, and thus of Thomas's theology, is systematically ordered by the *direction* of all things toward an end. Indeed, for Thomas, the "end" is not merely the aggregate of things as they turn out at last; rather, the end is the goal of all creatures. It is interesting to note that Thomas never uses the term "last things" as a kind of shorthand for what we might call "eschatology." For such a shorthand term, he usually prefers to speak of "the final end," or simply "the end."⁶ His consistent

⁴ See *ST* I, q. 2, prologue; *ST* III, prologue; *In I Sent.*, prologue; *In IV Sent.*, prologue; *SCG* IV, ch. 1, para. 1 and 11; *Compendium theologiae* I, ch. 1 and 2; *CT* II, ch. 2.

⁵ For the various explanations for the structure of the *Summa theologiae* that have been proposed, see Brian V. Johnstone, "The Debate on the Structure of the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas: From Chenu (1939) to Metz (1998)," in *Aquinas as Authority: A Collection of Studies Presented at the Second Conference of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht, December 1–16, 2000*, Publications of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht, New Series 7, ed. Paul van Geest, Harm Goris, and Carlo Leget (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 187–200, esp. 187–88 for bibliography.

⁶ Even in cases where Thomas uses a kind of plural description of last "things," he usually refers those things (i.e., plural) to man's *end* (i.e., singular). So, in *SCG* IV, ch. 1, para. 11, when describing the contents of the end of the last book of the *SCG*, he speaks of "the things surpassing reason which are looked for *in the ultimate end of*

preference for the singular is an indication of the way that he integrates his teaching on the finality of creation into a unity. That which happens according to the divine plan at the “end” is not an event that simply happens at the conclusion of history; rather, the end is its fulfillment.

Thus it is all the more significant that, in the view of the Angelic Doctor, it is God himself who is this “end.” This is not to say that there are no intermediate ends of consequence. Indeed, although subhuman creatures have their own purposes, Thomas can even say that man is the end of all of them.⁷ However, that finality is only a relative finality; over and above humanity, God himself is the end of all creatures, including not only men but also angels, animals, plants, and minerals.⁸ God creates and orders all human persons and all of creation to himself as their end. He is the fulfillment of all creatures—principally of man himself.

That God is the end of all is certainly programmatic for Thomas. On the part of the divine nature, God’s very goodness is that by which he is the goal of all things. Risking an overly brief treatment, then, I merely note that in the *Summa theologiae* Thomas dedicates an early article to whether the good has the nature of a final cause, where he states that: “Goodness is that which all desire, and since this has the aspect of an end . . . goodness implies the aspect of an end.”⁹ Now God is, of course, the highest good.¹⁰ Thus God has the nature of an end. God’s goodness, as that which all things desire, not only supplies a rubric under which the divine source for all directedness may be *described*—it is that through which all directedness *comes*. And as the final cause is first in causing and last in what is caused, so the final cause is found first in God, and

man, such as the resurrection and glorification of bodies, the everlasting beatitude of souls, and matters related to these” (emphasis added).

⁷ On the notion of all things being made for man in Thomas, see *In II Sent.* d. 1, q. 2, a. 3; *In IV Sent.* d. 47, q. 2, a. 1, q1a. 1, corp.; *In IV Sent.* d. 48, q. 2, a. 2, ad 8; *In IV Sent.* q. 2, a. 3, ad 3 and ad 6; *In IV Sent.* q. 2, a. 4, corp.; SCG IV, ch. 97, para. 1; *De veritate*, q. 5, a. 9, obj. 13; *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 9, corp.; CT I, ch. 148; *Super Ioan.* 6, lec. 5 (v. 44b; Marietti ed. no. 940); *Super Eph.* 1, lec. 3 (v. 10; Marietti ed. no. 29); ST I, q. 44, a. 4; ST I-II, q. 2, a. 1, corp. See Kromholtz, *On the Last Day*, 155–63.

⁸ For Thomas, the end of all things (including man) is the divine goodness: *In II Sent.* d. 1, q. 2, a. 2; ST I, q. 44, a. 4; ST I, q. 65, a. 2; CT I, ch. 100–1; see also *In IV Sent.* d. 48, q. 2, a. 3, ad 6; SCG III, ch. 17, para. 2; *De veritate*, q. 5, a. 9, ad 13, q. 22, a. 2; *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 4, corp.; ST I-II, q. 1, a. 8, corp.

