

RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR PETER—I

Can Thomas Aquinas make Christian eschatology more credible today? Professor Peter has written the kind of paper one cannot help enjoy reading and discussing. He begins by pointing to the fading popularity of the "theology of hope." But that is no reason for serious theology to lose interest in its theme. Everything new gets old in time. Theology of hope had its turn. Since then we have had theology of revolution, theology of play, and now liberation theology is playing its match on center court to a growing audience. We will have "new theology" no. 11 soon, then no. 12, and on and on. But Carl Peter rightly claims that the very origins of Christianity makes the survival of eschatology inevitable in Christian theology, no matter what the fashions of the day. I certainly agree with that. We could go on to say that the theology of hope not only embraces the eschatological origins of New Testament Christianity, but also has a timely service to perform in the present with respect to two temptations. The first temptation is for the Church to retreat now from the world into its own organizational system; that is the conservative retrenchment we see in the seventies, after a decade of secular exuberance and social involvement. And the second temptation is to leave the world of history by way of religious otherworldliness. The theology of hope says "no" to both forms of temptation. That is because of the down-to-earth thrust—the incarnational grounding of the eschatology that moved the apostles out of their Palestinian ghettos into the great centers and busy highways of world history. So I am happy that, whatever my disagreements with the author of this paper, we are together in our desire to make Christian eschatology as credible and creditable as possible.

One of the surprising features of Professor Peter's paper is all the credit he gives to Protestant scholarship in awakening interest in eschatology and its chief categories of hope and the future. He writes as though Roman Catholics have as yet made no contributions to hope as a way of being and thinking. However, Roman Catholics have not been exactly idle. Since the author deals with Thomas Aquinas, he could have made use of Bernard's book of 1961, written before anyone had

heard of Moltmann, entitled *Théologie de l'espérance selon Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris, 1961), as well as Gabriel Marcel's book *Homo Viator*, of 1944, which is a prolegomenon to a metaphysics of hope. And Pieper's book, *Über die Hoffnung*, was written in 1935. These books are solid reflections on the nature of hope in human existence, and have the advantage of not being determined by the various Protestant reactions to Bultmann's existentialist eschatology. But even in this post-Bultmannian era Catholic scholarship has made valid offerings to the theology of hope. Surely Johannes Baptist Metz's name should not be ignored. Nor should one discount the fresh reflections by connection of the Catholic theologians of liberation on the themes of hope and futurity. I would like to have seen Professor Peter acknowledge the deep involvement of recent Catholic theology in the rediscovery of eschatology and its implications for Christian thought and action, for theological method and church praxis in the world.

But now to get closer to the heart of the paper. Carl Peter thinks that a dilemma has arisen in the Protestant treatment of eschatology and history, a dilemma which became glaring in Bultmann's theology. The dilemma is this: how can we find meaning in history when the meaning of history, of which we are a part, can be known only at its end? How can there be meaning for us who stand neither outside of history nor at the end of history? Bultmann's answer is: you must pull it out of your guts here and now. Bultmann, of course, used more delicate language, but in the end it was inadequate. The theology of hope, through Moltmann and Pannenberg, began as an attempt at a more adequate response to this dilemma. The eschatological meaning of history is foreshadowed by events that point to the end. Moltmann speaks more about promises that bear the meaning of history, whereas Pannenberg speaks more of prolepses.

At this point Professor Peter asserts that Bultmann's dilemma reappears in the theology of hope as "a very serious weakness." He also refers to it as "a major impasse." He makes a lengthy diagnosis of this weakness, and then offers a prescription from the thought of Thomas Aquinas. In a brief critique I can only raise a few questions—posed and pointed in such a way as to stimulate further discussion. These questions deal both with the adequacy of the diagnosis, and with the Thomist prescription.

In the first place, it is clear that Carl Peter is pointing to a deficiency in the theology of hope which many critics noticed. The word of promise seems to be placed in sheer antithesis to all past and present reality. Moltmann's use of the technical formula *inadaequatio rei et intellectus* suggests that what we hope from the future stands in total contradiction with what we know of the past and experience in the present. Only the future reality, only what does not yet exist, can correspond to the word of promise. My question is this. Does not this interpretation hang only from a single thread in Moltmann's early thought? It would be a serious weakness, if Moltmann would have left it at that. But Moltmann himself went on to make his own correction. So I suggest that before reaching back for medicine from a medieval doctor, it might have been better to see what cure Moltmann was about to administer to himself. Moltmann's latest book is entitled *The Crucified God*, and here is what he says about that:

The theology of the cross is nothing but the reverse side of the Christian theology of hope if the starting point of the latter lies in the resurrection of the crucified Christ. . . . *Theology of Hope* began with the resurrection of the crucified Christ, and I am now turning to look at the cross of the risen Christ. I was concerned then with the remembrance of Christ in the form of the hope of his future, and now I am concerned with hope in the form of the remembrance of his death. The dominant theme then was that of anticipations of the future of God in the form of promises and hopes, here it is the understanding of the incarnation of that future, by way of the sufferings of Christ, in the world's sufferings.

