

## A ROMAN CATHOLIC CONTRIBUTION TO THE QUEST OF A CREDIBLE ESCHATOLOGY

The enthusiasm generated by the theology of hope in the late sixties has obviously waned. For one thing, publishers are more wary of the topic and for a very good reason. Many readers who helped make it current and fashionable have lost interest. But more is involved. Hard questions have been posed for the sponsors of this movement that was center-stage theologically less than five years ago. Still when popular interest decreases that is no sure sign that a movement is or should be without influence on the mainstream of theological thought. In the case of Christian future-talk the situation is quite the opposite. Those who write religion columns in secular newspapers may find exorcism more fashionable but that does not mean theologians can afford to forget that *spes quaerens intellectum* has had more than a little to do with the origin and survival of their discipline.<sup>1</sup> There is some indication that this may well be the precise time to take another look at the future-talk that is unavoidable in Christian theology. The following remarks proceed from the conviction that this is indeed the case. Their purpose is to suggest that the tradition emphasizing the possibility of fruitful cooperation between faith and reason can contribute something positive to contemporary efforts aimed at a critical consideration of the importance of the *not-yet* for a Christian understanding of the *now*. I take it for granted that Roman Catholic theologians still need to become more

<sup>1</sup>This is true whether Rudolf Bultmann or Ernst Käsemann is right in the dispute about the motherhood of apocalyptic when it comes to the origin of Christian theology. Cf. respectively: "Ist die Apokalyptik die Mutter der Christlichen Theologie?" in *Apophoreta: Festschrift für Ernst Haenschen zu seinem siebzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. by W. Eltester and F. Kettler (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), pp. 64-9, and "The Beginnings of Christian Theology," in *New Testament Questions of Today*, trans. by W. J. Montague (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), p. 102. For the importance of such future-talk and the struggle against eschatology, cf. the differing opinions of Klaus Koch, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (Naperville: Allenson, 1973), and Jean Carmignac, "Les dangers de l'eschatologie," *New Testament Studies* 17 (1970-71), 365-90.

aware of the major role such future-talk must play in their discipline.<sup>2</sup> I also assume it is well known that even the limited realization they have presently in this regard is by and large traceable to the achievements of Protestant scholarship. But with no more liking than others for anything smacking of a messianic stance on the part of Catholic systematians, I shall still suggest that their intellectual heritage provides them with something to give as well as to receive in the process. As a result I shall maintain that they can help in the collective task of making for more credible Christian future-talk.

### ESCHATOLOGY AND THE MEANING OF HISTORY

It may seem strange to speak of Rudolf Bultmann and Thomas in the same breath as I try to make something of a case for my contention. And yet I think the reference to the professor from Marburg and the divine from Roccasecca is very much to the point. For twenty years ago Bultmann's words gave clear expression to a dilemma contemporary eschatology is still attempting to resolve. And when Thomas Aquinas is seen as having made an effort to come to grips with a very similar dilemma in the thirteenth century, his thought appears to have a currency and timeliness in our decade of the twentieth.<sup>3</sup> For this reason I should like to begin by recalling a difficulty which Bultmann posed in his Gifford lectures at the University of Edinburgh in 1955. In it he described the limitations placed on human knowledge because of historical consciousness, a problem that has haunted Western theology in the

<sup>2</sup>They surely have not taken it properly into account in their current dispute about the permanent binding force of dogmatic formulae. Cf. "Why Catholic Theology Needs Future Talk Today," in *CTSA Proceedings* 27 (1972), 146-67, esp. 163-7. The theses approved and published by the International Pontifical Commission of Theologians in May of 1973 indicate an ever-so-subtle but notable shift in this regard. Cf. "L'unité de la foi et la pluralisme théologique," in *La Documentation Catholique*, No. 1632 (May 20, 1973), pp. 459-60.

