

# *Doxophany: A Trinitarian Eschatological Vision*

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The purpose of this essay is to provide a theological vision about the ultimate meaning of creation and history. I use the word *vision* because of a conviction that all *vital* theology must be rooted in an inner spiritual perception of reality. I use the qualifying word *theological* because of an equal conviction that any legitimate Christian vision of reality must be mediated through an analysis of the form and content of divine revelation in Scripture. The ultimate meaning proposed will be in terms of the eschatological category of "Doxophany," which, as the word itself suggests, refers to the final, perfect revelation of the glory of God in the eschaton.<sup>1</sup>

In biblical usage the concept of "glory" is very rich. Here "glory" is especially understood in terms of the mystery of the inner trinitarian reality of the love of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The whole of creation, history, and consummation can be viewed as a movement proceeding from the infinite, eternal inner love of God as triune into a state of exhibition and manifestation of that hidden, inner reality in a new creation and a new humanity, through the Incarnation, atonement, and exaltation of Jesus Christ. My intention is to present in this theological vision a series of historical observations followed by a set of theses.

## I

### Historical Observations

Theology is man's effort at entering into the reality of God revealed in Jesus Christ and authoritatively witnessed to in holy Scripture. As such, there are infinite possibilities of development in the understanding and consciousness of the church. As Philip Schaff put it in his *Theses for the Times*,

Christianity in itself is the *absolute* religion, and in this view unsusceptible to improvement. We must not confound with this, however, the *appropriation* and *appropriation* of Christianity in the consciousness of mankind. This is a progressive process of development that will reach its close only with the second coming of the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

One of the earliest theological visions of the ultimate purpose of creation and redemption is found in the writings of Irenaeus in the second century A.D. Nowhere

1. The word comes from *doxa* which means "opinion, appearance, glory," and *phanain* which means "to manifest." I first encountered this word in Eitelbert Stauffer's *New Testament Theology* (tr. John Marsh; London: SCM, 1955) ch. 19.

2. Philip Schaff, *The Principle of Protestantism* (tr. John Nevin; Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1964) 221.

do we find an explicit exposition of his theological vision in an orderly essay—most of it has to be extracted from polemical writings against the gnostic heretics of his time. Yet his contribution provides an important beginning point for our purpose. Irenaeus does not provide the most fundamental framework for the comprehension of the ultimate *telos* of God's ways in creation, history, and consummation. He does, however, present some conceptions which are important to such a framework. In particular, he takes as his starting point the fall of humanity, and he sees the salvation of humanity through Jesus Christ as both a deliverance from the power of Satan and a participation in the divine nature. He focuses on Jesus Christ as the one who "re-captulates" the history of the race—undoing the tragic effects of the fall and, advancing humankind beyond Adam, also bringing about the perfecting of the race. "Because He who formed us in the beginning and sent His Son at the end is one and the same, the Lord . . . both destroyed our adversary and perfected man in the image and likeness of God."<sup>3</sup> This triumph over Satan and transformation of humankind was rooted in the union between God and humanity accomplished in the incarnation of the Logos. "The Logos of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who on account of his great love became what we are that he might make us what he is himself."<sup>4</sup>

In Irenaeus we discover two key elements important to a theological vision of God's ultimate purpose: first, the notion of the union of God and humankind through the incarnation of the Logos and, second, the notion of the *transformation*, indeed, the *apotheosis*, of humanity as a central effect of the saving work of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup> We discover no particular emphasis on the glory of God or an inner trinitarian love of God in Irenaeus's vision.

A further advance is found in the medieval discussion of the absolute purpose of the Incarnation, that is, that the Incarnation was independent of the fall. We first meet this issue in the work of Alexander of Hales (d. 1245). In part three of his "Body of Theology," commissioned by Pope Innocent IV, he treats the question "Whether if human nature had not fallen through sin there would still have been reason and fitness for the incarnation of Christ?"<sup>6</sup> This he affirms. Many later scholastic theologians, including Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventura, discuss the question, the former affirming it, the latter two ultimately denying it, preferring to connect the Incarnation with the fall. Yet Thomas Aquinas, in his early commentary on the sentences of Peter Lombard (Sent III Dist 1 Q1 p. 3), comments sympathetically on the affirmative side:<sup>7</sup>

Others however say that since by the Incarnation of the Son of God there was accomplished not only the liberation from sin, but also the exaltation of human nature, and the consummation of the whole universe, for these reasons even if

3. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.21.2.

4. *Ibid.*, 5, preface.

