AQUINAS' TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT AND ESCHATOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN NIGERIA

By

Tochukwu Obumneme Paulmary Nweze
Università Pontificia Salesiana [Salesian Pontifical University]
&
Don Bosco Institute of Philosophy, Ibadan, Nigeria
tochukwupaulmarynweze@gmail.com
+234 8139584644

Abstract

Herein, we assume the stance of a philosophical investigator to scrutinize the understanding of a typical Nigerian on eschatology and teleology. Does everything have an end? How does this end influence my immanent existence? Examined herein also, is the current state of events in our modern day Nigeria and how it can remedy both the mentality of the people as well as the already prevailing circumstances. The central question is on the Nigerian perception of eschatology and teleology; through the provided answers, the submission attempts to help us accept the current reality of a nation in fear and look towards adopting applicable contextual imagery of what it means to be culturally venerable but realistically disposed to the changing trends in the modern world.

Keywords: Eschatology, Teleology, Consciousness, Religion, Cultu re, Cosmological proofs.

Introduction

The differences in perception when evaluating the same object, has the psychological orientation of the perceiving subject as a primary determinant; that is why we have decided to pick the lens of a philosophical investigator to scrutinize the understanding of a typical Nigerian on what the end means. Does everything have an end? How

does this end influence my immanent existence? These and many more questions will load our string of discourses as we move towards achieving realization of some intrinsic characteristics that may have been difficult to accept. Furthermore, the guiding principle of our arguments will proceed from a fundamental understanding of the cosmological argument of the existence of God according to the scholastic philosopher, Thomas Aquinas, especially the reference to the ordering of things to their end, which is also the central theme of the teleological argument. The implication of adopting a part of the *Quinque Viae* of Aquinas will be to draw certain element of the parts during the course of our analysis.

Though Nigeria is the target of this study, the scenario of other African cultural influences will help our elucidations to have a firm footing. The relationship between the conception of God in the various religions in Nigeria and how they are true to the doctrinal presuppositions of their belief, as well as the possible gestalt switch to an egoistic adulteration of religious teachings. Similarly, we shall examine the implication of being conscious about the last things that will inevitably befall the entirety of existence and the exaggerated followership rendered to such in the wake of the "religious prostitution" in Nigeria.

Finally, it will be incomplete a submission, if we fail to suggest possible adaptations that will influence the current state of events in our modern day Nigeria and how it can remedy both the mentality of the people as well as the already prevailing circumstances. Our optimism will be viable a tool in seeking a point of convergence between the way Nigerians are used to perceiving eschatological realities and the way the concept of the end of all things ought to be approached via philosophical routes.

Aquinas' Teleological Argument

When a thinker elucidates concepts, there is often a greater chance of understanding the idea based on the background of their childhood and intellectual endeavours. Thus, the life of Thomas Aquinas will be a point of departure for our discourse in this section, which will lead

us to grasp the conceptual overview of his teleological argument, especially as it is derived from the cosmological arguments. In so doing, it is apt to begin with clarification of key terms.

The first term to clarify is 'teleology'. The understanding of the term teleology is stemmed from the root word '*telos*' which is the Greek word for 'end' and '*logos*' as 'reasoned discourse', while the further particularization of concepts gives the term '*teleos*' which takes up a new linguistic operational perspective to mean in English 'complete' or 'orderly.' Though the two Greek terms have an effect on the usage and language-context interaction, the philosophical application of teleology is the depiction of the problems inherent in the universe and the organization found within the persistence of this design (Partridge, 1966: 4184-5).

Thomas Aquinas, or in the original Italian: Tommaso d'Aquino is prominent in the Christian sphere for a great many contributions including the masterpieces: *Summa Theologiae* and the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Among the many things he is famed for, perhaps the most recognized, is the argumentative collection he provides to support belief in God's existence. This collection is comprised of two members: cosmological and teleological.