⁹ ST I, q. 5, a. 4, corp.

¹⁰ ST I, q. 6, a. 2, corp.

last in his creatures—finally (literally) in the eschaton. In final causality, then, we have a kind of blueprint for all of creation and redemption—a plan that is first found in God himself, indeed, in his very being.

Now, for human beings, final fulfillment is found only in the vision of God himself.¹¹ This is the very goal or end of Christ's saving work, including Christ's resurrection. In commenting on 1 Corinthians (15:28), Thomas states that the end of Christ's resurrection was not merely to restore the humanity of Christ, but further, to lead the rational creature "to the contemplation of the Divinity," in which is our beatitude, with our end being "God himself."¹² It is noteworthy, too, that God is *our* beatitude; that is, he is to be the fulfillment of us as human beings, not merely as souls. Thus our final fulfillment must include resurrection of the body, so that the whole person may be fulfilled. What is more, this fulfillment must include all of the elect, that the body of Christ may be completed.

But what does it mean that God is the end of all things? This does *not* mean that all things are to become God (owing to all creatures' inherent limits). It also does not mean that all things will contemplate God—only intellectual creatures may do that. Yet it *does* mean that all things are to become *like* God.¹³ Thomas will even say that all things are, in some way, in the image of God—even though this description properly pertains only to intellectual creatures, who not only exist and live, but can know and love him.¹⁴ But all of creation, in the renewal of the world at the end, will be likened to God; insofar as they are ordained to perpetuity, they may remain in the world to come.¹⁵

Now Thomas considers the creature's end to be something that God intends to communicate to the creature. This is God's intended end, God's purpose, for his creature (which is integral to the being of the crea-

¹¹ See *ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 7, s.c.; *ST* I-II, q. 3, a. 8, corp.; Yves M.-J. Congar, "L'historicité de l'homme selon Thomas d'Aquin," *Doctor Communis: Acta et Commentationes Pontificiae Academiae Romanae S. Thomae Aquinatis* 22, no. 4 (1969): 297–304, esp. 299.

¹² *Super I Cor.* 15, lec. 3 (v. 28; Marietti ed. no. 950): "ostendit finem huius resurrectionis non esse in humanitate Christi, sed ulterius perducetur rationalis creatura ad contemplationem divinitatis, et in ea est beatitudo nostra, et finis noster ipse Deus est."

¹³ *SCG* III, ch. 19–20; *ST* I, q. 44, a. 4, corp.; *CTI*, ch. 101.

¹⁴ *CTI*, ch. 75; see also *ST* I, q. 93, a. 2.

¹⁵ For Thomas, this means that plants and animals as such have no place in the eschaton; see *SCG* IV, ch. 97, para. 5; see also *In IV Sent.* d. 50, q. 2, a. 3, q. 2, corp.

ture, to be sure). It is an end to be brought about ultimately by God—not to aggrandize himself, as if this were possible, nor to do something for his own utility. Rather, he acts because of his own goodness.¹⁶ That is, he communicates his own perfection to them. The “patient,” or receiver, in its way, intends to acquire its own perfection, which is to be like God; the creature can also participate in its own process of being perfected. Yet it is God’s initiative and grace that makes possible such conformity to himself.

Although the creature can participate in the process of perfection, for Thomas, the eschaton—the end—is God’s work, no matter how much the creature desires it and strives for it. Crucially, in its final, eschatological accomplishment, it is the work of God alone. So, for example, the elevation of the soul to the vision of God is possible only by divinely granted grace.¹⁷ Now it is true that humans can indeed be said to merit the *visio Dei* and thus a glorious resurrection—of course, only through their identification with and incorporation into the action of God-made-man, Jesus Christ. But humans do not have the power to bring about their own perfection. That is God’s work. This much is generally well understood.

But it is not only the eschatology of humanity that is in question here. It should be noted that the angels also needed grace in order to be turned toward God and so to reach beatitude, for “to see God in His essence, wherein the ultimate beatitude of the rational creature consists, is beyond the nature of every created intellect.”¹⁸ So the beatitude of angels is beyond the reach of their proper power, just as our beatitude is beyond our power. In addition to angels’ final perfection, we must also consider full human perfection, which requires the general resurrection. Thomas insists that only divine power can bring about resurrection.¹⁹ Resurrection is absolutely beyond the capability of nature, although not opposed to it.²⁰ Still, resurrection is beyond what human nature can do on its

¹⁶ *ST I*, q. 44, a. 4, ad 1.