5. This theme becomes almost a commonplace in later theology, e.g., Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, 51 (*tautos gar [ho tou theou logos] epēnthrōpōzen hina hēmeis theopoiēthōmen*), quoted in B. F. Westcott's essay "The Gospel of Creation," in *The Epistles of St. John* (London: Macmillan, 1892) 319.

6. See Westcott, "The Gospel of Creation," 294-95. Thomas would later deny this in the *Summa*.

sin had not existed the Incarnation would have taken place. And this can also be maintained with good reason.

Note here the same concepts found in Irenaeus, of liberation from sin and Satan and the transformation of humankind linked to a framework of divine purpose broader than simply redemption of fallen humanity. B. F. Westcott, in his very instructive essay "The Gospel of Creation," writes:

. . . at least it cannot be said that a belief in the absolute purpose of the Incarnation is at variance with Scripture. . . . [M]uch is gained by the thought that from the first it was the purpose of God to gather up all things in the Son of His love.<sup>8</sup>

In this essay Westcott seeks to establish that the Incarnation was independent of the fall. He sees in the Incarnation a larger connection than simply the redemption of lost humankind. There is for him an archetypal significance in the Incarnation that reveals both the full divine notion of man in the Archetypal Man, Jesus Christ, and also the highest destiny of humankind as made for a mediated union with God. This significance has an impact on and transforms the whole of the created order. This constitutes a material advance toward the maximum cosmic understanding the biblical revelation will allow concerning the *telos* of God's ways in creation, history, and consummation.

In the Reformed tradition we find an explicit discussion of the ultimate divine purpose in creation. Jonathan Edwards in his work "Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World" concludes his lengthy reasonings as follows: "Thus we see that the great and last end of God's works . . . is indeed but *one*; and this *one* end is most properly and comprehensively called, THE GLORY OF GOD. . . ." He describes the meaning of the "glory of God" as "the emanation and true external expression of God's internal glory and fullness."<sup>9</sup> He further elaborates on the significance of God's "internal glory": "The whole of God's internal good or glory, is in these three things viz. his infinite knowledge; his infinite virtue or holiness, and his infinite joy and happiness."<sup>10</sup>

Edwards was at pains in his treatise both to reject the counterposition that the final end in creation was the conferring of divine benevolence on the creation and to answer arguments that his positions presented God as selfish and self-centered. In answering these objections he provides a glimpse of the inner theological vision underlying his somewhat dry and detailed rational arguments. He writes, "It is such a delight in his own internal fullness and glory, that disposes him to an abundant effusion and incarnation of that glory. . . ." Edwards does not penetrate into this inner "delight" of God to express his glory. Nor does he touch upon the key biblical dictum that "God is love" (John 4:14) or upon the sig-

8. *Ibid.*, 327-28.

9. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of President Edwards* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1869) 2.253.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, 215.

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ificance of the intratrinitarian relations within the Godhead in relation to that dimension.

One more historical position relative to the *telos* of God's ways is of interest—expressed by C. S. Lewis in his rapturous vision of the "Great Dance" found in *Perelandra*. Marvelous, indeed, is the theological poetry presented to us in the "Great Dance"—and precise! Lewis presents creation and redemption as expressions of the unimaginable inner richness of God.

He has immeasurable use for each thing that is made, that His love and splendour may flow forth like a strong river which has need of a great watercourse and fills alike the deep pools and the little crannies. . . .<sup>13</sup>

Note the conjunction of God's love and glory ("splendour") here. The "Great Dance" is a personal expression of the inwardness of God's love and delight.

Referring to the fact of the Incarnation, Lewis says "In the Fallen World He prepared for Himself a body and was united with the dust and made it glorious forever."<sup>14</sup> This is the "apotheosis" theme of Irenaeus and the Greek fathers. He continues, "This is the end and final cause of all creating, and the sin whereby it came is called Fortunate. . . ." Here Lewis sees the eternal intention of God to unite himself to humankind ("dust") in the Incarnation apart from the fall, but it was in fact accomplished through the fall. It is the *felix culpa*, the sin called "Fortunate." At the end of the vision he describes entrance into the mystical silence of adoration and worship at the mystery and glory of God's "Great Dance."<sup>15</sup> He describes "a simplicity beyond all comprehension, ancient and young as spring, illimitable, pellucid" which drew Ransom, his protagonist in the trilogy, "into its own stillness." It is a silent doxology of creaturely worship evoked by the mystical revelation of the doxophany of God in the "Great Dance."

In these historical observations we find the elements of a comprehensive theological vision of the *telos* of God's ways in the grand unfolding drama of creation, redemption, and consummation: (1) the exalted destiny of humanity for mediated union with God through the Incarnation; (2) the manifestation of the inner glory of God as the end result of God's works *ad extra*; and (3) the inner dynamic of love within the triune Godhead as the driving force behind creation and the revelation of that love as its final purpose. We are now ready to develop a precise theological exposition of a trinitarian eschatological vision centered on doxophany.