<sup>3</sup>For a recognizably Roman Catholic expression of Christian doctrine regarding the future, cf. chapter 7 of the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium*). Earlier Aquinas had introduced both analogy and participation into his treatment of man's future under God. His position on the matter belongs positively but not exclusively to the Roman Catholic theological tradition. If timely today, his stance may well have a future as well as a past.

twenty years which have followed.<sup>4</sup> No description of the origin of the theology of hope or even liberation theology is complete without taking this source into account. Now Bultmann phrased his problem in the following fashion. Man would be able to know the meaning of history taken as a whole if he could locate himself at its end and look back to survey its entire course. He might also accomplish the same if he were outside history and could view it as a disinterested observer from a distant planet. Because however man can do neither, Bultmann concluded that the meaning of history taken as a whole is beyond human ken. He then proceeded to close his final lecture with words to this effect. The man who complains that he cannot see meaning in history and therefore regards his life interwoven in history as meaningless is to be admonished thus. Do not look around yourself into universal history; you must look into your own personal history. Always in the present lies the meaning in history and you cannot see it as a spectator but only in your responsible decisions. In every moment slumbers the possibility of being the eschatological moment. You must awaken it.<sup>5</sup> Look not for the meaning of history; awaken meaning in history by your decision at any moment.

Undeniably a malaise with regard to this position of Bultmann was connected with the revival of interest in eschatology a brief ten years ago. To many he seemed to dissolve history into moments of decision and thus to collapse the future into the present with unwholesome consequences for both Christian faith and the critical exercise of human intelligence.<sup>6</sup> One reaction came to be known as the theology of hope and is associated with the name of Jürgen Moltmann. The latter replied differently to the Bultmannian dilemma, that still challenged Christian theologians. Man might, after all, know something of the meaning of

<sup>4</sup>In Roman Catholic theological circles this has led to a heated debate over infallibility, especially that of dogmatic formulae.

<sup>5</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity* (New York: Harper Bros., 1962), p. 155.

<sup>6</sup>Ernst Käsemann seems to be of this view in "The Beginnings of Christian Theology," in *New Testament Questions of Today*, p. 96. For a harsh evaluation cf. George Wesley Buchanan in the Introduction (p. 28) to his translation of Herman Samuel Reimarus' *The Goal of Jesus and His Disciples* (Leiden: Brill, 1970).

history taken as a whole if he could catch a glimpse of that meaning within history itself.<sup>7</sup> If only in time and space one could find a clue, something that acted as a sort of preview and anticipated the end and goal of universal history, then somehow man's talk about the future destiny of individuals and the human race might be more than a case of haphazard guessing or conjecture. Christian hope too might well be more than wishful thinking, more than a result of the illusion or projection that others besides Freudians and Marxists suspected it to be. Bultmann overlooked another alternative. Man might possibly find in past history a glimpse of the future and final meaning of his life. That which Moltmann pointed to as a promising candidate for offering such a revelation was the resurrection of Christ. The destiny of Jesus expressed therein is a preview of what others' destiny will be.

To accept this of course requires hope and that hope must make an effort to render an account of itself to others who do not share or profess it. On the other hand as believers attempt to make such an effort in dialogue with men and women of good will they must ask something as well. And that is this. Have others written off too quickly the possibility that the resurrection of Jesus Christ just might indeed reveal what God will do for all men? Is his victory over death God's promise that history does indeed have a meaning or at least that it will be shown to have such a meaning in the future?<sup>8</sup> One need not exit from history or stand at its end to know whether it has a meaning. Suffice to have an anticipation of that meaning within history itself.

Now it is obvious that this view has a number of strengths. But its critics have pointed out a very serious weakness. And it is in this context that I would propose Thomas Aquinas as having something important to offer, despite the limitations his day imposed on his theologizing.

<sup>7</sup>This is surely the position sustained by Jürgen Moltmann throughout his *Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

<sup>8</sup>Here he takes into account a presupposition of the positivist historian and speaks of the recoiling of the latter's question (about the resurrection) on its subject. Cf. *Theology of Hope*, p. 175.

THE HOLD OF THE FUTURE ON THE PRESENT

Moltmann has so emphasized the future character of history's meaning, so insisted that the latter is now not clear that he has considerably diminished any grounds in the present for making statements about God and providence.<sup>9</sup> Promises, he tells his reader, have been made but not yet fulfilled. God will do what he has not done and is not doing. The Lord will negate the power of evil but is not doing so in any clear way at all presently. His Spirit will renew the face of the earth but the latter still remains literally God-forsaken.