¹⁷ See *ST I*, q. 12, aa. 4–5.

¹⁸ *ST I*, q. 62, a. 2.

¹⁹ See, for example, *In III Sent.* d. 5, q. 3, a. 2, obj. 4; *In IV Sent.* d. 43, q. unic., a. 1, q1a. 3, corp. and ad 4; *SCG IV*, ch. 81, para. 5 and 14. See also Kromholtz, *On the Last Day*, 279–82.

²⁰ See *ST I*, q. 105, a. 8, corp.; *Super I Cor.* 15, lec. 5 (v. 36; Marietti ed. no. 969) and lec.

own, for resurrection is beyond any natural hope, being among the most exalted kinds of miracle, which can be accomplished only by God.²¹

Thomas says something similar of the renewal of the corporeal world. As with resurrection, he contends that the stoppage of the heavens' motion (and of the world's time that results from that motion) and the renewal of the world (at that moment) is something effected by God alone: "The motion of heaven will cease in that renewal of the world, not indeed from some natural cause, but by the action of the divine will."²² The agency of God over this event is shown in that both the general resurrection and the end of the world will occur at the coming of Christ. That is, the end comes when Christ comes, because he brings it about. This demonstrates his own dominion over the eschaton, and thus, through the divinity united in his person, God's dominion over it.²³

I should point out an important way in which these last two kinds of final perfection (general resurrection and the world's renewal) are linked. Thomas teaches that the heavens' motion will cease when the number of the elect is reached (i.e., when all who are to be saved have in fact been saved).²⁴ Furthermore, he holds that it will cease precisely because the human generation and material sustenance for which the world was made will no longer be needed—the movement of the heavens being a cause of that generation and sustenance. Once the dead have been raised to an incorrupt life, there will be no need for the generation (and corruption) supplied through the world's motion.²⁵

But note that, in Thomas's view, the transformation of the world is not a natural result of humanity's change in status. Thomas does not ar-

9 (v. 53; Marietti ed. no. 1015); and *CT I*, ch. 154; see also *Super Rom.* 11, lec. 3 (v. 24; Marietti ed. no. 910). On the naturalness of resurrection, see *In IV Sent.* d. 43, q. unic., a. 1, q. 3, corp., ad 3, and ad 5; *SCG IV*, ch. 81, para. 2.

²¹ See *In II Sent.* d. 18, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3; and *ST I*, q. 105, a. 8, corp.; see also *ST I*, q. 110, a. 4, corp.; *ST III*, q. 43, a. 2, corp.

²² *In IV Sent.* d. 48, q. 2, a. 2, corp. See also *In IV Sent.* d. 47, q. 1, a. 1, q. 3, corp.; *In IV Sent.* d. 43, q. unic., a. 3, q. 2, ad 1; *CT I*, ch. 242; and *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 6, corp. and ad 10.

²³ *In IV Sent.* d. 43, q. unic., a. 2, q. 2, corp.

²⁴ See *In IV Sent.* d. 48, q. 2, a. 2, corp.; *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 5, corp., q. 5, a. 6, corp.; *Quaestiones disputatae De spiritualibus creaturis* 6, corp.; *Super Heb.* 1, lec. 5 (v. 11; Marietti ed. no. 75); and *CT I*, ch. 171.

²⁵ *In IV Sent.* d. 48, q. 2, a. 2, corp.; *In IV Sent.* d. 44, q. 1, a. 3, q. 4; *SCG IV*, ch. 97, para. 7.

gue from the idea that all things tend toward a state of rest or any other purely natural teleology. This is clear because he argues that, from the viewpoint of reason, the heavenly motion could continue without end (just as, more famously, he believes it to be philosophically tenable to hold that the world could have had no temporal beginning)—although revelation allows the believer to reach an understanding that the world's motion will end. Thus it is for properly theological reasons that Thomas holds that the motion of the heavens will cease (as is the case for the beginning of the world). That is, he holds that it is only God who will cause the cessation of the celestial motion along with the renewal of the world (just as he will cause the Resurrection). God will do this so that the world will match humanity's new, risen status—but the one does not cause the other. God causes them both. Thomas holds that it is “fitting”—not necessary—that God act in this way.²⁶