In the second place, Professor Peter suggests that we go back to Thomas, because he can do something for the theology of hope that it cannot do for itself. This has to do with the present grounds of Christian hope for the future. If Moltmann does not pay a great deal of attention to this methodological issue, I am puzzled by Peter's assessment of Pannenberg. In fact, nothing has preoccupied Pannenberg more in the last decade than the methodological problems arising on the ground of rational inquiry into the truth and verifiability of theological statements. Yet, Peter says that this matter of faith and reason in relation to eschatological statements "deserves more consideration than it is receiving from either Moltmann or Pannenberg." I agree with the

Moltmann part of it, but not with the Pannenberg part. In *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 2, Pannenberg has an essay entitled "Faith and Reason," but this goes unmentioned in the footnotes. In this essay he takes up, among others, the Thomist notion of the relation between faith and reason. I offer a few quotations from this essay, right on the mark of Peter's problematique: "Christian eschatology does not mean simply that one should keep watch for a still-outstanding future and thereby become alienated from the present. On the contrary, the Christian understanding of the eschaton turns one's view back to the present, insofar as the present is also experienced as determined by the coming reign of God" (p. 47). In terms of the relation between future and the present, there is something for reason and there is something for faith. Another quotation: "The eschatological structure of reason opens up room for faith's talk about an eschatological future of the individual, the human race, and the world as a whole. Such talk cannot any longer be cast aside as contrary to reason" (p. 63). Pannenberg is dealing with a different concept of reason than Thomas, namely, with an historical understanding of reason, in Dilthey's language, with historical reason. The problem of the relation between faith and reason has shifted in the modern period. Because the concept of reason is different, the relationship between faith and reason is bound to be presented differently in modern terms, even if the concept of faith were to remain the same. But even that has changed, because of the changed role that authority plays in matters of revelation.

Furthermore, if Professor Peter suggests that the theology of hope cannot help itself on the problem of faith and reason, to make its eschatological statements more credible and intelligible to those who do not yet believe, I wonder what his assessment of Pannenberg's latest book will be, namely, his *Wissenschaftstheorie und Theologie*, a 450-page volume dealing with theology as a science. Apart from this book, though, Carl Peter does not refer to any of the relevant essays in *Basic Questions in Theology*, vols. 1 and 2. Again, as with Moltmann, he is dealing with the earliest and thus more undeveloped form of Pannenberg's theological work.

In the third place, can Thomas's view of the cooperation between faith and reason be so simply plugged into the modern *Fragstellung*? Professor Peter is, of course, aware of the horizontal distance and differ-

ence between Thomas's thirteenth century and our twentieth century. But I suggest that the magnitude of this difference is hardly measured by acknowledging that Thomas had to read the New Testament in Latin without the benefit of historical criticism. Can one jump back into the thirteenth century in this way, and salvage some answers to twentieth-century problems, simply by touching up a point here or there? It is heartening to see that Professor Peter speaks not of the timelessness of Thomas's thinking, but rather of its timeliness. There is a vast difference between the two notions. But I wonder if the difference does not fade away somewhat if one can apply so directly thirteenth-century answers to twentieth-century questions? The crux of the difference lies in all the things that are covered in modern jargon by such terms as hermeneutics, historical understanding and the historicity of knowledge.

In the fourth place, Professor Peter acknowledges that Thomas will have to win back his own way into the modern discussion, "without the external bulwark of church authority." I would ask whether it is useful to contrast Thomas's notion of the relation between faith and reason to Pannenberg's, for example, without discussing the nature of authority. Pannenberg has taken off all the wraps of authority—scriptural or ecclesiastical. Did not Thomas's notion of faith have a structural dependence on a kind of authority that failed to withstand the onslaughts of critical reason during the Enlightenment? Can we then re-pristiniate his notion of faith and reason as a timely solution to our problems, without getting him off the hook of authority? I am assuming that none of us is willing to hang by that same hook, in the effort to make our assertions of hope "credible and intelligible" to modern man.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge that, despite these critical questions, I see a lot of common ground between Professor Peter's aims and the theology of hope. Surely people like Pannenberg and Sauter would endorse such a lively exchange between "believing hope and the unbending demands of critical thought." They would doubt that Thomas can be of much help, in view of the rise of the historical concept of reason in modern times. And they (including Moltmann) would also be linked to Professor Peter's reconstruction of the way that Thomas conceived of the future taking hold of the present, namely, through the reality of love. But in addition to love, we would add righteousness.

Perhaps we should also add that under the conditions of history, both the love and the righteousness of the future kingdom become present through a negative dialectic, in forms that may appear in stark contrast to the hidden reality of the kingdom that in the end shall become universally manifest in all its power and glory.

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