Here Moltmann is faced with a problem that is not new. Without rendering an account of the grounds that exist for their faith and hope, Christians have long appeared to others to indulge in fanciful thinking when they have recourse to such language as "God will wipe away every tear," and "death will be no more," or again "he will come to judge the living and the dead; and of his kingdom there will be no end." Is there a launching pad in the past or present strong enough to support such hopes for the future? How do Christians who hope explain why they hope and what warrants their hope at present when they are asked to do so, as asked they are and should be?

As we try to answer such questions, in however limited a fashion, I think Thomas Aquinas deserves a hearing that he is not receiving at present. Moltmann himself makes reference to Aquinas in precisely this context.<sup>10</sup> He contrasts God as *finis ultimus* for Thomas with the image of *Deus adventurus* of the New Testament. The former awakens eros in the present; the latter comes towards all things and transforms them. Moltmann regards the difference as important. So, I confess, do I.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore I think this supposed defect in Aquinas may well

<sup>9</sup>Among others, L. Gilkey, "The Universal and Immediate Presence of God," in *The Future of Hope*, ed. by F. Herzog (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), pp. 81-109.

<sup>10</sup>J. Moltmann, "Theology as Eschatology," in *The Future of Hope*, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup>His position and that of Aquinas are at odds. I regard his reference to "the apocalyptic thought forms of the New Testament" (p. 13), as needing qualification. Assuming for the sake of discussion that eros does justice to the present effect the *finis ultimus* has on man, I wonder whether that is so far from what one exegete has lamented in a book many Christians regard as belonging to the biblical

point to a real strength in his thought. It is precisely this that I am suggesting today.

I have tried to show elsewhere that Thomas Aquinas had a timely view of future-talk in his day.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore precisely because he saw the not-yet in terms of its beginning in the here-and-now, his view can be helpful and timely in the current theological discussion as well. This I should like to spell out a bit more in detail and shall do so by a series of points that I hope will be conducive to that end.

### HOPE AND REASON

The first has to do with a *desideratum* in the present. I submit that theology in general and within theology the specialization of eschatology needs badly a concerted effort to cultivate and foster an exchange between the vision of believing hope on the one hand and the unbending demands of critical thought on the other. I understand well enough (even though I disagree), when one finds faith incompatible with reason. Previous dogmatism made the reaction of the Enlightenment very intelligible.<sup>13</sup> I understand as well a Karl Barth, who could distinguish faith and critical thought so radically and give his commitment to the former. I understand but again do not agree. But what I cannot fathom is the attitude that regards questions concerning the meaning and verification of faith's truth-claims as a matter of secondary importance. Let me now put these general remarks in context. We are speaking of future-talk primarily on the part of Christians. Two contemporary theologians who deserve credit for calling popular and

canon. Cf. E. Käsemann, "An Apologia for Primitive Christian Eschatology," in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. by W. J. Montague (London: SCM Press, 1964), pp. 169-95.

<sup>12</sup>*Participated Eternity in the Vision of God*, vol. 141: *Analecta Gregoriana* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1964); and *The Doctrine of Thomas Aquinas Regarding Eternity in the Rational Soul and Separated Substances* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1964).

<sup>13</sup>Here I agree with Wolfhart Pannenberg even though the reaction he is sympathetic to was excessive in the claims it made for reason. Cf. "Response to the Discussion," in *Theology as History*, vol. 3 in *New Frontiers in Theology*, ed. by James M. Robinson and John Cobb (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 227.

scholarly attention to the forgotten importance of this type of Christian discourse are Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg. Each has somewhat overstated his case; perhaps that was almost inevitable in the climate they originally encountered. But both encouraged Christians to ask again whether apocalyptic is not, in the words of Ernst Käsemann, the mother of all Christian theology. And the maternity in question does not refer solely to remote origins but to an ongoing relation of dependence between Christian faith seeking critical understanding and Christian hope looking to more than the past and present.

