

SYLLOGISM OR PARADOX: AQUINAS AND LUTHER ON THEOLOGICAL METHOD

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[Editor's Note: Luther's most trenchant critique of Scholastic theology (and therefore of Thomas Aquinas) was that it relied too heavily on syllogism and ignored paradox, a category central to his own "theology of the cross." A closer look at Aquinas, the author argues, shows that his use of syllogistic reasoning was in fact sharply limited and that by no means was he blind to the function of paradox in the theological enterprise. Luther's critique, therefore, while it may have applied to some Scholastics, missed its mark with regard to Aquinas.]

A HALF CENTURY AGO it was scarcely conceivable that Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther could be mentioned in the same breath, let alone with the conjunction "and" between their names. Four hundred and fifty years of interconfessional rancor and bitterness had been built largely on their respective legacies. How could they be compared, much less be brought into dialogue? Did not fidelity to "the truth" demand an absolute loyalty either to one or the other? Today of course this mentality has changed, irrevocably one hopes. Pope John Paul II himself has commended the deeper study of Luther to Catholics. And Lutherans have widely accepted the principle that indeed they may have something to learn from Aquinas.

Many complex reasons account for this development. One of the most important has been the recognition by Catholics that Aquinas was first and foremost a theologian, a realization that on the surface seems obvious. But in reality, the awareness is possible today only because of a long and difficult struggle among interpreters of Aquinas that resulted in a rejection of earlier depictions of him. Aquinas, it was concluded, was not a metaphysician with theological interests, nor was he first and foremost a philosopher, not even a "Christian philosopher." After a long succession of Aquinas scholars including Gilson, Chenu, Weisheipl, Pesch, Torrell, and others, we have come to understand that from beginning to end Aquinas was a theologian. To approach him

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from this perspective makes a profound difference. As Ulrich Kühn has written, "One misunderstands Thomas from the ground up if one tries to describe him as a philosopher who, in an ancillary way, also tried his hand at revealed theology."¹ This new, more adequate picture of Aquinas the theologian is, to my mind, one of the assured results of modern Aquinas scholarship. One of the new possibilities it has opened up is the placing of Aquinas and Luther alongside one another. As Pesch has observed, "Thomas could become a real dialogue partner for Protestant theology only when he was freed from Thomistic custody where he was held as a Christian philosopher, to become an authentic, salvation-historically oriented theologian."² A half-century of change in Aquinas scholarship means that we are no longer comparing apples and oranges.

The term "dialogue partner" may sound suspiciously modern to some. Is it not perhaps anachronistic to apply this to the past? We do well to remind ourselves that Aquinas himself treasured dialogue partners, the ones with whom he agreed and the ones from whom he differed. As he wrote in his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, "One should love both, namely those whose opinion we follow and those whose opinion we repudiate, because the one and the other have been at pains to seek out truth and have helped us in that quest."³ Thus we find warrant in Aquinas himself for the attempt of scholars over the last 30 years to bring his theology into dialogue with Luther. This body of work, while it has not perhaps always been motivated precisely by a love for both Aquinas and Luther, has surely been respectfully cognizant of the fact that these two great Christian thinkers were at pains to seek out truth. Moreover, this scholarly project was confident that this dialogue would help us in that quest.

Dialogue implies difference, since total agreement would mean the end of dialogue. It would obviously be false and ultimately futile to deny or even to minimize the vast divergences between the theologies of these two men. In my judgment, scholars involved in this dialogic enterprise have not done that. In fact many have brought Aquinas and Luther into dialogue precisely to understand better the fundamental differences between them. Many, for example, have concluded that the basic parting of the ways lies in their respective theologies of nature and grace. Others locate it in Christology, or anthropology, or episte-

¹ Ulrich Kühn, "Thomas von Aquin und die evangelische Theologie," in Ludger Oeing-Hanhoff, ed., *Thomas von Aquin 1274-1974* (Munich: Kösel, 1974) 13-31, at 22.

² Otto Hermann Pesch, *Thomas von Aquin: Grenze und Grösse mittelalterlicher Theologie* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald, 1988) 38. See the discussion by Mark Jordan, "Theology and Philosophy," in Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993) 232-51; and most recently Thomas F. O'Meara, *Thomas Aquinas, Theologian* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1997).