Cosmological Proofs for God's Existence

The cosmological proofs of Aquinas are the substantial attempts of arguments in natural theology to use nature as an apparatus to prove the existence of God. This adventure of Aquinas was approached from five perspectives which is known in Latin as the '*Quinque Viae*' or simply in English, 'the five ways' (Aquinas, 1920: 1, q. 2, a. 3.).

The primary argument is one from motion. This argument is crucially an attempt to achieve an understanding of the nature of the *per accidens* and whether it necessarily implies the *per se*. This is evident in the fact that whatever is in anything *per accidens* is always present in that thing due to the intervention of an external cause. The undeniable evidence that in the world, some things are moved, gives credence to the adoption of motion as the first and foremost way. Despite the ambiguity that surrounded the concept of motion in

Aquinas' usage, which did not clarify whether it is a spiritual, accidental, substantial or local, qualitative experience is substantial enough to affirm the existence of motion (Bonnette, 1972: 81-82). Since it is evident through sense-perception that some things in the world are in motion, we can therefore infer that anything that is in motion must have been set in motion by an exterior cause. Hence it holds that nothing can be set in motion by something else except it is already bearing the potentiality of the term of its motion. This movement from potentiality due to the effect of an acting agent which is itself in actuality, places the subject in a state of actuality. These movements from potentiality to actuality cannot go on forever, hence we must attain that first mover which was not moved by anything and this is God (Kenny, 2003: 6).

The viewing of the nature of efficient cause subsists within the order of efficient causes that our experiences can grasp. It is important to note that the concept 'cause' refers to the influence on the *esse* of the thing caused, hence that through the existence of an immanent material comes into being, the caused thing. There is a metaphysical flow from the first act-of-being of the cause through its form on which it confers the being through an operation that yields the effect (Bonnette: 105-106). These grounds assert that it will be impossible for something to be the efficient cause of itself, since it cannot be in order and still precede itself in order at the same time. Therefore, since it must be caused by what is prior to it, it follows that in order to eliminate the problem of an infinite regress, it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause which all give the name, God (Bonnette: 110).

Then comes the argument from necessity. Unlike many authors will assume, Aquinas does not tow the path of considering contingency but he rather considered *ex possibili et necessario*, possibility as against necessity. This entails the existence of certain things that are found to be generated and to be corrupted, hence can possibly exist, then go into non-existence (Bonnette: 129). However, Thomas opines that there are some things that do not have the possibility of being and not being, hence [are] necessary. This necessity has a cause outside of itself which is also a necessity with

another cause in a continuous string of necessities, till we assume something which is necessary of itself and has no cause but is the cause of other things; this we call God (Kenny: 46).

The next argument is that of *gradation*. Since there is always a movement of things towards that which is greatest especially within a genus, it follows that the greatest is invariably the cause of all others which fall within the genus that it expresses its supremacy. This is a stern pointer that in the strings of greatness, there must be that which is the greatest being and the cause of all perfect; this we call God (Aquinas: 1, q. 2, a. 3.).

The idea of governance bears a fundamental concern, since the intelligent order of things must be coordinated towards attaining a design which makes the cause of order more obvious. This *order* is only achieved when related and concordant things unite under a particular government that lead all towards a definite end. The presence of both contrary and discordant things in the world which express diverse natures, but are all united in a single order, opines that there must be an exceedingly providential being which governs the world, this being we all call, God (Bonnette: 157-158).

Having shown Aquinas' cosmological proofs for the belief in God's existence, we shall now look at the teleological argument. The cosmological arguments employ observable phenomena and principles ostensible in the natural world to point to the existence of a supernatural entity. Perhaps, one could fault Aquinas' arguments as being too forward in that they make some logical leap to some non-material and supernatural being; it could very well be the case that the entire universe has been uncaused in the same manner as God is taken to be uncaused; Nature may very well be necessary, governing her members in some outstandingly orderly pattern. Perhaps, in a bid to concretize this, Aquinas introduced a sort of teleological reasoning to provide a sense of purpose as the defining character of the arguments for the existence of God.