I am personally a Roman Catholic by birth and conviction but confess one thing without hesitation. The credit for reviving this futurist perspective which despite certain exaggerations gives promise of being very fruitful in the theological enterprise belongs primarily to Protestant scholars. So too, I think, does a major impasse at present. Moltmann asserted the need to bring disciplined thought into believing hope. But when confronted with the question of how probable the resurrection narratives were in their underlying truth-claims he tossed the question back. He asked historians whether they did not have a bias in defining *a priori* what is and what is not historically possible and probable. Now it is difficult to teach Greek to the Greeks. Historians may hesitate to react seriously to Moltmann perhaps because a challenge hurled by faith is not calculated to initiate what will at best be a very difficult combined quest for truth.

Wolfhart Pannenberg too saw the problem and began with sympathetic understanding of the spirit of the Enlightenment with its merciless questioning of dogmatic truth-claims.<sup>14</sup> He tried to answer questions such as these about the resurrection of Jesus. What did it mean and what grounds were there for holding to it? The charge leveled against him by opponents is rationalism. For those who think the latter would be a healthy corrective to the flight from reason that they think they witness in contemporary theology, my reply has to be this. If not in this particular case at least in his general systematic outlook Pannenberg seems to underplay the importance of rational enlightenment arising from faith.<sup>15</sup> Bultmann's dilemma reappears but in a

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>At the very least he emphasizes much more that knowledge of Jesus'

somewhat different form. As to the grounds for hope that history has a meaning, how does man assess those grounds within history? Are they evident? If so, then Christian faith is not needed. Are they absent save by way of promise? Then blind faith is needed to assert them. There the dilemma rests at present.

I wonder whether a third possibility is not open and in need of articulation. Are those grounds present in the sense that they can be credibly, creditably and responsibly asserted by man without being so evident as to compel the assent of all but the uninformed or perverse? Do God's plans for the future and present providence have an impact now that is real? Are they a dimension of reality that can be experienced by Christian and non-Christian, which both may at least theoretically be able to recognize as credible but which neither finds so compelling as to eliminate all the risk of faith? I answer that this possibility is a real and realistic one. It deserves more consideration than it is receiving from either Moltmann or Pannenberg.

It also implies a limited but unnoticed and real timeliness of Thomas Aquinas. For him the future God has promised man is neither obvious from reflection on the world around man nor totally absent from that world when the latter is scrutinized by critical intelligence.<sup>16</sup> The Lord's future gifts are already anticipated in history, helping give a meaning to history. That anticipation of future realities takes place in the present not by way of a promisory note but by way of a real participation in the here-and-now. God's future kingdom is already partly visible and already partly real in the generosity which feeds the hungry and gives even a cup of cold water to the thirsty. Those who love now are the ones who will see clearly. Charity is the link between

history, including his (Jesus') resurrection from the dead, is the basis of faith; that knowledge is not a stage beyond faith; and that faith does not cling to its own form of knowledge. Cf. "The Revelation of God in Jesus," in *Theology as History*, p. 129, and "What is a Dogmatic Statement?" in *Basic Questions in Theology*, trans. by G. H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), p. 209. For a Roman Catholic systematician such a position would have significant implications when it came to saying how one thinks dogma and doctrine develop.

<sup>16</sup>To know his destiny man needs *Sacra Doctrina* (*Sum. theol.* I, q. 1, a. 1, c.); this is so even though the existence of God as the Author and End of human existence can be demonstrated by reason (*Sum. theol.*, I, q. 2, a. 2, c.).

man's present and man's future when both are under God.<sup>17</sup>

Aquinas says this with a clarity that makes the non-advertence to this fact on the part of so many surprising. But what he describes as already present by way of participation cannot be mathematically raised to the *n*th power so as to show exactly what its future fullness will be. God's future kingdom is begun through charity without being reduced to the status of a simple multiple of the latter. Participation and analogy go hand in hand in this case. Both deserve far greater consideration in the present scene debating about God's future gifts and his present workings than they are receiving.<sup>18</sup> So does Thomas himself in his effort to bring the faith he shared with Christians into fruitful cooperation with the reason he shared with all other men. In a word he still offers an example of faith and reason working together without either's losing its identity as they deal with hopes for the future.