We can say something similar of the general resurrection. Thomas holds that the Resurrection is something that even reason alone could posit. Thomas argues that, since the human soul is immortal (which he believes can be known from reason), and since the soul ought to inform a body, it would be unreasonable if the human soul would go on existing perpetually without the body—and that therefore the body ought to be furnished to the soul in some kind of permanent way. The Resurrection is thus reasonable.²⁷ Now Thomas never goes so far as to suggest that the individual is owed resurrection in justice; nor does he claim that some kind of natural desire for resurrection is a given of human nature. After all, he treats the Resurrection in the fourth book of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, along with the Trinity and other revealed matters in which he is dealing only with matters proper to revelation. Nevertheless, he holds that reason demonstrates the fittingness of resurrection for humanity—and the nonfittingness of an ultimate lack of resurrection.

Nevertheless, even though he holds resurrection to be a most fitting end for humans, Thomas is clear that they cannot attain resurrection on their own. This is true of those who are to be glorified and of those

²⁶ SCG IV, ch. 97, para. 1; see also Kromholtz, *On the Last Day*, 154–237.

²⁷ *In IV Sent.* d. 43, q. unic., a. 1, q1a. 1, corp.; SCG IV, ch. 79, para. 10–11. In this, Thomas differs from his contemporaries Albert and Bonaventure, who hold the Resurrection to be almost exclusively a matter of revelation; see Kromholtz, *On the Last Day*, 121–22n30.

who are to suffer eternal torment. The soul and the remains, considered singly or together, are incapable of bringing about their own reunion. Only God can reunite souls with their remains. Thomas holds that not only is it the case that only God can raise the dead in this way, but also that God cannot even delegate this power; he cannot bestow this power of agency upon any creature. It is through Christ, through the hypostatic union, that the Resurrection is to be caused.

It worth noting that Thomas will say that resurrection is, as it were, *more* miraculous than the justification of sinners.²⁸ Thomas says that, unlike justification of the sinner, where there is something already in the sinner suitable of being raised to the life of grace, the bodily remains are completely unsuited to being raised (and the soul is certainly incapable of effecting such an action). This is not to say that, for Thomas, resurrection is unnatural. It is a resurrection to a state that fully suits the soul and completes human nature, but one that cannot be attained by soul or corpse (or even by soul *and* corpse).

A further note on the divine dispensation is needed. This concerns Thomas's teaching regarding the complete renewal of human nature at the end: human nature (not merely every individual) will be restored for everyone, all at once, at the Resurrection.²⁹ The same human nature is shared by all; when it is restored, it will be restored for everyone at the same time. Certainly, it will be restored concretely only in persons; for Thomas, human nature is not some kind Platonistic idea with its own existence. Still, in human persons or human souls, that nature shares certain conditions that are to be changed such that the human nature is restored at one time, through Christ. While salvation has been made accessible through the initial coming of Christ, that salvation is granted only to persons, one by one. Restoration of human nature is not granted generally until the end. Thus the effects of original sin continue to be felt in this life: disease and death, proclivity to sin and ignorance. What

²⁸ ST I-II, q. 113, a. 10, corp.: "In certain miraculous works it is found that the form introduced is beyond the natural power of such matter; so, in the resurrection of the dead, life is above the natural power of such a body. But the justification of the ungodly is not miraculous, because the soul is naturally capable of grace; since from its having been made to the likeness of God, it is fit to receive God by grace."

²⁹ SCG IV, ch. 81, sec. 15; *Super I Cor.* 15, lec. 8 (v. 52; Marietti ed. no. 1010); see Kromholtz, *On the Last Day*, 353–57, esp. the references at 355n94.

we can discern here, then, is the ongoing relevance of God's dominion over his creation, especially his human creatures. There can be no easy assurance that all will be well unless that assurance is founded on trust in God.