The Teleological Argument

The idea of the Aristotelian concept of the final cause within the four causes, is the authorizing of expectations that should be met during its course and the eventual attainment of finality at the point of satisfying these expectations. This adoption of teleological reasoning is to grasp a general but non-normatively inferential process of causal associations with their final causes (Henning, 2018: 249-250). The teleological argument thus observes the purposefulness of something using the fifth of the *Quinque Viae*, which refers first to the presence of observed end for even things that lack knowledge. The manifestation of this order in things without reason purports the presence of some other thing with reason which directs it towards its purpose, hence there must be an intelligent being that directs both the rational and irrational things of natural origin to their end. This allusion to God is Aquinas' teleological argument (Fradd and Delfino, 2018: 96).

Dissection of a concept by flowing first from an understanding of the etymology of its terminology, to a deep exposition of the experiential background of the author, has given us a firm foundation to build upon the teleological argument. We shall try to see how the understanding of the participatory courses of things as they tow the trajectory towards a purpose through the ingenuity of an intelligent designer who has ordered it, can set our debate in the next section rolling.

Eschatological Consciousness and the Nigeria Factor

How do Nigerians perceive the idea that there is an end? This will be the central theme of our investigation, as we try to see how our answers can help us accept the current reality of a nation in fear and look towards adopting applicable contextual imagery of what it means to be culturally venerable but realistically disposed to the changing trends in the modern world.

To begin with, it is commendable to look at the country Nigeria and her religious perception. It is very clear a fact that Nigeria is an African country; as such, there are certain things that she is

likely to inherit from the African character: especially as pertains the religious sphere (which is the focus of the present paper). The uniqueness of African culture entails a difficulty in differentiating her culture, religion and politics. This influence began from the origins of the practices of African Traditional Religion, which have various links to the social, economic, spiritual, psychological and entirety of the human experience. The presence of multiple ethnic extractions in Nigeria makes our context more heterogeneous. The penetration of Islam and Christianity into Nigeria and its subsequent metamorphosis into a 'phobiocentric' or fear-motivated instrument of forestalling loyalty in individuals is also particularly interesting (Stevenson, 1985: 14).

This 'phobiocentrism', using Islam and Christianity which have the largest population of followers in the country, is adopted by the Muslims and engrained in the sharia law, to eliminate a proper investigation of the doctrinal propositions of their foundations to avoid the identification of loopholes. These loopholes for them are like a domino that may eventually crumble the entire religious enterprise, thus followers are afraid about what they say or do; the oligarchs within Islam ensure the continuity of these practices since they favour them. Christianity on the other, has failed to checkmate the astronomical increase in the number of denominations and the entry of untrained preachers into ministry.

Also, Christianity seems to be grooming a monster right within her place of domicile, by neglecting the hostile strings of extremist competition amongst preachers for the acquisition of a larger congregation without any consciousness for the qualitative dispensing of the contents of the Christian Bible in line with the growing concern of the peoples' everyday life. This phobiocentrism comes into play when preachers begin to align their sermons and counselling sections with their members' responses to their immediate needs and more disastrously is the inclination to a "prophet of doom" strategy which prompts their members to depend solely on them for their spiritual welfare rather than God. The congregants, as suspected in this paper, are often responsive to these insincere acts even when

they are very much aware of the underlying motivation; this is largely because of some 'eschatological consciousness' present among them.