#### HOPE AND TRUTH

Is religious truth reducible to historical or philosophical truth or is it of a radically different kind, with very few grounds for comparison with either? The disjunction is not complete and yet is often accepted as if it were. In Protestant circles it may rightly or wrongly evoke the shade of Schleiermacher. For Catholics it should recall among other things medieval Averrhoism and perhaps even Siger of Brabant. In this context I think a thorough study of Aquinas' *De unitate intellectus* has much to commend both him and it. We are surely not dealing today with the precise problem he was. But we are concerned with how the truths we believe as the basis for our hope relate to the convictions we arrive at with other men who share our reason but not our beliefs. Because his question in the *De unitate intellectus* is not precisely ours,

<sup>17</sup>*Sum theol.*, I, q. 12, a. 6, c.: "Unde intellectus plus participans de lumine gloriae perfectius Deum videbit. Plus autem participabit de lumine gloriae qui plus habet de caritate."

<sup>18</sup>There are signs that this may be changing at least in the case of analogy. Cf. David Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (New Haven and London: Yale, 1973); and William J. Hill, *Knowing the Unknown God* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1971). See also J. Dunne, "Saint Thomas' Theology of Participation," *Theological Studies* 17 (1957), 487-512, and C. J. Peter, "Metaphysical Finalism or Christian Eschatology?" *The Thomist* 38 (1974), 125-45.

we have no right to simply repeat his answer. But one concern of his is clearly also a contemporary problem for theology. And I submit that his answer to Siger's question deserves consideration as at least part of the answer to a much controverted question of our day: that of the hold of the future on the present. His conviction that the oneness of truth is a goal to be worked for through various disciplines rather than a possession assured once and for all may be an alternative to the dilemma posed by Pannenberg and Moltmann in their reaction to Bultmann.

#### CHRISTIAN HOPE IN DIALOGUE

Thomas wrote many things that I have not the competency, brashness, or slightest desire to defend as timely today. But one realization shines through his treatment of the Last Things and Hope. He knew that human intelligence will rightly and loudly object if its attempts to check the meaning and grounds of truth-claims made in the present about the future are dismissed with counter-charges from faith and reserved for resolution at the eschaton or parousia. In popular terms that is a cop-out on the part of faith and ill becomes the discipline of theology. With all his ability and notwithstanding the time-bound limitations of his language and mind-set, Thomas Aquinas made an effort to offer an account of the hope he espoused to those who equivalently challenged him to do so. That is more than a task posed for thirteenth-century talk about Hope and the Last Things. It is an imperative of twentieth-century eschatology. In this the latter can learn a lesson from Thomas even after it has pointed out what are by our standards his all too obvious weaknesses such as reading the New Testament in Latin without the benefit of historical criticism. In other words Thomas in his theologizing points out one thing very well. In the context of discourse regarding the future, Christians must do more than cling to the promises they believe God has made to them and all men. Clinging is not enough. They must explain what they mean by those promises now; why in other words those promises have as referent more than the future and point to tasks and realities in the here-and-now. But when Christians do that, others will ask why that referent in the present is correctly described by reference to an Agent greater than man but

kindly disposed toward man rather than chance, or wishful and muddled thinking—the result of an illusion or projection. Thomas Aquinas tried to do this in his own way. But in so doing he relied on a highly cultivated metaphysics. Through Aristotle's theorem of act and potency he could speak of a participation of God's future plan present in the spirit of man and world here and now. That participation was not such as to destroy the mystery of the future but did not consist in a figment of the imagination either. From theologians as diverse as John Macquarrie and Heinrich Ott come warnings that unless Christians speak again of the last things they will miss important implications of the foreshadowing of those same last things in the course of history now.<sup>19</sup> Talk of death, survival, the demonic, and parapsychic phenomena is once again fashionable. Some theologians—myself included—are anything but reassured by this fact in itself. Still it does offer thinking Christians who seek to understand their faith a chance and opportunity to speak to others who wonder what they hold and why and what are their grounds for so doing. Thomas' talk of God's future grace for man was not, I think, enhanced by the fact that certain crucial concepts like *olam* and *aion* reached him not in Hebrew or Greek texts but primarily through a Latin version of the Scriptures. Still one thing helped him very much indeed, this notwithstanding. He had a metaphysics that for all the criticisms it has subsequently received did keep his piety from making his thinking about present reality muddled. There is a lesson here. Curiosity about rumors of angels and sacred canopies in contemporary culture may lead just as well to a cult of the occult as to the reappearance of a widely accepted view of life acknowledging the pervasive influence of the Transcendent in the workings of history. A brake against this sort of enthusiasm which may well reduce religion and its truth to the realm of mere feeling is a metaphysics critically aware of its own grounds.