I must go further now and speak not only of the inability of the creature to attain its higher, eschatological state (or to sustain itself in that state), but also the dependent *quality* of that state. Whereas its glorified state makes the saint's soul share in the divine life, the new state does not identify that soul with God in every way. Of the ways in which glorification of souls *in patria* differs from the divine mode of being (if I may make such a comparison), I offer only one example: the duration that Thomas assigns to the life of the blessed. The highest operation that the blessed enjoy, the *visio Dei*, is a "participation in eternity (*participatio aeternitatis*)" and is thus measured by the duration that Thomas calls "participated eternity," rather than merely by aevum or by time.³⁰ Now, for God's eternity, Thomas accepts Boethius's definition: "eternity . . . is the simultaneously whole and perfect possession of unceasing life."³¹ This is a special measure for God's duration, since he does not and cannot change; he is immutable in his very essence. No creature can be eternal; only God is truly eternal, since God alone is immutable in his essence and is the only one who has no beginning.³² As with all the qualities predicated of God, his eternity is identical with his very self, although in the human mode of thinking, it is a distinct way of considering him.³³ Eternity is the measure of all other du-

³⁰ See *In IV Sent.* d. 49, q. 1, a. 2, q1a. 3, corp. and ad 3; SCG III, ch. 61; ST I, q. 10, a. 3, corp.; ST II-II, q. 18, a. 2, ad 2; *Quaestiones disputatae De virtutibus*, q. 4 (*De spe*), a. 4, ad 3; Kromholtz, *On the Last Day*, 101–7; Carl J. Peter, *Participated Eternity in the Vision of God: A Study of the Opinion of Thomas Aquinas and His Commentators on the Duration of the Acts of Glory* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1964), 20–26. For a list of references, see Peter, *The Doctrine of Thomas Aquinas Regarding Eternity in the Rational Soul and Separated Substances*, Pontificia Studiorum Universitas a Sancto Thoma Aquinate in Urbe (Rome: Typis Pontificiae Universitatis Gregorianae, 1964), 7n26.

³¹ Boethius, *Philosophiae consolatio*, Book 5, *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum*, vol. 67 (Vienna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1866–), 122, l. 12–13: "Aeternitas igitur est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio." See *In I Sent.* d. 8, q. 2, a. 1; CT I, ch. 8; ST I, q. 10, a. 1, obj. 1.

³² See *In I Sent.* d. 8, q. 2, a. 2; ST I, q. 10, a. 2; see the references in Peter, *Participated Eternity in the Vision of God*, 9–12.

³³ See ST I, q. 3, a. 3, corp., q. 10, a. 2, corp. and ad 3; Peter, *Participated Eternity in the*

rations insofar as it is the source of them all and goes beyond all of them.³⁴ Now, since eternity is identified with God himself, creatures beholding him does do not become simply “eternal.” Rather, they *participate* in God’s eternity; as such, this beatific vision is limited. Thus *visio beatifica* goes beyond acts measured by *aevum* both because it is divine (and not merely proper to creatures) and because it excludes the possibility of losing it. The vision of God enjoyed by the blessed is a true participation in his eternity, but this vision does not thereby make them eternal. It may be added that, in contrast with the blessed, the damned will not participate in eternity. Instead, they will be in everlasting motion, measured by time.³⁵

What I wish to conclude, in a preliminary way, is something about the kind of finality that humanity and the cosmos have been given. It is only in a very rough way that we may say that Thomas has Christianized Aristotelian teleology. There are important, crucial characteristics of Thomas’s theological appropriation of teleology that do not result from just any use of Aristotelian finality. If Thomas teaches that there are indeed “entelechies,” or ends written into natural things that are within reach of those things according to their own powers, those ends can only be understood as ends that are subordinate to higher ends, higher ends that are not within the creature’s own power to reach. This indicates the way in which God has granted to his creatures a directedness toward himself, which can orient them to a participation in his goodness, a participation that is according to their nature but beyond their natural power. I will return to this theme, but for now I turn to a few ways in which certain revealed categories shed light on a kind of directedness even within God.

The Directedness of the Divinity

Having considered the doctrine of God as it can be discerned in Thomas’s teaching on the final end, I offer a cursory consideration of the eschatological or teleological aspects reflected in Thomas’s teaching on God, particularly regarding the mission of the divine persons in the

Vision of God, 12.

³⁴ *In I Sent.* d. 19, q. 2, a. 1, ad 2.