Understanding Eschatology and Consciousness

In commencing, we shall begin with an etymological analysis of the two major words: eschatology and consciousness. The terminology, eschatology owes its roots from the Greek words '*eschatos*' meaning 'the ultimate or highest' and '*logos*' which refers to a reasoned discuss. The philosophical consideration of eschatology referring to the last things, has trailed the thoughts of sages since the ancient era, where the questions of: 'What is the highest good?' 'How can it be attained?' 'When can this good be attain?' and 'who can attain it?' were all paramount. All these are enquiries into the existence of man, which touch issues like the possibility, reality, nature and operations of the concepts of death, heaven, hell, reincarnation etc., and man's approach towards these realities (Partridge: 4028). Then, we delve into consciousness. Unlike eschatology, the term comes from a Latin root, as a conjunction of *cum* and *scire*. The Latin term '*cum*' means 'with' or 'together'; and '*scio*' or '*scire*' means 'to know' These put together will culminate in an invitation to a state of awareness of both mental and moral dimensions. This operative framework can only be functional in the rational man who applies the instrument of reasoning in the formulation of principles that guide his moral character (Searle, 2005: 43 & Guertin, 2019: 406-412). When there is more appeal to the spiritual connotation of most occurrences than to their rational evaluation, the negative implication is that the ingenuity of man will be trivialized while exalting timidity and the lack of zeal. Suspicion and lack of trust are the order of the day since every action that one is faced with must fit into the categories of the expression of the force inherent in man. Acts of charity are refused because of the convincing metaphysical interpretation that has passed down through generations.

Furthermore, it is no longer news that many Nigerians have lost their lives in unjustifiable ways, simply because of the exaggerated association of sickness with some diabolical manipulation; without a commensurate education on the influence of

physical and physiological factors in the onset of illness. The consumption of medication is labelled as lack of trust in God's healing power, and prayer becomes both a spiritual and an orthodox remedy; in fact, it could simply put, be tagged an elixir for all ills (Uchendu, 1964: 30-35). These form some general extremities of our eschatological consciousness.

Teleological Argument and Eschatological Consciousness in Nigeria

The immediate auto-reflection that initiates at the grasp of the concept of death in relation to many other things which must attain a *terminus*, is a popular subject among Africans especially Nigerians; the author suspects that it is mostly because of the dualism immanent in many of our cultures. The belief that there is another world where spirit beings dwell only points to the finiteness of our earthly existence, hence it is easy to convince an average Nigerian of the validity of Aquinas' assertions on the movement from the perception of the ordered end of things to intelligent designer status ascribed to God.

The popularity of "end-time Gospel" as it has come to be identified, started when covetous Christian preachers began to perceive the longer attention span of Nigerians on any sermon that linked their earthly existence as a result of dualism. This discovery gave birth to the commercialization of Christendom in Nigeria, which at the onset was an admonition on the best way to preserve life in order to enjoy the dividends life had to offer, to the casting of the golden dice on the insecurity of the human soul after earthly existence. The concern for what will occur at the last days became so much the topic of sermons in churches to the extent that even when donations are made, allusions to a heavenly financial accumulation with contributions in Churches became a growing trend.

Also, the fear of what the last days will be, became a determining factor for the choice of actions members were to take, either by threatening them with the punishment of certain biblical personages or instilling a guilty conscience in them which acts as a judge in every matter of spiritual concern. The era of willing generous

charity towards others is gradually phasing out with the onset of a period where charity is prompted by a "spiritual Ponzi scheme" mentality where a transcendental being is meant to either offer a laudable service or multiple finances beyond what is given as Charity. The other method is the "ransom fraud" where members are made to believe that they owe God a ransom for their life and must continually upset this debt throughout life.

We shall now turn to cosmological and ontological overture pertinent in this discussion. The presence of related themes associated with the foundation of humans and the universe among the traditions of the numerous ethnic assemblages in Nigeria, is a contributing factor to the perception of eschatology from a cosmological and ontological point of view. The laudable convergence of narratives from the nature of the world to the nature of man and his relationship with the Supreme Being, form the architecture of 'cosmontology' as an implication for the acknowledgement of the end of things since both the universe and man's ends are at the disposition of predetermined strategic elucidations (Aderibigbe, 2020: 28).

There is a great amount of unifiable elements of belief among the diverse cultures in Africa; this commonality is what lightens the burden of sharing about the concept of God. However, among the cultures in Nigeria, the anthropocentric approach to existence places God at the beginnings and as the source of all vital forces interplaying in the universe. These are the conglomerations that developed the worship-centred communion between God and man in religious consciousness of traditional religions in Nigeria. This activates the yearning of man to embrace a transition from an anthropocentric existence to a spiritual colloquy with the Supreme Being at the obvious end of earthly life, which raises the question about death and afterlife (Mbiti, 1970: 72).

