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## Modernity and the Question of Hope: Some Perspectives through Thomas Aquinas

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**Abstract:** I dwell on the question of hope qua a critique of modernity and theology's role in this, arguing that authentic hope cannot but include a theological horizon that is necessary for a humane and liberative social imaginary. Two insights are drawn from such: a critique of modernity is not exhausted by a historicist discourse, and an alternative reading of Aquinas' theology of hope may be developed via a discussion of the crisis of critical theory. I forward my argument in three parts: 1) I rehearse an account of the congeniality between modernity and religion developed by Charles Taylor; 2) I discuss the distinction between Taylor's perspective and the historicist reading of modernity; and 3) I try to reconstruct Aquinas' theology of hope within the framework of its reflexive unity with the two other theological virtues, faith, and charity. I use the three virtues' grounding in grace's radicality to counter the dominant historicist bias in interpreting both the question of hope and modernity. The whole discussion promises to be an alternative reading of modernity and Aquinas' theology of hope, guided by the question: *What different account of modernity and hope can be drawn from a re-reading of Thomas Aquinas' theology?*

**Keywords:** hope, Aquinas, theology, critical theory

### Introduction

In the standard Thomist literature, hope is regarded as a theological virtue. The term *theological* has a strange gravitas to it. For some, specifically, the believers, it inspires a sense of awe and reverence; for others, it only suggests something ethereal, that is beyond terrestrial and therefore, as they say, irrelevant. And yet, ironically, because precisely it is a theological virtue that, per Aquinas, hope is well attuned to the materiality of our human experience. In his definition of hope, Aquinas speaks both of "difficulty" and

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“possibility.”<sup>1</sup> Our fragile and fallible nature requires it. A theological virtue like hope is a necessary stimulus for us to transcend ourselves and to strive for a purpose larger than our egocentric horizon.<sup>2</sup> It is a virtue because it disposes us towards ethical maturity; it is theological because it elevates our limited human capacities. Critics frown at Aquinas’ tact of calling this elevation of human nature *theological*. The use of the term makes it appear as if one can become more than human, a prospect which, besides being superfluous, is also farcical. Aquinas however, does not think of human flourishing in this manner; he never considers one can be more human than she should be. For Aquinas, human flourishing simply involves becoming fully human by attaining what one is yearning for.<sup>3</sup> He calls this human completion, *beatitudo* or *beatific vision*, his version of *eudaemonia* inspired by his reading of Aristotle, St. Paul, and St. Augustine.<sup>4</sup> Becoming fully human, for Aquinas, is a theological experience, but it is not transgressive. He does not think of humanity and divinity as two unrelated principles, with each trying to outdo the other. As he sees it, there is in every human person a trace of God, and one consummates her being human when, in various episodes of her mortal struggles, she gets to see the unfolding of that hidden divinity, vaguely in the beginning until such time that she beholds it face to face.<sup>5</sup> Towards this end, a human person requires hope.

This account of human flourishing, however, is not peculiar to Thomas Aquinas alone. Various wisdom and religious traditions—Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, among others—abound with the same testimony. This only goes to show that Aquinas is in good company when he suggests that the theological mooring of becoming human cannot be disregarded. I will develop this theme further in the first part where I will rehearse Charles Taylor’s account of the continuity between religion and modernity. While Taylor does not explicitly take up the question of hope, I will use his theologically suggestive injunction as an opening to explore the place of hope in imagining the future of humanity.

It is one thing however to speak of hope within a religious frame and another to employ it as a motif of socio-political critique. Conventional opinion has it that one can only do such via an account of hope developed within a historicist framework. The influence of this historicist bias is such that when one speaks of human destiny in its modern sense, the prospects

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Bros. edition, 1947), IIaIIae 17.1 Reply, <<https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/summa/>>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, IIaIIae, 17.6 Reply to Obj. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, IaIIae 1.6 Reply.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Supplement, 92.1 Reply.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.2 Reply.

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seem to be confined only either to an expectation of triumph or anticipation of defeat. The former is represented by optimism; the latter, by pessimism. Both optimism and pessimism are dominant worldviews and each in its own ways has the potency to undermine one's understanding and practice of hope. In the second part, hence, I will try to trace the contours of optimism and pessimism as I chart their common lineage to the historicist hermeneutic of modernity. This is an important step towards the recovery of a notion of hope capable of resisting and deviating from historicism's reductive proclivity.

This kind of hope, as I would suggest in the third part, can be gleaned from a re-reading of the theology of Thomas Aquinas. As indicated in my title, this paper contains perspectives on modernity and the question of hope, not *from* but *through* Aquinas. The third part, in other words, will showcase not so much the classical rendition of Aquinas's teachings on hope but a reconstructive appropriation of his thought. Such an attempt will highlight what I describe as the reflexive character of Aquinas's reflections on hope. Understanding the reflexive element of Aquinas's thought is crucial as it is necessary for making sense of the liberative and humanistic potency of hope's theological groundwork. The reconstructive approach is also important in bringing Aquinas to some degree of proximity to the contemporary critique of historicism.

Ultimately, the goal of this paper is to convey a theoretical proposal that can moderate the current historicist thinking on modernity and its interplay with our sense of the divine in the context of our shared disenchantment. An important aspect of this attempt is the appeal not so much to restore enchantment wholesale but to re-ignite the thought that modernity might have not outgrown enchantment after all. Hope in this scheme may serve as an invitation to remember what was rather than foresee the things yet to come. If only for this, I would say, Aquinas's theology of hope would always have a place in the vision of an alternative modern social imaginary.

### **On The Continuity Between Religion and Modernity**

"Catholic" and "modernity" are terms that, historically and culturally, are segregated by antagonism on various fronts. The execution of Giordano Bruno, the condemnation of Galileo, and the publication of the Index of Prohibited Books continue to remind us of the chilling consequences of this fierce animosity between the two. Pius X, in his encyclical *Pascendi Dominici*, underscored the insurmountable gap that separated the two in no uncertain terms. The enmity of the Catholic Church towards modernity did not, of course, go unrequited. Intellectuals like the French philosophes Denis

Diderot and Voltaire were among those leading the charge against the church and religion. Both philosophers exulted science and naturalist thinking while others, like David Hume, deplored ecclesiastical authority for amassing political power and ruining Europe by sowing the seeds of superstitious belief. Closer to home, we can recall the repercussions of this anti-modernist campaign by the Catholic Church in the persecution suffered by Rizal and his fellow ilustrados at the Propaganda Movement. Their espousal of ideas and practices identified with modernity led to their vilification as enemies both of the church and the state; on that account, they suffered torture, destitution, deportation, and in Rizal's case, martyrdom. This complicity between Rizal and modernity would haunt him long after his death leading to a large-scale ban of his novels, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, in Philippine Catholic schools as late as the 1950s.