³ In XII Metaph., lect. 9, quoted in Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* (Chicago: Regnery, 1964; orig. ed. 1950) 193.

mology and linguistics, or ecclesiology, or in the difference between Aristotelianism and Platonic Augustinianism, or in Aquinas's and Luther's different understandings of faith.⁴ Still others describe the difference in terms of sapiential vs. existential understandings of the theological task.⁵

Without invalidating these results of purely systematic comparisons, I wish to return to Luther himself in order to ask again what he understood to be the fundamental difference. I raised this question already in 1989, in my book *Luther on Thomas Aquinas*⁶ but there I restricted myself to examining only what Luther explicitly said about Aquinas. Here I want to go beyond that to consider a critique that remains implicit in Luther insofar as Aquinas is not mentioned by name. Nevertheless it is, I believe, Luther's most fundamental objection to Aquinas. One finds this objection in what is called his theology of the cross, present already in his 1517 "Disputation against Scholastic Theology," fully developed in his 1518 "Heidelberg Disputation" and "Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses," and thereafter permeating the whole of his vast theological corpus.

THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS VS. THEOLOGY OF GLORY

Although a full description of Luther's theology of the cross is not possible here, permit me to characterize it briefly.⁷ In the first place, it is a theology of revelation; accordingly it turns its face resolutely against all speculative approaches to God, human beings, and the world. God's self-revelation, Luther concluded, must be the source and center of all theology. Not that natural knowledge of God is out of the question. Luther readily conceded a natural knowledge of God in his lectures on Romans in 1515–16.⁸ Similarly in his 1526 lectures on Jonah, he acknowledged that the light of reason can lead us to acknowledge the existence of God and even some of the divine attributes.⁹ But this knowledge is defective since we still do not know how

⁴ See the summary of the debate in Harding Meyer, "Fundamental Difference—Fundamental Consensus," *Ecumenical Trends* 15 (1986) 38–41.

⁵ Otto Hermann Pesch, "Existential and Sapiential Theology: The Theological Confrontation between Luther and Thomas Aquinas," in Jared Wicks, ed., *Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther* (Chicago: Loyola University, 1970) 61–81, 182–93.

⁶ Denis R. Janz, *Luther on Thomas Aquinas: The Angelic Doctor in the Thought of the Reformer* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1989).

⁷ The standard work is Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 5th ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976; original edition 1929). More recently, see Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); and now also Hubertus Blaumeiser, *Martin Luthers Kreuzestheologie: Schlüssel zu seiner Deutung von Mensch und Wirklichkeit* (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 1995).

⁸ Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–) vol. 56, p. 176, lines 15–32; hereafter all references will be to this Weimar edition, abbreviated as, e.g., WA 56, 176, 15–32.

⁹ WA 19, 205, 27–206, 6. Cf. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* 162; and Brian

God is disposed toward us as human beings. For that knowledge we must rely on revelation alone.

But God's self-revelation is not direct. In fact God is revealed as God through what is God's opposite. The central core of God's revelation is the cross of Jesus Christ. What humans perceive in the cross is weakness, shame, humiliation, and suffering. Precisely here, in these experiences, God is to be found. Hidden beneath them, the eye of faith perceives God's power, glory, and love. Exactly where God seems most absent is where God is revealed most fully.

God is found not only in the suffering of the cross but also in the midst of the suffering that humans experience as God drives them to doubt, fear, tribulation, temptation, and finally despair. This is what Luther calls God's "alien work" (*opus alienum Dei*), God's work of wrath. Beneath it is to be found God's "proper work" (*opus proprium Dei*), God's work of mercy. For only when humans abandon themselves can they begin to trust in God's mercy alone. This experience, Luther believes, is what makes a theologian of the cross: "Understanding, reading or speculating do not make a theologian, but living, or rather dying and being damned."¹⁰ This is what Luther had in mind when he said, "The cross alone is our theology."¹¹

The way of speaking appropriate, indeed indispensable, to such a theology is paradox.¹² Paradox is appropriate because the Gospels and the Pauline writings provide a rich precedent. Paradox is indispensable because the center of the Christian faith is the scandal and contradiction of the cross and because it points to its deeper mystery beneath surface contradiction. The theses Luther wrote for the *Heidelberg Disputation* in 1518 are themselves called "theological paradoxes."¹³ For the rest of his theological career he reveled in paradox. From beginning to end his theology of the cross is a theology of paradox, a theology of apparent contradictions that point to a deeper meaning.

Luther's theology was hammered out on the anvil of controversy and cannot be grasped without attending to the opposing voices. He drew the sharpest contrast between his theology of the cross and what he called a theology of glory. For him, a theologian of glory is one who observes the world and on this basis draws conclusions about God,

A. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason: A Study in the Theology of Luther* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962).