³⁵ *In III Sent.* d. 31, q. 2, a. 1, q1a. 2, ad 1; *ST I*, q. 10, a. 3, ad 2; see also *CT I*, ch. 183, and Peter, *Doctrine of Thomas Aquinas Regarding Eternity*, 110.

economy of salvation, that is, the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.³⁶ We can begin by briefly naming a few ways in which there is a direction toward an end in God-made-man, Jesus Christ. Thomas says that a created beatitude was in the human nature of Christ, whereby his soul “was established in the last end of human nature”—that is, in having the vision of God.³⁷ Regardless of any difficulties determining the precise nature of Christ’s knowledge during his earthly life, it is understood that Christ in the Resurrection and Ascension enjoyed full beatitude and full enjoyment, as the first born of all creation. Where the head has gone, the members are to follow. Christ brings humanity into union with the divinity, a union that will be fulfilled for all the elect only at the end. Now Thomas notes that it was fitting for Christ to rise from the dead to raise our hope, that we may rise on the last day (Jb 19:27), and to complete our salvation, that we may be advanced to advance us toward good things.³⁸ Christ’s ascension into heaven and his being seated at the right hand of the Father indicate that the mission of the Son leads to a return of the Son to the Father, thus pointing, in the location of his assumed humanity, even in his human body, toward the final goal of every human person. In his very theandric union, then, and in his work of bringing his humanity (and therefore ours) into the presence of God, humanity is directed to the divine.

Even more clearly, though, the doctrine of Christ’s Second Coming, as Judge, indicates a particularly eschatological direction for all creatures. Whereas God’s ongoing governance or judgment is exercised over men in the world (with Christ exercising this judicial power since his ascension),³⁹ the definitive and final judgment for human beings is two-fold. First, there is the particular judgment at the end of each individu-

³⁶ This is not to say that a consideration of the person of the Father would be irrelevant here. For example, Gilles Emery has suggested the Father as the personal “term” (end) of the economy; see Emery, *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God*, trans. Matthew Levering, Thomistic Ressourcement 1 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 188.

³⁷ ST III, q. 9, a. 2, ad 2; see Jn 8:55.

³⁸ ST III, q. 53, a. 1, corp. (Rom 4:25). The Transfiguration is a kind of foretaste of this: ST III, q. 45, a. 2, corp.; but whereas *claritas* is to be an immanent property of glorified bodies, Christ’s body in the Transfiguration had not yet been glorified: ST III, q. 45, a. 2, ad 2.

³⁹ CT I, ch. 242, citing Mt 28:18; ST III, qq. 58–59.

al's pilgrim life.⁴⁰ Then, ultimately, there is the judgment and sentence of everyone at the end, all at the same time. Christ will come again in glory to preside at this final judgment, at his final "coming" or *adventus*, the "day of the Lord."⁴¹ At that time, the general resurrection and renewal of the world will occur. Indeed, Thomas teaches that Christ's coming at the Resurrection makes it clear that it is through Christ that the general resurrection comes about.⁴² Human ignorance of when the final end will occur underscores God's dominion over it. Only God effects this final end, and thus only God knows when he will effect it.⁴³

This much—that God acts eschatologically in the economy through Christ—is clear in Thomas's work. Aquinas's teaching on the eschatological role of the Holy Spirit is not as extensive, but it is nevertheless noteworthy. The Holy Spirit is the Lord, the giver of life—eternal life—and the final final person of the Trinity. One theme that is particularly fruitful for investigation is the Holy Spirit as "pledge" or "down payment," as expressed in certain Pauline texts, namely, 2 Corinthians 1:22 and 5:5, and Ephesians 1:13–14. The latter speaks of the "holy Spirit of promise, who is the *pledge* of our inheritance." Commenting on this, Thomas notes a Gloss that offers a variant reading of the passage: instead of "pledge (*pignus*)," it has "earnest (*arra*)," so that it speaks of the "holy Spirit of promise, who is the *earnest* of our inheritance" or "*down payment* of our inheritance" (emphasis mine). Thomas suggests that the connotations of "earnest" money make for the "better rendering." His explanation is what we are seeking here:

A pledge [*pignus*] differs from the object in place of which it is given, and it must be returned once he who has received the pledge obtains the object due him. An earnest [*arra*], however, does not differ from the object in place of which it is given,

⁴⁰ CT I, ch. 242, citing 2 Cor 5:6; SCG IV, ch. 96, para. 1; *In IV Sent.* d. 47, q. 1, a. 1, q1a. 1, corp. and ad 1; *Quaestiones de quodlibet* X, q. 1, a. 2, corp.; ST III, q. 59, a. 5.