We often hear this version of the story. Charles Taylor, however, offers a different account contained in a lecture he delivered on the occasion of his receipt of the Marianist Award from the University of Dayton in 1996.<sup>6</sup> The said lecture was entitled *A Catholic Modernity?* The notion of Catholic modernity, as Taylor himself explained, had nothing to do with making modernity Catholic or Catholicism itself modern. It is a term he used to underscore the challenge for an honest self-criticism among Catholics against the background of our changing moral and cultural landscapes. The whole aim of this self-criticism, according to him, is "... to see what it means to be a Christian here, to find our authentic voice in the eventual Catholic chorus ...."<sup>7</sup> An important aspect of this Catholic self-understanding is the acknowledgement of the context which sets the condition for this task. Taylor alludes to this context in his hermeneutic proposal, which takes Catholicism and modernity not as divergent strands but as overlapping episodes of the same modern cultural evolution. Catholicism and modernity need not be seen hence as mutually canceling each other. A Catholic believer, in other words, should contend with modernity as keenly as she would examine her religious identity if she must come to terms with the demands of her faith today. This Catholic self-criticism acquires an even greater urgency at the frontier of the so-called "ordinary life."<sup>8</sup>

The phenomenon of "ordinary life" described by Taylor refers to the modern lifeworld inhabited by the average folks who view and practice

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<sup>6</sup> Per tradition, the Marianist Award is given by The Society of Mary or the Marianists (the French congregation behind the founding of University of Dayton) to a Catholic public intellectual who has shown remarkable achievement in demonstrating the constructive interface between religious faith and scholarly practice.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 15.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 234-302.

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religion as a core feature of their day-to-day commerce. It is generally agreed that modernity is responsible for elevating the common station of the everyday person that was once considered second-rate compared to the contemplative life of priests and monks inside the monasteries and convents. Through the efforts of Reformist leaders like Luther and Calvin, it became possible for a baker or a shop owner to imagine that he too could live a blessed life without donning a religious habit and locking himself up inside the cloister. The privileging of contemplative life dates back to ancient Greece, specifically to the tradition propagated by Plato and Aristotle. In such tradition, philosophy was hailed as a contemplative activity in relation to which all other pursuits were deemed inferior. The person who proves himself capable of this contemplation was held in the highest esteem and was recognized as an exemplar like Aristotle's *megalopsychos* or Plato's Philosopher-King. The chasm between contemplation and ordinary life, however, was challenged, first by the Hellenistic schools and then later by an outlier religion to be known later as Christianity. Hellenistic thought drew a large following from the populace just as Christianity became the religion of the multitude. It is true that during the medieval period, something of this original Christian charisma was sidelined with the increase of Catholic institutional power. But even during the Catholic Church's heyday, there have not been inadequate attempts to bring religion closer to the realm of the ordinary. The Dominicans tried to bring contemplation outside the monasteries, while the Franciscans made great strides preaching to the unchurched. Ahead of them, there were also the Benedictines who baptized manual labor as a form of spiritual exercise. We also cannot discount the witnessing of heroines like St. Catherine of Siena, who mastered the ordinary as a religious without a convent, and St. Therese of Lisieux, who gave the ordinary an extra-ordinary twist within the convent's walls. Modernity did indeed transform the way we value ordinary life but to say it was its own doing may be giving it undue credit. The ordinary life did flourish with the advent of Protestant modernity because the conditions that enabled it had been set and prepared by Catholic culture.<sup>9</sup> As shown above, the ordinary was as much a part of the Catholic religiosity from its early origins among the early Christians down to the migration of Christianity to countries like the Philippines. This is the same flavor of ordinariness that permeates the contemplative thought of the philosopher-mystic Simone Weil and the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. Georges Bernanos' classic novel, *The Diary of a Country Priest*, is also a subtle but very powerful account of how grace could find a place in the mundane.

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<sup>9</sup> Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity*, 17-19. See *Ibid.*, 268.

By conceiving the boundaries between Catholicism and modernity as overlapping, Taylor subtly managed to repair the disjunctive perspective that commonly kept the two apart. This contiguity makes it now possible for one to consider a modern social imaginary without abandoning its theological or religious roots. As Taylor puts it: “Modernity is secular, not in the frequent, rather loose sense of the word, where it designates the absence of religion, but rather in the fact that religion occupies a different place, compatible with the sense that all social action takes place in profane time.”<sup>10</sup> Despite its conciliatory tone, the foregoing statement should not be taken as saying that the tension between Catholicism and modernity has been overcome; on the contrary, precisely because religion and modernity are sharing borders, Taylor is suggesting the need for an approach that can take into account their complex relationship. As will be seen, my argument in this paper is dependent on the careful negotiation of this complexity given modernity’s pronounced inhospitality to a theologically grounded hope. In the next segment, I shall turn to the discussion of hope as a question that is at once urgent yet difficult against the backdrop provided by modernity. I shall also try to examine the ineliminable place of theology in this consideration. This process should eventually pave the way for a return route to Aquinas as a reprieve to modernity’s problematic valuation of hope.