I have spoken of a timeliness of Thomas Aquinas in that his future talk, despite its time-bound character, deals creditably with issues close enough to those faced at present that its merits are considerable in our

<sup>19</sup>H. Ott, "Philosophical Theology as Confrontation," in *The Future of Philosophical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), pp. 164-5. What John Macquarrie says of the importance of the term *eternal life* is much to the point. Cf. "Eschatology and Time," in *The Future of Hope*, pp. 123-5.

day as well as his. Perhaps this is an instance of what Professor James Weisheipl means when speaking of a transcendence of Thomas' thought that can be grasped only when Aquinas is seen dealing with problems of his day that are problems in ours as well.<sup>20</sup> Still, because of a fear that the term *transcendence* might well evoke the reaction that my presentation manifests Scholastic exuberance, I have spoken instead of the timeliness of one particular aspect of Thomas' thought. That is his future-talk, which asserts the presence of something of eternity in time and points to something of God's future gifts in his amazing grace to man in the present despite all suffering and evil.

There is another reason however why I speak of the timeliness of this particular aspect of Thomas' thought concerning the presence of eternity in time. It is this. Professor Michael Gannon in a perceptive essay written in a volume edited by John Tracy Ellis studied the intellectual life of Catholic priests in the United States before and after the Modernist controversy at the beginning of our century.<sup>21</sup> In so doing Gannon associates a widespread intellectual awkwardness on the part of these American clerics with what he terms the "normative science of worshipful Thomism." Candidates for the priesthood, he says, "were asked to memorize in Latin answers to questions that had not been posed for hundreds of years."<sup>22</sup> He then qualifies the matter. It was not, he says, "Thomism as such which created the intellectual desert which was the American seminary system but the manner in which Thomism was masticated, predigested, and force-fed."<sup>23</sup> He distinguishes Thomism and the mode of existence it enjoyed for some decades after *Pascendi* and *Lamentabili*. I think the distinction he makes is valid and salutary. But he pursues it no further. My remarks have been an effort to do so in one area: that of future-talk in our day and Thomas'. Some of the questions Aquinas posed about future hopes

<sup>20</sup>James A. Weisheipl, *Frair Thomas d'Aquino* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), p. 1. For a perceptive review, cf. James Collins in *America* (March 9, 1974), pp. 179-80.

<sup>21</sup>Michael V. Gannon, "Before and After Modernism: The Intellectual Isolation of the American Priest," in *The Catholic Priest in the United States: Historical Investigations* (Collegeville: St. John's University Press, 1971).

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 352-3.

are close enough to those being asked by the best practitioners of eschatology today that his answers have a special right to be heard. If they are heard I submit they will in this area—whatever be the case with others—be found to be strikingly timely.

The Thomist positions on analogy and participation are neither self-evident nor a prepackaged answer to questions raised regarding eschatology today. Still they have more to offer than is realized presently. Without the external bulwark of church authority Thomas Aquinas has perhaps a chance to stand on his own two feet again. Roman Catholics have no right to claim his insight as theirs exclusively. But if they ignore his contribution, they will likely not do what they can to help in the task of making a more credible case for Christian future-talk.

#### REPLY TO THE CRITIQUES\*

Is there a Roman Catholic eschatology? The answer my paper intended to convey is affirmative. In reply to Professors Carl Braaten and Schuyler Brown I should like to recall the grounds for such a stance.