⁴¹ CT I, ch. 242; SCG IV, ch. 96, para. 2; *In IV Sent.* d. 47, q. 1, a. 1, q1a. 3, ad 1; *In IV Sent.* d. 48, q. 1, a. 4, q1a. 4, corp. and ad 2.

⁴² *In IV Sent.* d. 43, q. unic., a. 2, q1a. 2, corp.; *Super I Cor.* 15, lec. 8 (v. 52; Marietti ed. no. 1008); *Super I Thes.* 4, lec. 2 (v. 16 [v. 15 in Marietti]; Marietti ed. no. 98); *Super Ioan.* 5, lec. 5 (v. 28; Marietti ed. no. 790); see also Kromholtz, *On the Last Day*, 325–31; *In IV Sent.* d. 47, q. 1, a. 1, q1a. 3.

⁴³ See *In IV Sent.* d. 47, q. 1, a. 1, q1a. 3.

nor is it returned since it is a partial payment of the price itself, which is not to be withdrawn but completed. God communicates charity to us as a pledge, through the Holy Spirit who is the spirit of truth and love. Hence, this is nothing else than an individual and imperfect participation in the divine charity and love; it must not be withdrawn but brought to perfection.⁴⁴

Let us note the implications of this promise of an eschatological presence of the Holy Spirit. In this life, there is an imperfect participation in charity, through the gift of the Holy Spirit; but in the eschaton, there will be a perfect participation (for those receiving it). Thus the Holy Spirit is to dwell within the saints for eternity.

If the Holy Spirit is that person who may be in us now by grace (speaking according to appropriation), and that person who will be in us perfectly in glory (we pray), this is congruent with the marks of the Trinity that are found in creatures. Thomas teaches that in every creature, there is a vestige or trace of the Trinity. Insofar as it (1) “subsists in its own being,” (2) “has a form whereby it is determined to a species,” and (3) “has a relation to something else,” every creature manifests its respective traces of the persons of the Trinity. That is, (1) in its subsistence (albeit a created subsistence), it represents the Father, who is “principle from no principle.” (2) As having form by which it is determined to a species, it “represents the Word.” And (3) as it “has relation of order, it represents the Holy Spirit, inasmuch as he is love, because the order of the effect to something else is from the will of the one creating.”⁴⁵ This ordering of the thing to something else, its directedness, its purpose or end, is a specification of the creature’s being that cannot be alienated from it, even if it is distinct from its subsistence and its form. This ordering indicates at least a *trace* of God the Holy Spirit in all things, while in humans, this is an aspect of being *in the image* of God; the act of loving God would correspond to this ordering.

Thus there is an invisible coming of the Holy Spirit leading to the

⁴⁴ *Super Eph.* 1, lec. 5 (v. 14; Marietti ed. no. 43), translation in Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Ephesians*, trans. Matthew L. Lamb (Albany, NY: Magi, 1966), 67; see also *Super II Cor.* 1, lec. 5 (v. 22; Marietti ed. no. 45), *Super II Cor.* 5, lec. 2 (v. 5; Marietti ed. no. 161).

⁴⁵ *ST I*, q. 45, a. 7, corp.

spiritual perfection of the souls of the saints (and culminating in an abiding of that same spirit); this is a perfection toward which they are particularly ordered, indicating intellectual creatures' being made in the image of God. At the end, there will be a visible coming of the Son, Jesus Christ, at which will occur the visible, bodily coming to perfection of the saints and of the world; they will be brought to their true end, the ultimate, toward which they have always been ordered. In at least these ways, then, the eschatological dimension is most evident in St. Thomas's teaching regarding the work of the persons of the Trinity.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Our observations can be collected together into two groups, by which the eschatological pattern of Thomas's doctrine of God will emerge. First, I noted the ways in which an eschatology as an Aristotelian teleology transformed by revelation is present in Thomas's work. For him, the final end is a major, programmatic theme touching upon his entire theological project. Furthermore, later I showed that, for Thomas, God himself is that end of all things, with all things being directed to him and likened to him. Christ himself in the Resurrection and Ascension raised our hope that we may follow where he has gone; the Holy Spirit is given as a down payment, to be given fully when God is all in all; a trace of this order to the end is in all creatures, while rational creatures are ordered toward beholding God as their end. So, this directedness toward God is a part of the divine plan.