### **Beyond Optimism and Pessimism**

There is actually nothing new nor staggering with the view that modernity has not outlived theology or religion. Taylor definitely is not the first to recognize and theorize about it. Before him, one can find the same line of thinking in the likes of Spinoza, Hobbes, Hegel, and much later, Weber. Unlike these theorists, however, Taylor does not consider religion in modernity as a mere historical outcome but the very phenomenon which opens up or transfigures history itself. Something of this can be gleaned from his other voluminous work, *A Secular Age*, where he alludes to the contrast between the closed and open frames of reading modernity; the closed reading is represented by the so-called death of God; the open reading, however, sees in modernity an occasion for new ways of meeting God in its alleged absence.<sup>11</sup>

The closed frame of reading modernity is a variant of a perspective that draws from historicism. As critics, like Popper and Parsons, see it, historicism conditions us to think that human destiny is largely shaped by

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 194.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 551-556.

history, not to mention its ascent or descent towards some fixed end.<sup>12</sup> The optimists see the ascent in the possibility of global progress; the pessimists, on the other hand, find in history's unfolding nothing but moral and cultural decadence. Billionaires like Elon Musk and Bill Gates are optimists; they believe that technology and financial capital can be put at the disposal of human ends towards global prosperity. The subtle inclusion of human development in the overall scheme of profit-making is a marked improvement of capitalism, hence the ironic allusion to *capitalism with a heart* or, as others say, *a human face*. Optimists look at this bright prospect as progressively linear, and they find no reason to delay or derail this horizontal advance. This optimism is shared by theorists like Max Weber, who finds in capitalism a fitting environment that allowed religion to endure and prosper within modernity. Weber's historicist reading of modernity sees congruence rather than a divide between belief in God and making money.<sup>13</sup> In the political sphere, this transference between modernity and religion, under the same auspices of historicism, finds its clearest articulation in the political theology espoused by Carl Schmitt. Schmitt drew from the insights of early modern theorists like Spinoza, Hobbes, and Hegel in formulating a notion of politics anchored on a secularized theology, that is, on the ontology of political power deemed as pervasive and as dominant as theology once was.<sup>14</sup> Today, the impact of Schmitt's political theory may be seen in the optimism exhibited by what I would call *political messianism*, which characterizes the contemporary populist and authoritarian regimes. Modern democracy itself has had the unfortunate fate of being reduced to a theatre of optimism where politics is often performed as a simulated drama of salvation history. In a democratic electoral contest, for example, candidates often project themselves as the messiah whose time has come; their pronouncements are delivered as prophetic intimations of the coming of the kingdom or the conquest of the promised land. In most cases, aspirants who deliver this message with the most intense optimism eventually end up victorious.

Religion and modernity remain conjoined even in the pessimistic tenor of the writings of other thinkers like Sigmund Freud. For Freud, modernity is inevitable, but he finds nothing celebratory with the dislocation that it engenders. Disorders are very much in keeping with the character of modernity. Modernity is transformative, but, as Freud observed, it also has

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<sup>12</sup> See Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), 71-76; Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action: A Study in Social Theory with Special Reference to a Group of Recent European Writers* (New York: The Free Press, 1949), 478-479.

<sup>13</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. by Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2005), 102-125.

<sup>14</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. by George Schwab (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 49-52.

its way of generating its own discontents. He attributes this duplicitous character of modernity to the inability of the modern person to release herself from the lure of transcendence or divinity. In the words of Freud:

Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God ....  
 Future ages will bring with them new and probably  
 unimaginably great advances in this field of civilization  
 and will increase man's likeness to God still more ... we  
 will not forget that present-day man does not feel happy  
 in his Godlike character.<sup>15</sup>

Not only does Freud see conjunction between modernity and religion, but he also detects a link between religion and existential pathology. In contrast, a thinker like Etienne Gilson, himself a Thomist scholar, looks at this deified humanism not so much as a result but the actual cause of the problem, which stems from what he calls the "Western creed."<sup>16</sup> He sees this tragic slip of anthropology to anthropolatry as a by-product of the cultural climate in the West, which bred the fantasy of the humanistic alpha and omega.

Exponents of critical theory are also cognizant of the modernity-religion intersection and are openly adversarial to both. While the rejection of religion is not explicitly included among the so-called normative assumptions of critical theory echoed by Paolo Bolaños from Max Horkheimer,<sup>17</sup> critical theorists themselves have not really kept a secret their antithetical stance towards institutional religion, specifically Christianity, and its subalterns like metaphysics, human nature, revelation, and providence. Marcuse did take issue with Christianity in *Eros and Civilization* in the same fashion he adopted from Freud.<sup>18</sup> Adorno embedded his critique of Christianity in his dismissal of metaphysics, given their common fractured history. In Adorno's view, the rupture of these fractures has made it imperative for metaphysics to give way to contingency and for religion to embrace its own fragility. In an emphatic remark, Adorno wrote: "No recollection of transcendence is possible any more, save by way of perdition; eternity appears, not as such, but diffracted

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<sup>15</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. by James Strachey <<https://www.stephenhicks.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FreudS-CIVILIZATION-AND-ITS-DISCONTENTS-text-final.pdf>>

<sup>16</sup> Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), 272.

<sup>17</sup> Paolo A. Bolaños, "What is Critical Theory? Max Horkheimer and the Makings of the Frankfurt School Tradition," in *Mabini Review*, 2, no. 1 (2013), 6.

<sup>18</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 69-73.



through the most perishable.”<sup>19</sup> This statement is important because it suggests a sensitivity on the part of critical theory towards some form of theology or religion but in a guise opposed to what it is reacting against. Ernst Bloch refers to this as “a religion of human Utopia, the Utopia of religion’s non-illusory elements.”<sup>20</sup> This brand of atheological discourse has been invariably described as *negative, semblance, or cipher* theology.<sup>21</sup> In a recent work, Bolaños prefers the term *inverse theology* to explain the discursive tact employed by Adorno in subverting the dominant religious thought via the latter’s own version of a “negation of negation.”<sup>22</sup> Through their different preferred strategies, Marcuse, Adorno, and Bloch succeeded in showing the viability of turning the established theological discourse and its truth claims on its head. Despite these modest gains, however, it is hard to tell how far critical theory has gone in addressing its complicity with historicism and, ultimately, the question of hope. Benjamin’s religiously inspired theorizing did provide some stimuli for re-thinking history but not to the extent of re-thinking historicism itself.<sup>23</sup> Hardly also did Bloch’s *The Principle of Hope*, despite its literary acclaim, provide any relief to this quandary. Bloch’s narrative flourish, it appears, did more in turning away potential advocates of a Marxist utopia rather than winning them. As Eagleton wrote in a comment on Bloch’s prose: “If his style prefigures utopia in its imaginative brio, it also does so in its obscurity.”<sup>24</sup> Erich Fromm’s *The Revolution of Hope* did not do much help either in repairing critical theory’s entanglement with historicism and its reticence about hope.<sup>25</sup> One might infer, as Nicholas Smith did, that hope’s close association with religion has much to contribute to this deep discursive silence.<sup>26</sup>

It is this subdued treatment of hope and the devaluation of its religious origins which supply the motivation for this paper. What makes the

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<sup>19</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 2004), 360.