¹⁰ WA 5, 163, 28–29.

¹¹ WA 5, 176, 32–33.

¹² On theological paradox, see Ronald Hepburn, *Christianity and Paradox: Critical Studies in Twentieth-Century Theology* (New York: Pegasus, 1958); Ian T. Ramsey, *Christian Empiricism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 98–119; and Henning Schröer, "Paradox," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977–) 25.726–37. The absence of an entry on "paradox" in Roman Catholic theological reference works is revealing.

¹³ WA 1, 353, 11.

virtue, wisdom, justice, goodness, etc.¹⁴ In other words, such a person builds a theology on empirical observation which does indeed yield a kind of wisdom, Luther conceded.¹⁵ But such wisdom has no soteriological significance. “[I]t is not sufficient, and it does [the theologian] no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross.”¹⁶ When Philip, in John 14:8, asked to see the Father, Jesus pointed to himself. “God,” Luther contended, “can be found only in suffering and the cross.”¹⁷ Thus, while the theologian of glory tries to look on God face to face, the theologian of the cross looks only on what Luther calls God’s “backward parts” (*posteriora*).¹⁸ Only here can we discover God’s disposition toward us, namely “the love of the cross, born of the cross, which turns in the direction where it does not find good which it may enjoy, but where it may confer good on the bad and needy person.”¹⁹ Without this knowledge, natural knowledge of God is utterly worthless.²⁰

The theology of glory also has its own proper thought form and manner of speaking, namely the syllogism. Already in 1517 Luther was warning of the dangers of syllogistic reasoning in theology: “No syllogistic form is valid when applied to divine terms.”²¹ In 1539 he was still decrying the intrusion of this foreign element into matters of faith.²² Syllogisms, of course, have their rightful place and their own validity since “all other branches of knowledge are taught on the basis of syllogisms.”²³ They are appropriate to philosophy, he explained, but not to theology.²⁴ We must “learn to speak a new language in the realm of faith,” for faith deals with the invisible, the mysterious, and ultimately the ineffable.²⁵ Syllogisms are simply inadequate in dealing with the central Christian affirmation that “the Word was made flesh.”²⁶ To “rush blindly into theology with this syllogistic form,” Luther noted, is to make nonsense of everything, to empty out the mystery and finally to fall into heresy.²⁷ This is precisely what the theologian of glory does.

For Luther then knowledge of God is available to us on several levels, or in concentric circles. The outermost circle is natural knowledge of God. On this level, syllogistic forms are valid but this knowledge remains fragmentary, confused, unfocused, and ultimately of no soteriological significance. Within that circle is a second circle—the knowledge of God available to us in Scripture. Here God reveals God’s very self but in a veiled way that requires discernment and study. The

¹⁴ WA 1, 361, 32–36.

¹⁵ WA 1, 363, 25–37.

¹⁶ WA 1, 362, 11–14.

¹⁷ WA 1, 362, 28–29.

¹⁸ WA 1, 362, 2–3. There is a serious mistranslation of “*posteriora Dei*” in *Luther’s Works: American Edition* (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955–1988) 31.52; this is pointed out by McGrath (*Luther’s Theology of the Cross* 148).

¹⁹ WA 1, 365, 13–15.

²⁰ WA 1, 362, 1–19.

²¹ WA 1, 226, 21.

²² WA 39 II, 4, 19–20.

²³ WA 43, 516, 40–517, 1.

²⁴ WA 39 II, 5, 7–10.

²⁵ WA 39 II, 5, 35–36.

²⁶ WA 39 II, 27, 9–14.

²⁷ WA 39 II, 26, 11–18.

center of Scripture is Christ, the third circle: In Christ we encounter God's definitive and final self-revelation. Within this circle there is another, the very heart of the Christian faith, namely the cross. Here all that God has revealed is brought into its sharpest focus because here we can finally see the nature of God's intention on our behalf. In theology, this central point must condition all the rest; this cross, in all its scandal, offense, and mystery, cannot be captured by any syllogism. Only paradox, the mind's groping in the dark after a deeper truth, is appropriate here. Thus at the very heart of the Christian faith the wisdom of the wise becomes foolishness, as Paul expressed it.