##### *Subject Matter and the Discipline*

I might have argued to a Roman Catholic eschatology on the basis of Roman Catholic doctrine concerning the coming kingdom of God. Had I done so, my reasoning would have run along these lines. If such doctrine provides a distinctive object for consideration, reflection, and critical investigation, then there is a corresponding specialization within the area of Christian eschatology as a result. I maintain that there is indeed such doctrine and that Roman Catholic eschatology is a term with an historical referent at least in this sense. Its future may be a matter of conjecture, but that is not the point in question at present. Let me be more explicit.

By *doctrine* in this very limited context I mean what on the basis of trying to hear God's word, the Roman Catholic Church believes in its worship; teaches in its catechetical endeavors; and confesses publicly—

\* [ED. NOTE. The text that follows has been added to the original paper at the request of the author. It is a reply made in the seminar discussion at the convention.]

especially when challenged. There are in this sense doctrines that many in the Protestant and Orthodox traditions recognize as at least arguably Christian and significantly different from positions taken by their own churches on the same matter. Chapter VII of *Lumen gentium* is an example; in the conciliar precedents it cites (e.g. Trent and Florence), as well as in its explicit content it goes notably beyond the New Testament symbols and interpretations thereof that are more or less common to Christians. The doctrines expressed in that chapter are a development over previous Roman Catholic positions on the "last things." Especially indicative of this fact is the communal perspective in which God's promises for the future are described as at work presently. The way those doctrines are stated gives, to be sure, no hint of the wide variety of understanding and at times even rejection they meet with from Roman Catholics today. But that is really beside the point here. The distinctive character of the doctrines in question is undeniable. I did not wish to burden this convention with maintaining at any length that there is distinctive Roman Catholic eschatological teaching that has been enunciated relatively recently and remains officially unretracted. The consequence is that there is a Roman Catholic eschatology if a discipline is distinct from others on the basis of its subject matter.

#### *Method and the Discipline*

But the object is one thing and the method of inquiry is another. Is there a recognizably Roman Catholic way of reflecting on, asking the meaning of, and checking the grounds for those doctrines regarding man's future under God? If so, then there is as well a distinctive Roman Catholic eschatology precisely as a process of inquiry. I maintain there is. Though by no means exclusively nor by any means most effectively, Roman Catholics have engaged in a kind of critical inquiry asking about the meaning and grounds for New Testament truth-claims. For far too long after the Reformation, their freedom to do so was restricted to the point that at times it effectively ceased to exist. But throughout that same history, in addition to other approaches espoused by Roman Catholics, one finds a set of recognizable characteristics in much of this confessional theology. There is a Roman Catholic eschatology because historically there has been a distinctive mode of inquiry into the meaning and grounds of Roman Catholic doctrines regarding man's

future. This of course calls at the very least for a word of explanation.

Commitment to distinctively Roman Catholic beliefs is in my view compatible with genuine criticism that analyzes the meaning and checks the grounds for doctrinal presentations of the New Testament symbols of God's promised future. What is more, I think simultaneous commitment to beliefs and a willingness to take with all its seriousness the doubts and denials those beliefs occasion is a contribution to the whole theological enterprise. The latter is better off because the *critical* efforts of those who hold to doctrines affect and are affected by similar efforts of others who are non-committed or even opposed to those same doctrines. I cited Thomas Aquinas as an example for Roman Catholic eschatologizing; not his philosophy or theological positions on the last things but his aims in discussing the latter. Let me express those aims again, for in addition to being his, they characterize a broader tradition of theological inquiry, which I think is rightly called Roman Catholic.

1) Dogmatic realism through a two-pronged inquiry:

Is there anything in the present to which the Christian can point when asked by others what he means by God's coming kingdom? For Roman Catholics that question has pointed to a task or a process of seeking to promote a positive exchange between faith and critical intelligence. To illustrate I chose Aquinas, who held that charity anticipates the vision of God that is to come. This resonates with Mt 25 and with Paul when the latter offers assurance that not even death can separate from God's love; points to the excellence of charity; and announces the adopted sonship to which the Spirit attests in the present. Professor Schuyler Brown has criticized my paper on the ground that the relation of the risen Lord to the present is dialectical. True enough, I reply, but that dialectical relation is not without positive traces in the present, traces pointing to the Lord's future and that of creatures. That those traces cannot be accurately and faithfully described as the future's hold on the present by way of participation in the here-and-now appears to be Brown's position though I have heard it only in oral form and have not seen his text as I have in the case of Professor Braaten. I regard that view as mistaken and ask for grounds for such a contention, which sounds after all neither new nor plausible.