<sup>20</sup> Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, trans. by J.T. Swann (London: Verso, 2009), 69.

<sup>21</sup> Rudolf J. Siebert, “Toward a Dialectical Sociology of Religion: A Critique of Positivism and Clerico-Fascism” in Warren S. Goldstein (ed.), *Marx, Critical Theory, and Religion: A Critique of Rational Choice* (Boston: Brill, 2006), 62.

<sup>22</sup> Paolo A. Bolaños, *Nietzsche and Adorno on Philosophical Praxis, Language, and Reconciliation: Towards an Ethics of Thinking* (London: Lexington Books, 2020), 110.

<sup>23</sup> Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, <[https://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/books/Concept\\_History\\_Benjamin.pdf](https://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/books/Concept_History_Benjamin.pdf)>.

<sup>24</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Hope Without Optimism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 91; see also Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope, Volume II*, trans. by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 619-624.

<sup>25</sup> Nicholas S. Smith, “Hope and Critical Theory,” *Critical Horizons*, 6, no. 1 (2005), 46; see also Erich Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope: Towards a Humanized Technology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 6-24.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, “Hope and Critical Theory,” 48.

reckoning of hope difficult within modernity is the dominant sway of historicism such that any discourse, be it for or against modernity, usually obtains its validation from the historicist framework. I tried to suggest how this historicist bias plays out in the tenuous relationship between modernity and religion as seen by the theorists surveyed. The historicist thinks human destiny can only be portrayed either as an uphill climb to the heights of progress or a free fall to the depths of catastrophe. I maintain that hope can be located in neither. There should be a way through which one can think of hope beyond the polarity of a rainbow-colored utopia and the dark specter of despair. Either of these persuasions draws from the historicist fiat, which takes history as the final and only arbiter of human destiny. The linear complexion of this perspective, however, does more to conceal rather than reveal the intricacies of our human situation. For as long as the historicist purview prevails, the champion and the critic of modernity will be both incapacitated by self-deception in the face of the question of hope. The former will be misled by its wishful certainty; the latter, by its presumed impossibility. One needs then to break this historicist impasse if the possibility of hope must be confronted squarely. In other words, to be emancipatory, hope must be freed from the restrictive hermeneutic impositions of historicism. This is what I intend to do in the next segment, where I shall try to turn to theology, specifically, the Thomist kind, to overcome this roadblock and come to terms with the question of hope.

### **The Question of Hope: A Response Through Thomas Aquinas**

Earlier in this paper, I put forward a claim gleaned from Charles Taylor that a hermeneutic of modernity cannot but be inclusive of a theological perspective. Given the undeveloped nuance of such a claim, I mentioned in the preceding that I shall attempt to flesh out Taylor's suggestion via a reconstructive reading of Aquinas' theology of hope. I began pursuing this task in the foregoing paragraphs by problematizing hope within the context of the interplay between optimism and pessimism and suggested that these two attitudes represent the extremes of what hope is not. Both optimism and pessimism are engendered by modernity, whose dominant reading is shaped by historicism. I have also proposed that the way out of the reductive prospects of optimism and pessimism is to contest, not each of them separately, but historicism itself. Any discourse on modernity, as long as it is hinged on the linear trajectory of historicism, will always involve some question-begging in the face of the projected end of history. Hence, though their content and manifestation may be drastically contrasted, both optimism and pessimism are actually one and the same outcome of the same eschatological view. It is this horizontal and determinist perspective of

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historicism that must be disrupted to accommodate a sense of hope that is ethically relevant and theologically grounded. The general direction of my prospective Aquinas-mediated response to the question of hope is anchored on this view.

Readers at this point may ask what exactly is this response *through* Aquinas constituted of? There are those who probably expect to read in my discussion a string of textual citations of Aquinas to consolidate my arguments for hope. I apologize to them if they realize later that my paper is rather short of their expectations. The exegetical strategy of reading Aquinas, I admit, has its own uses in traditional Thomist scholarship<sup>27</sup>, but, despite its merit, I suppose it is not one that suits my purpose and the problem I wish to sort out. And so, rather than merely invoking the authority of the Thomistic canon, I will try to demonstrate instead an alternative approach to Aquinas' oeuvre without losing sight of his fundamental theological commitment. In a nutshell, this project aims at opening up a hermeneutic vista that could help the reader appreciate Aquinas' works with fresh eyes. There really is nothing exceptional with this alternative interpretive undertaking other than the attempt to enlarge the context in which one may read Aquinas' corpus. And by enlargement, I mean the introduction of themes or issues that are not traditionally identified with Thomistic scholarship like this response to the question of hope via a tangential critique of modernity. This "unThomistic" mode of engaging Aquinas is unfamiliar, but it is not necessarily novel. Aquinas himself showed, and quite successfully that taking on the masters like Aristotle or St. Augustine may sometimes require reading them against the grain. Orthodoxy, so it seems, is not necessarily dependent on a singular, exclusive channel.<sup>28</sup> We can read in his numerous *disputatio*, *quodlibetales*, *opuscula* not to mention his Biblical and Aristotelian commentaries, the multiple cultural and intellectual geographies that Aquinas traversed to trace and flag new routes in aid of his truth-seeking. The task of the Thomist today hence is to extend this pursuit towards the same direction in which his writings are only one of the pathways. From this vantage point, one can sense the complexion of the Thomist response I wish to articulate, inspired to a certain degree by such contemporary Thomists like Norris Clarke with his proposed creative retrieval of Aquinas,<sup>29</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre through his

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<sup>27</sup> See Dominic F. Doyle, *The Promise of Christian Humanism: Thomas Aquinas on Hope* (USA: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> In the Commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Aquinas wrote to paraphrase the Greek philosopher: "...we must respect both parties, namely, those whose opinion we follow, and those whose opinion we reject. For both have diligently sought the truth and have aided us in this matter." See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Metaphysics*, trans. by John P. Rowan (Chicago, 1961) <<https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/Metaphysics.htm>>.