Death, Afterlife, and Reincarnation

The grandiose reverence and aesthetical veneration of the dead in Nigeria cause the need to peruse into the motivating factor behind this character. In most African cultures and of course, in Nigeria

particularly, it is mostly perceived that the unavoidable acceptance of the end of life is associated with old age; hence, most cultures institute a spring of curiosity when a young person dies because it is seen to be an "untimely death." Death for them is a separation of the spiritual substance of the body from the material (Ifesieh, 1979: 73).

Their idea of the dual nature of man is that which has regard for the visible sphere which is the world, and the implied non-visible sphere where one resides at the end of earthly life. Anything that threatens this security that man enjoys by being one with the world is attacked as a real threat to one's entire existence, hence, this is the core behind the escalated interventions among Nigerians when an appropriate and dignified end is unassured. The dignified reality of survival amidst the unavoidable end that awaits our earthly existence, brings that necessity of marriage for the ethnic extractions of Nigeria. This necessity is not in the first place a move for the unitive aspect as appraised in the Christian religion but it rather gives preeminence to the procreative dimension, because one's progeny is a representative multiplication of one's vital force. This explains why it is abominable in some cultures in Nigeria for a man to die without either marrying or having children; of which in some, his wife has to be married to his brother in other fill up the lacuna he created (Mbiti, 1975: 105-106)

The concept of reincarnation is the understanding that a being who has ended its earthly journey through death can possess another body to live again. This is a completely metaphysical reality on which certain African ethnic extractions affiliate their eschatological convictions. Unlike Christianity, who believes that the resurrection is a typical form of accepted concept for incarnation, African Traditional Religion as practiced among some ethnic groups in Nigeria, believes in the continuous circular movement from life to death, till an expected aim is achieved before the rank of heavenly bliss can be attained (Aderibigbe: 68-70).

An advantageous implication of such conception is that it checkmates the lifestyle of individuals in line with the observation of both the divine law and the positive law. This is the reason why in the popular beliefs among certain cultures in Nigeria, the corpse of people

who were known for despicable atrocities in the community, were usually scarred to monitor any possible reincarnation which is believed to manifest such scarring. Though there are excesses in the contextualization of this idea, it promotes the spread of sound morals among the traditional believers since it was a thing of honour to be venerated as an ancestor with virtues rather than the contrary. This is more appropriately referred to as partial reincarnation since it is limited within the family and only for a period of time (Aderibigbe: 76).

Death in certain cultures like that of the Igbo and Yoruba people of Nigeria, is a gateway to a new form of existence, as it signifies the termination point of human life in the terrestrial world. This ideological interpolation is what makes the varying perceptions on postmortem existence, an important concern in the everyday life of average indigenes. They believe that there is a locus of interaction in the spatiotemporal existence of births and rebirths such that a commensurate cosmic harmony is achieved. The presence of certain physical features of the reincarnated ancestor authenticates these claims while the ancestor sustains a separate existence in the nether world. The presence of these two ethnic groups among the three majors in Nigeria, is enough reason to trace the exaggerated consciousness in the behavior of individuals in relation to their spiritual significances, even when there is no need for such evaluation (Aderibigbe, 2016: 291).

It is good to see how a flow from the concept of the ordering of things to their end from the point of view of scholastic philosophy could be contextualized through the eyes of the diverse cultures in Nigeria. This has given a reason for how the sensitivity of discussions on death or the reflections on afterlife seem to take precedence in questioning of moral standards than the immanent implications. As much as we are confronted by the abuses of this ideology, we have all pointed out its benefits and the fact that all these implications are unavoidably engrained in the daily life of average Nigerians.