## II

### *Thesis 1: Eschatology is pictorial final purpose*

The title of this essay speaks of an *eschatological* vision. It does so because we must look to the eschatological revelation in Scripture to discover the *telos* of God's ways. Human beings, as Frankl points out, have a "will-to-meaning," which must be satisfied if they are to live in their full capacity as human. Humans have

always been concerned with the future because of their needs for security, meaning, and even because of simple curiosity.

Modern unbelieving people have developed their own eschatological mythologies, sometimes optimistic and evolutionary, sometimes pessimistic and apocalyptic. Modern science—and science fiction as an extension of modern science—is often the key source of such contemporary eschatological visions. Scriptural revelation presents a radically different vision—another cosmology, another end point for both human experience and the universe.

It is the end result of a process that determines the purpose of that process. Since this is so, if we can discern what, in fact, is the end result of the vast pageantry of creation, history, and final consummation as we find it in Scripture, we will gain an understanding of the final purpose of God and our individual place in it.

In biblical revelation we encounter pictorial, visionary material describing both the origin and the conclusion of the created order. We encounter vivid pictures of divine purpose in the eschaton. What, in fact, is presented as the final result of the great drama of creation and history? We look to a renewed heaven, a renewed earth, and a Spirit-filled creation totally under the dominion of the will of God, so that the kingdom of God manifests itself perfectly in every sphere and in every aspect of existence. In the Spirit-filled creation we find a Spirit-filled people walking, serving, loving, worshipping, and rejoicing in God. God becomes humanity's God fully and truly, and humanity becomes God's people, wholly redeemed.

All of this can be summed up in two words: *doxophany* and *doxology*. The manifestation of the glory of God in all of created reality and the creaturely response of recognition of that glory is an unending doxology to God. As Stauffer puts it so eloquently, "The antiphony of universal history leads to a symphonic doxology. At last God has attained the *telos* of his ways: the revelation of the *gloria dei* achieves its ends in the hallowing of his name."<sup>16</sup>

### *Thesis 2: The Cause of all things is the eternal love of the triune God*

The high point of biblical revelation is found in John's simple words "God is love" (1 John 4:16). This statement unveils to humanity the deepest inner nature of God. The meaning of love is defined by the very nature of God as he is in himself. Everything we know about love as human comes only by virtue of the fact that we are created as *Imago Dei* and experience love in a created and human way.

As we contemplate the mystery of God's eternal existence as love—apart from the creation of the universe—we encounter the truth that God is not an isolated being in himself. God's essence is love, and therefore he has always been love even apart from creation. This is possible because God is not simply a person but, as Scripture reveals, is tri-personal—as Father, Son and Holy Spirit—from eternity. This is how God is love from eternity. God has never been alone but has always, with an inner infinite richness, been a community of love within himself. The love of the Father for the Son and of the Son for the Father and the flow of that eternal love in the Holy Spirit have always been the innermost nature of

13. C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York: Macmillan, 1968) 217.

14. *Ibid.*, 215.

15. *Ibid.*, 219.

16. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, ch. 19, "The Final Glory of God."

God himself. Undifferentiated Being in an absolute monad is not the biblical revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Neither is God simply a person.

Of this mystery of his being we can only use what must be called theological poetry to describe it. There is a fiery warmth within God himself. The very heartbeat of God's existence is a flow of self-giving from Father to Son, of receiving from Son to Father, a flow back and forth of self-knowledge in the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit. There is an infinitude of richness within God that is beyond our comprehension—of acceptance, compassion, understanding, giving, caring, communication, intimacy. There is an intimacy threefold, an intimacy on a level and in a dimension beyond our capacity to grasp. Herman Bavinnck writes eloquently of God as love in these words:

In God love far transcends the love of creatures. For the love of God is independent, unchangeable, simple, eternal, and omnipresent. It does not depend upon us, nor is aroused by us, but flows free and pure from the depths of the divine Being. It knows no variation, neither falls nor rises, appears nor disappears, and there is not even a shadow of turning about it. It is not merely a property of the divine Being alongside of other properties. . . . but it also coincides with the divine Being Himself. God is love: He Himself, wholly, perfectly, and with His whole being. This love is not subject to time and space, but stands above it and comes down out of eternity into the hearts of the children of God. Such a love is absolutely reliable.<sup>17</sup>