<sup>29</sup> W. Norris Clarke, SJ, *Creative Retrieval of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Essays in Thomistic Philosophy, New and Old* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 4-5.

suggestion of a Thomistic scholarship via unThomistic means<sup>30</sup> and Herbert McCabe's self-styled out-of-the-box Thomism.<sup>31</sup> Clarke, MacIntyre, and McCabe are aware that Aquinas himself was not a Thomist and that he was a theologian who dedicated his entire life to the pursuit, not of Thomism, but of truth itself.<sup>32</sup>

My theoretical exploration on hope then shall proceed informed largely by Aquinas' theological vision. It goes without saying that, for Aquinas, any talk of hope is inherently theological. This means that a discourse on hope involves a reference to the fulfillment of the deepest human longing, which, for Aquinas, as it was for St. Augustine, is what the word God is all about.<sup>33</sup> It would be inaccurate, then, to think of "theology" or "theological" as something that relates only to the divine as Aristotle conceived it.<sup>34</sup> The distinction made by Aquinas between *natural theology* attributed to Aristotle and *revealed theology* to which he was committed spells the difference between *the God of philosophers*, the distant and impersonal deity, and *the God of believers* who reveals itself in an act of love.<sup>35</sup> In the Christian tradition, this self-communication of God is likewise a human affair since the recipient of revelation is herself a human person. For Aquinas, Theology is a discourse that brings both God and the human person into an interface.<sup>36</sup> In this scheme, the self-understanding of the human person has undoubtedly a theological element. What this suggests is that the self-knowledge bannered by both Socrates and Plato as key to living well is not attained by the human person directly and autonomously; she does this via a mirror which reflects to her an image of who she is. In Aquinas' framework, such a mirror is God. As one who encapsulates the best possibility for the human person, God is also the disclosure of who we are and what we can be.<sup>37</sup> On this score, a Cartesian who presumes that self-knowledge can be intuited on one's own is either deceived by hubris or trapped in a dreamy

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<sup>30</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *First Principles, Final Ends and Contemporary Philosophic Issues* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 4-5.

<sup>31</sup> Franco Manni, *Herbert McCabe: Recollecting a Fragmented Legacy* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2020), 36.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, ed. by Joseph Kenny, O.P., trans. by Anton C. Pegis, James F. Anderson, Vernon J. Bourke, and Charles J. O'Neil (New York: Hanover House, 1955-57), Book 1, Chapter 1, Par. 2, <<https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/ContraGentiles.htm>>.

<sup>33</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae 17.2 Reply.

<sup>34</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. by Richard Hope (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), Book Epsilon, 1026a10-30.

<sup>35</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I 20.1 Reply.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Aquinas, introduction to *Commentary on Boethius' On Trinity*, trans. by Rose E. Brennan, S.H.N. and Armand Mauer (1946-1953), <<https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/BoethiusDeTr.htm>>.

<sup>37</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.44.4, Reply to Obj. 3

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state. Aquinas, in contrast, would say that recognition of one's existence is never achieved through self-validation. Awareness of one's existence is never unilaterally personal; it's something that Aquinas would qualify as analogous. To look at existence as analogous is to see it in relational terms.<sup>38</sup> To say it differently, becoming a human person is not a stand-alone experience; it's something one encounters within the context of a meaningful relation. Humanity hence coincides with relationality. Human connection is a constant feature of any person's story from birth to childhood to maturity down to the terminal stage of life. And as far as Aquinas is concerned, this relationality of the human person takes its origin from her union with the very cause of her existence, whom, for lack of a better term, Aquinas prefers to call God.<sup>39</sup>

It is fair to say then that theology, as Aquinas would have it, is both sacred and human. It is sacred because it invites us to "know" God; it is human because it inspires us to pursue such an aim in the very act of knowing ourselves. Aquinas' emphasis on the latter part is unmistakable, as evidenced by the space, rigor, and depth he devoted to the question of becoming human in the two segments of the Second Part of *Summa Theologiae*, undoubtedly its longest section. Those who read (or misread) Aquinas' theology as a discourse removed from the pathos of human becoming are also those who miss the reflexive element of his theological thinking. The charge, then, that the theological and the terrestrial in Aquinas' mind are mutually exclusive is faulty as it is naïve. His elaborate discourse on what it takes to be a human person in the Second Part of *Summa Theologiae* bears witness against this claim. Among other questions, it is in this lengthy Second Part of *Summa* that one can find Aquinas' discussion of hope.

Aquinas takes up the question of hope in two separate places at the Second Part of *Summa*. In the first part of the Second Part, hope figures in his discussion of habits;<sup>40</sup> in the second part of the Second Part, he dwells on hope in a more detailed fashion alongside the other theological virtues, faith, and charity.<sup>41</sup> The discussion of hope as a theological virtue is important as it allows us to see the intricacies of Aquinas' experiment to bring to a closer dialogue the Greek and Christian traditions. The notion of virtue as something enacted by choice and determined by the mean is drawn by Aquinas from Aristotle via the latter's *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>42</sup> The tripod, however, of faith, hope and charity is an inheritance from St. Paul the Apostle,

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, I 13.5 Reply.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, I.13.8 Reply to Obj. 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, IaIIae 62. 1-4.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, IIaIIae 17-22.

<sup>42</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Book II, 1107a, 31.

specifically from his first letters to the Thessalonians<sup>43</sup> and Corinthians.<sup>44</sup> It would seem at first glance that marrying the two distant strangers is an impossible task. On the one hand, you have Aristotle, who deems virtue as a product of choice; on the other, there is Aquinas, who maintains that theological virtues are infused, that is, outside the realm of human choosing.<sup>45</sup> Added to this is another layer of difficulty from the fact that hope hardly figures in Aristotle's list of prescribed virtues. The closest parallel of hope in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is the idea of *wish*, which he nonetheless dismisses due to its weak link to rational decision making.<sup>46</sup> There seems then a reasonable ground to disqualify hope as a virtue, all the more as a theological virtue, when one examines it in purely Aristotelian terms. One should note, however, that Aquinas is not just rehearsing Aristotle's ethics in the Second Part of *Summa*; neither is he merely baptizing him, as others are wont to say. A number of things are happening in this important segment of Aquinas' magnum opus. Thus, unless one reckons with this bigger picture as well as the larger context of hope's connection with the other theological virtues, the arguments for hope as a virtue would seem to fail.