2) Commitment to the oneness of truth as at last a possibility:

Roman Catholic theologizing since the Reformation has shown a remarkable commitment to asking how truth can be one and how the truth believed about the future relates to that known about the present. Our historical oversimplification of the task of answering these questions is itself a witness to this fact. In my paper I cited Thomas Aquinas as an earlier example of such commitment to the unity of truth. No criticism I have heard makes me regret that choice.

3) Expectancy of the recurring despite the new:

Roman Catholic theologizing has been and still is characterized by a twofold conviction: certain types of questioning recur; so do certain approaches toward responding. If it has not always and readily welcomed changes in man's conceptions of faith and reason, it has sooner or later reconciled itself to this phenomenon when it occurred and then often gone on to say the whole thing should have been expected. But Catholic theology is also confident that whatever the changes, certain kinds of challenge will continue to arise from Christian beliefs (and their truth-claims), while certain kinds of questioning will recur in man's native intelligence. Despite Professor Braaten's warning, I do not think it is ready to concede that Dilthey changed all this; nor am I.

A characteristic of Catholic theological history is its anticipation that certain types of thinking about meaning and fact will recur. However well or poorly one may think it succeeded in the undertaking, Catholic theology has aimed at trying to prevent the tyranny of either the faith challenge or the critical questioning of faith by reason.

Here again I introduced Aquinas as an example. But I at least thought I pointed out his limitations by referring to his lack of historical criticism of the New Testament and to his reading *olam* and *aion* through *saeculum*. I am surprised that Professor Braaten failed to grasp the implication. Thomas encountered the Old Testament usage of such concepts through a Latin translation, and for their meaning he had recourse to Aristotle! In a word he simply did not understand the relation between believing faith and critical reflection in terms of historical consciousness. One is obliged to do so after Dilthey. But the kind of expectancy Aquinas led others to have regarding theologizing

looks for recurring types of questioning regarding the meaning and factual basis of faith's truth claims; a questioning in other words that gives to and receives from hopeful beliefs. This has been a characteristic of Roman Catholics who did eschatology even if of others as well.

In answer to Professor Braaten's question,<sup>24</sup> by *reason* I mean recurring, interrelated acts of wonder; experience of perplexity; search for its meaning; discovery of possible meaning; position-taking with regard to various possible meanings; consistency-seeking; and choice when all of these rest on grounds grasped and recognized as convincing or plausible in their own right.

By *faith* I mean a commitment of the whole man involving expressions (beliefs), which rest on grounds that cannot be convincingly, compellingly, and fully elucidated or demonstrated.

I think the interplay of both is found in good Christian theologizing. Furthermore in a day that recognizes the values of ethnic consciousness once again, it may not be amiss to do the same with regard to confessional consciousness. I think there is a set of attitudes toward both faith and reason that has for a long time been characteristic of a particular way of Christian theologizing—a way closely enough connected with the historical efforts of Roman Catholics to justify one's speaking of an eschatology stemming in a peculiar way from that tradition, which is my own as well.

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<sup>24</sup>Professor Braaten stated while reading his paper that I failed to refer to any of the relevant essays of Wolfhart Pannenberg in *Basic Questions in Theology*, vols. 1 and 2. In the discussion period he admitted that this was a mistake on his part. I had indeed done so in footnote 15, which is printed above as he saw it in the original draft. With regard to his contention that I underestimated the contribution made by Roman Catholics to bringing out the importance of hope for thinking, I refer to my footnote 12. I regard my two published dissertations referred to there as containing in text and bibliography the grounds for my assessment of the superiority of Protestant efforts in this line. He refers to the work of Ch.-A. Bernard published in 1961. So did I in a dissertation I published in 1964. I did so again by referring to the latter in the note alluded to above.