The revelation of God as love is the highest truth that we have of God. It tells us that the heartbeat of eternity and of the created order is the heartbeat of divine love. The ultimate reality, over and above everything else that we see or know or understand, is holy love, the holy love of the triune God, who from eternity flows within himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in unvarying glory. That flow of love is the inner glory of God. It is his inmost substance, his reality, his weightiness, his glory. Indeed, the basic meaning of *Kabbod*, the Hebrew word for "glory," is "weightiness, richness, substance."<sup>18</sup> The glory of anything is its weightiness, its substantiveness. This eternal flow of triune love is the hidden glory of God. It is a glory that, apart from creation, was contained wholly within God himself, in the infinite perfect consciousness that is God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the intense unity of the *perichoresis unaltillos*, that is, the mutual interpenetration (*mutua inexistential*) of the three persons in virtue of the simultaneous subsistence in the numerical oneness of the divine *ousia*.<sup>18</sup>

*Thesis 3: The plan of the ages is the inclusion of all things into the eternal flow of divine love in the Trinity*

Once we have clearly recognized that the heartbeat of eternity and of creation is the eternal love of the triune God, it becomes possible for us to grasp more fully and profoundly the plan that was set in motion through creation and history.

17. Herman Bavinnck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (tr. Henry Zylstra, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956) 138-39.

18. See Polanus's exposition of this concept in Heinrich Hepppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (tr. G. T. Thompson; London: Allen & Unwin, 1950) 113.

God, in his freedom, in his infinite love and depth, chose to create a universe of things visible and invisible. He initiated a plan through creation so that the internal flow of his love might overflow its boundaries and enter into that which he had created, that which he had spoken out of his heart of love, that which he had spoken out of his perfect wisdom, that which he had spoken out of his unlimited power.

The destiny of the created order is this divinely planned purpose of participation in the inward glory of God's love and the consequent exhibition of that glory. In this way doxophany and doxology combine to fulfill the highest imaginable end—the supreme exaltation of God—and to accomplish the diffusion of the greatest good for the created order—union with God in his inward glory of love.

We note here that a genuine, holistic grasp of this point settles some of the concerns raised by those who object to the "selfishness" of God in making himself his own end in creation. Edwards seeks to deal with this in his own way in section 4 of his essay. The proper heart cry of all created reality is to be found in the creaturely sense of absolute dependence upon God and is perfectly expressed by the Psalmist, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory" (Ps 115:1). And yet attendant upon the highest end of God's glory is the highest gift of love to the created order—participation in his love through inner union.

*Thesis 4: The process of this plan is its unfolding in human history and the consequent transformation of that history*

Biblical revelation begins with the creation of all things climaxing in the creation of human beings as *Imago Dei*. The focus of that revelation is the human race, its fall and God's consequent gracious, loving covenant with it—first with Adam, then with Abraham and Moses, and finally in the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. A review (from the perspective of Theses 2 and 3) of what God has been doing in human history makes it clear that the process of all things is aimed at a progressive manifestation of God's eternal love in the created order. It is a process by which that which is inward and hidden in God himself is made available in a unique and wonderful way to humanity and the whole of creation so that the whole of humanity and creation can be brought into intimate union with that inner flow of God's love. A key result of God's covenanted relationship with humankind, which culminated in Jesus Christ, was the transformation of human history by the introduction of the reality of the final glory of the age to come into this present age in a definite, real, and yet partially hidden manner.

*Thesis 5: The method of this plan is the mediation of the eternal flow of God's love by means of a union and relation accomplished in the domain of history through the Incarnation of the eternal Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity*

The introduction of the ontological reality of the final glory into this age is conditioned by three basic concepts: mediation, incarnation, and atonement.

It is critical to the biblical revelation that union with God and participation in the eternal flow of God's love is not direct; neither is it an already existing fact of creation simply to be "realized" by humankind. Mediation contradicts all false

knowledge of the glory of God fills all things as the waters cover the seas (Num 14:21; Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14).

In this thesis we come to the most comprehensive framework for theological understanding. All other purposes which may be discerned in Scripture for creation, redemption, and consummation find their proper significance only in relation to this final cause of all things. Creation, humanity, the fall, sin, history, the Incarnation, atonement, salvation, the kingdom of God, the church—all are illuminated by this final purpose of God.

Creation and the new creation are the purposeful overflow of God's holy love expressed with his perfect wisdom and accomplished by his infinite power. Man, humanity, is now understood only as we understand *The Man*, Jesus Christ, who is the full, final perfect exposition of what it is to be human—to live the *Soli Deo Gloria* both as doxophany and as doxology.