The Second Part of *Summa* may be considered Aquinas' counterpoint to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is, in fact, tempting to call it a Thomist *Nicomachean Ethics* except that, in the said segment, Aquinas was working on purposes that far exceeded Aristotle's own. And as it would turn out, the theologian who started as a mere commentator of "The Philosopher" became the author of an opus that, to a great measure, would go beyond Aristotle's work. If readers check on its structure and organization alone, they will see a longer and more detailed menu of virtues in the Second Part, a huge part of which are absent in the Aristotelian corpus. Besides faith and charity, they will also discover themes that are most unlikely Greek in origin like sin and grace as well as actions and virtues that Aristotle might cringe at finding like almsgiving, virginity, humility, including clemency and meekness. The Second Part of *Summa* also bears witness to Aquinas' attempt to render a more seamless continuity between ethics and politics incorporated in his own theological anthropology and his account of divine providence. Even with a cursory reading then, the evidence of Aquinas' intent to extend and expand *Nicomachean Ethics*, along with his subtle maneuver to moderate the latter's rationalist core, is hard to miss. As mentioned earlier, the dependence of

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<sup>43</sup> "We always give thanks to God for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly keeping in mind your work of faith and labor of love and perseverance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father..." 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, *NASB*.

<sup>44</sup> "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I also have been fully known. But now faith, hope, and love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love." 1 Corinthians 13:12-13, *NASB*.

<sup>45</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae 62.1 Reply.

<sup>46</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1111b-1112a.

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choice and the determination of the mean by practical reason is clearly pronounced in Aristotle's ethical treatise.<sup>47</sup> Aquinas sustains Aristotle on this score but is likewise cautious on granting reason too wide a leverage when it comes to the attainment of human flourishing. It should be remembered that for Aquinas, the movement towards happiness is not just a rational undertaking; it is also a commitment of faith and faith, he would tell us, belongs to the province of desire which finds its seat in the human will.<sup>48</sup> This very delicate supersession of reason by will is adopted by Aquinas from both St. Paul and St. Augustine for whom knowledge of God, the wellspring and aim of Christian *eudaemonia*, is gained not so much by *episteme* but by longing or yearning. For Aristotle, the good which defines human flourishing is best achieved through philosophic contemplation; for Aquinas, as it is for his predecessors, St. Paul<sup>49</sup> and St. Augustine,<sup>50</sup> we meet the good which alone can satisfy our most intense seeking via the surprising ways of revelation. Revelation is both a prompting or provocation or, in theological parlance, a call. The longing or yearning comes with one's affirmative response to this call via an act of faith. The associated term for faith is *credo*, which in its roots means, "to put one's heart."<sup>51</sup> It is probably in St. Anselm, specifically in his *Proslogion*, that one can find the most moving expression of this kind of faith. As Anselm wrote: "Let me look up at your light, whether from afar or from the depths. Teach me how to seek you, and show yourself to me when I seek. For I cannot seek you unless you teach me how, and I cannot find you unless you show yourself to me. Let me seek you in desiring you; let me desire you in seeking you. Let me find you in loving you; let me love you in finding you."<sup>52</sup> With *episteme*, as taught by Aristotle, the good is attained through knowing, which he restricts to reason; faith, on the other hand, is also a form of knowing, but unlike philosophic knowledge, it approaches its object through some degree of unknowing. Unknowing is the disruption of symmetry, or in medieval expression, adequation, between the knower and the thing known. Faith preserves the space between the two. A thinker and theologian like St. Anselm sees in that space a unison between faith and love. Unlike reason, faith does not find its consummation in capturing the form or seizing ideas in perfect clarity. The element of opacity or distance is never an obstacle when one knows by way of faith. As attested by anyone who has

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 1113a

<sup>48</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae 4.2; see also IIaIIae, 40.1, Reply and Reply to Obj. 1.

<sup>49</sup> See Acts 17:16-29

<sup>50</sup> See Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. 2019), Book XI, 2.4., 204.

<sup>51</sup> See Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. "credo" <<https://www.etymonline.com/word/credo>>.

<sup>52</sup> Anselm, *Basic Writings*, trans. by Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007), 81.

witnessed sundown or beheld the face of a newborn or received kindness from a stranger, what escapes the mind or overcomes language or resists rational demonstration is sometimes our only clue about that which we can only know in its utter unfamiliarity. The reflexive character of Aquinas' theology is unmistakable in the notion of faith he articulated. As he underscored: "... that which is proposed to be believed equally by all, is equally unknown by all ...."<sup>53</sup>

This character of reflexivity underlying Aquinas' understanding of faith is as well pronounced in his notion of hope. The important outcome of Aquinas' move to juxtapose faith and hope is the clarification of hope's groundwork in Aquinas' theology of desire. The phrase "theology of desire" does not figure in any of Aquinas' works, but what it suggests can be conveniently gathered from his discussion of hope both as an irascible passion and as a theological virtue.<sup>54</sup> From a larger perspective, one may say that hope, herewith proposed as Aquinas' theology of desire, complements suitably Gabriel Marcel's formulation of hope as "ontology of desire." Marcel does recognize the association of religion with hope, but his reactive portrait of it vis-a-vis despair tends to understate its motivating power.<sup>55</sup> Aquinas' edge over this account of hope, as previously pointed out, is his emphasis on hope as a theological virtue. Because it is theological, it partakes of the reflexive dimension of Aquinas' theological thinking; the same theological framework also gives it a teleological orientation that goes beyond the desire to overcome despair. And because it is a virtue, it falls within the larger framework of practices that govern the totality of human life. The element of practice in Aquinas' notion of hope shifts the emphasis from *acting against despair* to *acting for a purpose despite despair*. Hope as virtue aims at transforming a person to be hopeful, that is, at directing herself towards a good that is difficult but possible to attain.<sup>56</sup> It is such good that prompts hope and not despair, as suggested by Marcel. Aquinas is not minimizing the debilitating effect of despair, aware as he is of its potency to weigh down the human spirit. By choosing to re-locate the notion of hope from its contrariety to despair to the larger context of grace-inspired action, he succeeds in displacing the instrumental role of hope as a mere means of coping.<sup>57</sup> This is a point that needs underscoring for better appreciation of Aquinas' move to establish hope within the reflexive continuum, which links the human passions and the life of practice aided by grace.