Through the study of metaphysics as an aspect of Philosophy and Logic in Nigeria, secondary schools can widen the horizon of the

citizenry on better means of developing a balanced locus of convergence between their religious beliefs and the critical examination of facts as well as its relevance in decision making. Without achieving positive results through enlightenment, we may only be justifying the claims of Karl Max that "religion is the opium of the people."

Conclusion

There is a very marginal variation in the conception of an average Nigerian about eschatological realities in comparison to that of other nationals including those in Africa. The status of Nigeria as the most populous nation in Africa may have little or no influence on their viewership of what a holistic idea of, what the end is, entails. The imbalance in wealth distribution in Nigeria, which places a large part of the population below the poverty line, has a lot more on the more common perception of how the end should be perceived.

Also, this entails that those who are wealthy conceive the idea of buying a place for themselves in heaven by contributing more to the development of ecclesiastical structures and projects, while avoiding the loss of one's good fortune by paying tithes and helping the poor. The mental mandate of these non-faith-based actions, is that whenever challenging situations arise, they are motivated to face them optimistically since for them, the transcendental realm has been satisfied. The case of the poor citizen is that he works in religious establishments and propagates their doctrines as an act of petition, while he awaits divine intervention even to some situations that dedication could remedy.

Furthermore, it is laudable that these perceptions are the engines behind the tens of thousands of Church buildings, religious structures and mosques in the country. Religious consciousness is an unavoidable factor in the religious architecture of Nigeria, such that non-involvement is often responded with a social stereotyping which ascribes evil tendencies on the actors. Looking at this situation from the brighter light, can this be termed a true move towards

development, since holistic development goes beyond the merely spiritual?

Consequently, there are others who tend to question the moral benefits of these edifices on the character formation of the citizens who worship there. The bouts of unrest in the country on both political, ethnic and religious fronts fails to produce a justification for the massive religious expansion which should build up a people with a vivid interpersonal relationship with their neighbours, as they build with their God. It is common place that this balance remains unachieved in our contemporary Nigeria, however, the continuous quest for transformation should be a seed of hope which will eventually germinate in due time.

Bibliography

Aderibigbe, Ibigbolade S. *Contextualizing Eschatology in African Cultural and Religious Beliefs*. New York: Routledge, 2020.

———. "Reincarnation," *Encyclopedia of the Yoruba*, eds. Toyin Falola and Akintunde Akinyemi. Indiana: Indiana Press, 2016.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*. Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. 2nd and rev. ed. 1920.

Bonnette, Dennis. *Aquinas' Proofs for God's Existence: St. Thomas Aquinas on "the Per Accidens Necessarily Implies the Per Se*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972.

Fradd, Matt and Robert Delfino. *Does God Exist: A Socratic Dialogue on the Five Ways of Thomas Aquinas.* Missouri: En route, 2018.

Guertin, P. A. "A Novel Concept Introducing the idea of Continuous Changing Levels of Consciousness." *Journal of Consciousness Exploration & Research*, 10 no. 6 (2019): 406-412.

Henning, Boris. *Aristotle's Four Causes*. New York: Peter Lang, 2018.

Ifesieh, E. *Religion at the Grassroots: Studies in Igbo Religion*. Enugu: SNAAP, 1989.

Kenny, Anthony. "The Five Ways: St Thomas Aquinas' Proofs of God's Existence." *Studies in Ethics and the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. V. Edited by D. Z. Philips. London: Routledge, 2003.

Mbiti, John S. *Concepts of God*. New York: Praeger, 1970.

———. *An Introduction to African Traditional Religion*. London: Heinemann, 1975.

Partridge, Eric. *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966.

Searle, John. "Consciousness." *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. Edited by T. Honderich. Oxford: Oxford University, 2005.

Stevenson, Ian. "The Belief in Reincarnation Among the Igbo of Nigeria." *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, XX (1985): 13-30.

Uchendu, Victor C. "The Status Implications of Igbo Religious Beliefs," *The Nigerian Field*, XIX no. 1 (1964): 27-37.