The fall is now clearly seen as an interruption of the process leading to the final goal of doxophany which yet, in divine wisdom, adds a radiance and intensity to the final outcome. History can now be only directional, pointing beyond itself, finding meaning only by being rooted in God's eternal purpose. The Incarnation is now understood as the genuine center of the process of all things by which God carries out his final purpose. It is the "plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:10).

The meaning of the atonement is enriched as a surpassing expression of God's love, not merely in taking upon himself the consequences of sin and fallenness, not merely in restoring humanity's original relationship of creaturely innocence, but in opening up the channel to the ultimate intention of mediated union with God in his eternal flow of love. Salvation now takes on a grandeur beyond all expectation. No longer is it simply a matter of personal deliverance from sin, death, and hell. Now it is understood in its true light as participation by the Holy Spirit, through faith, in the ultimate reality and purpose of the universe.

The kingdom of God and the church come into their own when viewed in the light of doxophany. The inner life of the church transcends the categories of sociology, psychology, and history. The church is rooted in the kingdom of God, which is simply the manifestation of God's glory in a transformed created order. The church is a colony of the age to come. Its present reality is a true participation in the final glory. The church is the burning bush of the presence of the final doxophany. It is the sign and firstfruits of God's final purpose.

Doxophany demands doxology from the created order. C. S. Lewis's "Great Dance" is an artistic recognition of this demand for creaturely response. The "Great Dance" is the exhibition and celebration of the eternal love of God in its infinite richness, variety, and unity of theme: the splendor and the glory of God.

The visions of the Apocalypse are the eloquent testimony of this doxological imperative in scriptural revelation. "Worthy" is the continual cry of the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, the myriads of myriads of angels, and "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein" (Rev 5:13). In their beings, transformed to be perfect doxophany, and in their free loving response of doxology, all fulfill their highest possible function and existence in one eternal conusation of the glory of God.

mystical notions of the self-deification of humanity. Indeed, any such direct, unmediated union with God is simply a philosophical-religious expression of the *hubris* of the original human sin to seek to be as God. This point is especially important in view of the present movement in Western thought toward Eastern pantheism and mysticism. The great truth of all false mysticism is that there is a genuine union with God to be obtained, a union compatible with the human nature and destiny as *Imago Dei*. But this union is not direct or given in such a way as to allow human beings anything other than the creaturely experience of absolute dependence upon God in that union. And it is fully and totally gracious in nature—not even natural to human beings as originally created.

The second key concept is "incarnation." The method of the plan is first the objective (that is, the "actual") union of God the Word, the *eikōn tou theou* (Col 1:10) with humanity, the created *eikōn*. The Incarnation provides a prototype of a new humanity. The inner principle and dynamic of this new life is the mediated union with the flow of God's eternal trine love in a form appropriate to the creaturely reality of humankind as *Imago Dei*. This reality is only made available to us, however, through the death, resurrection, ascension, and session of the Man of Heaven and the working of the Holy Spirit incorporating humanity into that reality.

At this point the question of the absolute nature of the Incarnation again comes into view. Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventura, and Calvin, with a keen sense of the biblical materials, are certainly secure in seeing the fall and humanity's redemption as the clearly stated context and immediate cause of the Incarnation. It is also clear from a larger theological analysis of the effects of the Incarnation and the final goal of creation that the Incarnation transcends its immediate context of the fall and redemption. The Incarnation, in this light, is a fulfillment and completion of God's *telos* in creation. The final destiny of humankind as doxophany and doxology in bearing the image of the Man from Heaven expresses an eternal purpose of God to unite humankind to the reality of his inner life of trinitarian love.

We must never lose sight, however, of the fact that the Incarnation is not effective apart from atonement through the cross of the incarnate Icon of God. The fall, in fact, disrupted the basic goodness of the created order and estranged human beings from their proper destiny. The Incarnation is clearly accomplished with a view to atonement. Any denigration of the atonement in favor of the independent significance of the Incarnation is contrary to the emphasis of the New Testament. None of the glory of God's love could be made available to humanity apart from the atonement, nor could it be implemented in human experience apart from the historical facticity of the atonement and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

*Thesis 6: The final purpose of all things is doxophany—the manifestation of the eternal trine love of God as divine glory beyond history*

We now come full circle, back to the final state of glory. The *telos* of God's ways is doxophany. The *Soli Deo Gloria* comes to its highest possible expression as the unimaginable richness of the inner life of God as love fills and transforms all of created reality. The transformation of the ages is complete. The

19. A careful review of John 17:24-26 and Eph 3:17-19, among other passages, indicates clearly this eternal perspective in conjunction with God's love and participation in that love.



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# CHURCH, WORD, AND SPIRIT

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