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<sup>53</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIa 1.5 Reply.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, IIaIIae, 18.1 Reply.

<sup>55</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*, trans. by Emma Craufurd (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1951), 36.

<sup>56</sup> Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae, 17.1, Reply.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, IIaIIae, 17.2 Reply to Obj. 3.



Further demonstration of the reflexive nature of Aquinas's understanding of hope is also palpable in the ritual and narrative dimensions of the Christian life. The ritual aspect, experienced through liturgy and sacraments, and the narrative aspect, mediated through the study of and reflection on the Sacred Scriptures, highlight the reflexivity that accompanies not just the human-divine interaction but also the personal-communal encounter fostered by the said ritual and narrative practices. The ritual celebration of the sacraments affords the faithful an opportunity to memorialize the various episodes of the incarnation of grace as when a person is initiated to the Christian life (baptism), commissioned to discipleship (confirmation), joined by the community in worship and thanksgiving (Eucharist), sanctified in spousal love (matrimony), consecrated to pastoral ministry (holy orders), renewed (reconciliation) and spiritually healed (holy unction). On these occasions, the sacraments serve as channels of hope, being themselves mediators of grace. Through their distinct efficacy, the divine and the human are brought to a closer unison through an interface that likewise links the material and the spiritual, singular and the plural, the individual and the community in a unique, reflexive bond. The same reflexive character may also be obtained from the reading of the Sacred Scriptures, from where one can derive an idea of narrativity expressive of Aquinas's notion of hope. As the central narrative of the Christian life, the Bible has the natural (and supernatural) capacity to disclose a vista of human destiny on earth as it is in heaven. When a believer reads the Scriptures or listens to a reading of them, he comes in contact with a story that is her own but not hers alone. It is a tale of all her fellow pilgrims, from ages past, present, including future. This kind of reflexivity is possible for a text like the Sacred Scriptures, whose telling is very much a part of its constant creation and re-creation. No one listens to the Word of God, in other words, passively; the hearer becomes simultaneously a co-author of the very message addressed to her when she receives the seeds of faith sown through the very act of proclaiming the Word. Here lies the close connection between *kerygma* and *kenosis*, between preaching and moral change. The Biblical injunction that says faith comes through hearing can be useful when we use it in reference to hope. Hope also comes from hearing, that is, receiving the Word in its narrative embodiment. Something similar may be likened to a theory espoused by Paul Ricoeur, who considers the text as revelatory of becoming instantiated in the reader's imagination via the narrative hermeneutics.<sup>58</sup> The narrative dimension of hope I am here attributing to Aquinas may be comparable to some degree to Ricoeur's theory but shorn of the latter's hermeneutic immediacy. Because when read, unlike

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<sup>58</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 104.

other texts, what the Sacred Scriptures disclose to a reader or listener is not yet becoming, but simply another narrative—the story of Ruth, the tale of Job, the parable of the good Samaritan, the account of Mary’s finding of the empty tomb or perhaps only my own personal narrative but seen in a new light, that is, in the light of the Word that speaks to me and prompts me to turn to a different horizon. Only when I recognize and receive the Word in the encounter of these narratives can I perhaps begin to imagine the possibility of becoming it offers. Hope is about that possibility.

This brings me to the last aspect of my exploration of a theological response to the question of hope via Aquinas, that is, hope’s relation to charity. Hope, for Aquinas, provides a hermeneutic horizon for human existence in the same manner that time does for Heidegger. This hermeneutic function of hope, however, does not emanate solely from hope but its reflexive link with another theological virtue, the virtue of charity. As a theological virtue, it belongs to hope to inspire us towards the good to which we have a natural proclivity. Such good, which is also our end, is offered in charity. The transference between hope and charity can perhaps be best illustrated by the encounter between Jesus and the alleged adulterous woman narrated in the Gospel of John.<sup>59</sup> As recounted by the Gospel, a woman accused of adultery was brought to Jesus for his judgment. Her accusers wanted to hear from Jesus what to do with her, aware as they were of his reputation as a moral teacher. It was a dilemma on the part of Jesus, who was caught between upholding the Jewish law at the expense of the woman’s life and saving the woman at the risk of being seen as unfaithful to the Mosaic tradition. The crowd wanted to stone to death the woman as is fitting to the faults ascribed to her. In response, Jesus urged the angry mob, composed mostly of self-righteous male Jews, to cast the first stone if they thought anyone among them was sinless. The Gospel reported the silence that prevailed after Jesus finished speaking. At the sight of her accusers leaving the scene one by one, Jesus, says the Gospel, turned to the woman and asked her to go and sin no more. What one may find in this specific episode is indicative of the reflexivity between hope and charity. Jesus knew the sins of the woman but chose to see the person instead (charity). The woman felt herself forgiven and embraced the possibility of moral change (hope). Jesus did not doubt in his mind that the woman could find her way towards a better life (hope); his words were meant to open to her the path to self-reconciliation and, ultimately, finding grace (charity). As a hermeneutic horizon, hope does provide a genuine incentive for moral transformation but as shown in the Gospel story recalled earlier, hope needs to be accompanied by the radicality of charity so a person can find the courage to seek what is good. Time as a

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<sup>59</sup> See John 8:1-11.

hermeneutic horizon does not and cannot do this. As Heidegger himself stipulated, the only completion that discloses itself to the human person at the end of the temporal spectrum is death.<sup>60</sup> Time also activates self-understanding and discloses other constitutive elements of existence like care and anxiety, but within and outside time, the Dasein in Heidegger's world has nowhere to go. Temporality also heightens a person's awareness of the short timeline of human existence; one who knows she does not have enough time will try to make only the best choices and will ensure that every moment, every chapter of her temporal experience is worth the ride. Time, in other words, can either be a window or a blinder; it is a window when it shows the existential ground of human possibility; it is a blinder when it restricts the human possibility to the limited range of temporality.