Second, I also pointed out the ways in which the final end is God's work alone, in Thomas's view. That is, I indicated ways in which the creature cannot achieve the revealed end. To reach the vision of God,

⁴⁶ Though unexplored here, an eschatological dimension to Thomas's doctrine of the *intra-Trinitarian relations* could be noted. For example, the doctrine that the procession of divine persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is limited to only three persons implies a perfection or *end* of those processions. Furthermore, the proceeding forth of Son and Spirit from the Father also implies a kind of "final" (though eternal) return of Son and Spirit to the Father in communion. If man is in the image of God, he therefore is made for this ultimate communion expressed eminently in the union of divine persons. And if, as Thomas holds, the procession of persons is the cause of creation, all creatures in some way ought to bear the mark of the final orientation of the divine persons to one another. See *ST* I, q. 45, a. 6, corp. and ad 1; cf. *In I Sent.* d. 26, q. 2, a. 2, q1a. 2, ad 2.

the grace of God is needed. It is God alone who brings about the general resurrection and for the renewal of the world. I also made clear that human nature has yet to be restored, still being under the effects of sin; it is God who will ultimately bring about human nature's restoration, at the end. Finally, I pointed out the way in which the beatific vision has a dependent quality, with a particular focus on its durational measure as "participated eternity." That all this happens at Christ's visible Second Coming, whose time we cannot predict, only underscores that Christ is the one through whom all of this takes place.

We can discern a greater pattern here: in the creature, there is, on the one hand, a certain suitability for becoming likened to the Creator, but, on the other hand, there is a total inability to effect this likening. In all the ways in which creatures reach their fulfillment—*visio Dei* for angels and human souls, resurrection for souls' completion as human persons, the transformation/renewal of the world—the end is fully suited to the creature, an end that can be described as a likening to God. But only God can bring about the transformation in question, and only God can maintain it. What we see is a kind of extension to *all* creatures of the subtle and perhaps irreducibly complex relationship between grace and nature in humans (although with some important differences). I have shown this pattern by a reflection upon the prerogative of God. *Angels*, although the most intellectual of creatures and made to know God, still needed God to be brought by God into his permanent presence. *Man* is created to see God, but needs God's help to attain that vision. God is the only one who can raise him from the dead, though his soul is incomplete without his body. The *world* is to be transformed to become everlasting, and so will be likened to God—but it is only God who can do this. In Thomas's doctrine of God, the dominion of God over all these kinds of eschatological fulfillment is consistent, explicit, and complete.

Thus, regarding the charge that Aristotelian teleology has taken over Thomas's theology, we can only say that such a charge clearly does not apply. In a consistent way, there is much more at work in Thomas's eschatology than Aristotelian teleology. An exclusively Aristotelian teleology would not systematically place an orientation toward an end within a thing, while at the same time placing the means for the thing's achievement of that end outside and above it the thing, in the transcendent God. Since Thomas has the sovereign God bringing humanity to

its completion through Christ, achieved in the future, according to the wisdom and will of God, it can hardly be said that he has replaced revelation with a “finalistic metaphysic.” Rather, he has placed finality within a metaphysics that is itself transformed by the revelation of the God of Israel, most fully manifest in Jesus Christ.

If God has made his creatures for himself, and has made them to participate in himself in the deepest way possible, it is a participation that will be possible only if God himself brings it into effect—and it will remain in effect only if God maintains it. This is a transcendent God, but not an isolated God. He is to involve himself in bringing his holy human creatures to himself, and in maintaining them in that beatific vision, for all eternity. That it is ultimately God who accomplishes all this shows that his power, far from isolating himself, suggests precisely a God who goes out of himself to draw us to him. He has made us and redeemed us through Christ for this end. The Spirit who is love draws us toward the Father, to lift us to friendship with him, finally, forever. This is the one for whom we would live, and die, that he may grant us resurrection from the dead, that we may enjoy in him the life of the world to come.⁴⁷

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⁴⁷ I have closed by suggesting some ways in which Thomas's eschatology and conception of God may provide resources for those concerned that the Christian God be understood as closely involved with his creatures, such that humans may enter into a personal (neither merely abstract nor merely subjective) encounter with him; see, e.g., Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 1965, §13; Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 1990, §44 and §77; and Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 2013, §8, §34, §36.