In the discussion above, I suggested that historicizing human existence can yield either a phantom optimism or unwieldy pessimism. I also argued that none of these prospects could sustain the human person in her struggles against the pervasive meaninglessness bred by modernity. Hence, I wish to underscore, at this juncture, the need to recover the hermeneutic horizon drawn from hope animated by charity. The role of charity cannot be overstated. In the writings of Aquinas, as it is in St. Paul's and St. Augustine's, charity represents the anti-historical. What I mean by anti-historical is the force or the drive that breaks open the restrictions of time to reveal what is possible, not at the end of it as historicists suggest, but from within its fractured and restricted confines. Grace is this kind of anti-historical, the grace embodied by charity and dramatized by the testimony of Christ's Incarnation. Grace, as the anti-historical, does not deny time or history but only the presumption that human destiny is exclusively determined by either of them. It ruptures time to create a space where it is possible for the human person to see the possibility of an unexpected, unanticipated good. The Gospel story about the accused woman is a tale of such an encounter with grace. She received grace at the moment she thought she deserved less. She found a fresh start where it seemed there was nowhere else to go. The encounter between Jesus and the disgraced woman discloses the possibility of the *gift*, which Derrida himself thought was unthinkable.<sup>61</sup> Not only can the *gift* undo any kind of symmetry or reciprocity, it can likewise override the linearity of time. Because it is non-linear, the *gift* can leap from the past as in the experience of the disciples on their way to Emmaus; it can appear in the present as in the case of the Samaritan woman, or it can reach out from the future in the form of hope as the sinful yet forgiven woman can attest.

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<sup>60</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 2001), 276-277.

<sup>61</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Given Time. I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 7.

This disruptive, non-linear character of grace qualifies the relevance of theological discourse in the critique and understanding of modernity against the views dominated and configured by historicism. The sad outcome of this historicist fixation, as stated above, is the restriction of our choices to either a pollyannish portrait of the future or the fatalistic acceptance of defeat. In shaping my argument for hope, I tried to veer away from the historicist trap and relied instead on the cogency of Aquinas' theology to demonstrate how the perceived ahistoricity of his thought can in fact be an advantage to mitigate the predominant historicist reading of modernity and its pathology. In recent years, there have been a growing number of scholars who have embarked on this theological turn to engage historicism and explore new frontiers for critical engagement. Noted scholars like Badiou, Agamben, and Zizek, provoked in different ways by their reading of the antinomian theology of St. Paul, are prime examples of this theologically inclusive anti-historicism experiment.<sup>62</sup> Regardless of their creedal qualifications, they are convinced that the vital questions engendered by modernity cannot be left to the exclusive determination of a historicist discourse. The conversation, to date, remains open-ended; such is the kind of conversation we should indeed strive to foster when it comes to things that matter like justice, religion, humanity, modernity, including the question of hope.

## Conclusion

I started this paper with a borrowed claim from Charles Taylor that a critique of modernity cannot but include a theological horizon. Taylor himself did not provide a theological explanation to validate his insight hence the decision on my part to fill in a perceived lacuna in his reading of modernity. In my discussion, I tried to show that the dominant discourses on modernity are configured within the framework set by historicism. This historicist, linear perspective sets the ground for the two competing worldviews on the proverbial end of history, namely, optimism and pessimism. At first glance, it would appear as if the two are choices

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<sup>62</sup> Colby Dickinson, "What Christians Need No Longer Defend: The Political Stakes of Considering Antinomianism as Central to the Practice and History of Theology," in *Crisis and Critique*, 2, no. 1 (2015) <[https://ecommons.luc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1062&context=theology\\_facpubs](https://ecommons.luc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1062&context=theology_facpubs)>; Vassilios Paipais, "Already/Not Yet': St Paul's Eschatology and the Modern Critique of Historicism," in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 44, no. 9 (2018), <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453718769455>>; see also Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (California: Stanford University Press, 2001); Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (California: Stanford University Press, 2005); Slavoj Zizek et al., *Paul's New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (Michigan: Brazos Press, 2010).

alternative to each other. A closer look, however, would reveal their superficial contrariety as both are but mere outcomes jointly lending credence to the same historicist hermeneutic. In my view, neither optimism nor pessimism provides a condition conducive to the attainment of a humane and emancipatory social imaginary. Banking on the thin theological texture of Taylor's suggestion, I articulated a notion of hope drawn from the thought of Thomas Aquinas. My reading of Aquinas' theology of hope is framed within its unity with the two other theological virtues, namely, faith and charity and their shared rootedness on the radicality of grace. In my discussion, I hazard a contention that the grace's radicality is coincident with its being anti-historical. By describing grace as anti-historical, I emphasized the potency of grace to break free from the linearity of time and to rupture from within time itself the different possibilities of human becoming like receiving forgiveness, finding God, and regaining the distinct joy of being human. Time and again, we hear and read theories depicting modernity as a graveyard of God. Taylor finds the idea unwarranted and seeks to repair the flaw. Prodded by Taylor, I turn to Aquinas, partly, to extend the aforementioned stance and partly, to recapture an intellectual sensitivity which remains hospitable to the divine which, in the modern milieu, has been given up for dead. The curious thing is that the phenomenon of a dead God is neither a modern nor a secular making. St. Paul's canticle (Phil 2:6-11) tells us that the death of God is God's own way of appearing in history. The Pauline text suggests that the only way for the divine to fit in temporality is for God to cross himself out in the very act of his self-donation; his is an advent in his own vanishing, a presence surpassing the banality of vulgar visibility. The closest, though frail, analogy would be that of light which gives illumination as it expends itself. No, God is not the light but the expending that comes with it, the same way divine presence expends itself in its seeming absence as the soul agonizes in its own dark night. It could very well be that the death of God is the necessary silence that accompanies the utterance of the Word. With this thought, we can perhaps reckon hope not as a vision of the foreseeable but a memory of what we have been unknowingly missing.

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