Who are these theologians of glory against whom Luther contrasted himself so starkly and absolutely? They are the rather diverse group that Luther calls, often in an undifferentiated way, "the Scholastics."²⁸ They are "the men at the Sorbonne who allow such things as the forgiveness of sins and the mystery of the incarnation and eternal life to be deduced by logic."²⁹ They are those who "learn from Aristotle" rather than recognizing "the crucified and hidden God."³⁰ Here is Luther's most sweeping indictment of Scholasticism and not merely Scholastic errors. Luther's primary concern was not Scholasticism's sacramental theology, its ecclesiology, even its theology of nature and grace.³¹ Rather it is the Scholastic theological method itself which he found to be at fault. As a theology of glory, its very foundation was deeply flawed.

Luther never explicitly mentioned Thomas Aquinas in connection with the theology of glory. Yet with this label he undoubtedly intended to indict the whole of the Scholastic theological enterprise and not merely the *via moderna* in which he had been trained. And he considered Aquinas to be the greatest of the Scholastics, "the teacher of all teachers."³² The conclusion, therefore, is inescapable: in his denunciation of the theology of glory we encounter his most pointed and fundamental attack on Aquinas's theology.

For us, the question is now whether Luther's critique opens up an unbridgeable chasm between these two great Christian thinkers. Was Aquinas's theology really a "theology of glory" as Luther defined it, and was it thus deserving of his unrelenting, lifelong opposition? For an answer to this, let us turn to Aquinas himself, first to see the limits of syllogistic reason in his theology, and second, to explore the role of paradox in his theology.

THE LIMITS OF SYLLOGISTIC REASON IN AQUINAS

As Chenu noted many years ago, if one were to analyze precisely the ways that reason actually functions in Aquinas, one would come up

²⁸ WA 1, 224–28.

²⁹ WA 39 II, 13, 10–12.

³⁰ WA 1, 613, 21–29.

³¹ On these and other critiques, see Janz, *Luther on Thomas Aquinas* 11–81.

³² WA 30 II, 300, 21–27.

with an endless catalogue: the discursive activity of reason in his thought is marked by an "extreme mobility."³³ This obviously cannot be our task here. Rather I merely want to comment briefly on the place of syllogism in his theology.

One does not have to read widely in Aquinas to see that he was fascinated with syllogisms. Not only was he in this way caught up with the intellectual fashion of his age but he also showed an extraordinary dexterity in handling them. He thought that syllogizing is the mind's proper activity, something that goes on even in sleep!³⁴ Even in his Scripture commentaries, where one would least expect it, Aquinas occasionally peeled back the layers of rhetoric to discover beneath them the bare bones of a syllogism. In his lectures on Ephesians 5, verses 6 and 12–13 are reduced to syllogisms, complete with major premise, minor premise, and conclusion.³⁵ Paul is here translated as it were into the thought forms of 13th-century Scholasticism.³⁶

Fascinated as Aquinas was with syllogisms, his followers wildly exaggerated this aspect of his thought. This development within Thomism reached its pinnacle in the person of Capponi della Porrecta who in 1588 published a five-volume work entitled *Elucidationes formales in Summam theologicam S. Thomae* in which every one of the 2,669 articles in the *Summa theologiae* was reduced to a syllogism!³⁷ Here Aquinas's masterful work was dismembered into discrete little blocks of cold logic, emptied of its richness and complexity, and hence distorted.

A syllogism obviously purports to prove. Reasoning, or what Aquinas called *cursus causae in causatum* (the progress of a cause to its effect),³⁸ has this as its most proper function.³⁹ It is the progress from two known truths to a third, previously unknown truth. And in this "proving" lies its problematic nature in regard to faith. But we must immediately notice that Aquinas uses the term *probare* ("to prove") in various ways. Taken in the narrow sense the word implies strict logical demonstration, what he sometimes called "sufficient proof." But it can also be used in a much weaker sense, as when, he wrote, "a reason is introduced, not as furnishing a sufficient proof of a principle, but as confirming an already established principle, by showing the congruity of its results . . ." This too Aquinas called a proof. Thus he wrote that in this sense "reasons avail to prove the trinity," a shocking statement

³³ Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* 177.

³⁴ *ST* 1, q. 84, a. 8 ad 2.

³⁵ *In Epistolam ad Ephesios* 5, lect. 3 and 5.

³⁶ On this, see Otto Hermann Pesch, "Paul as Professor of Theology: The Image of the Apostle in St. Thomas' Theology," *The Thomist* 38 (1974) 584–605.

³⁷ Reprinted in *S. Thomae Aquinatis Angelici et V. Ecclesiae Doctoris Ordinis Praedicatorum Summa theologica cum elucidationibus Ven. P. Fr. Seraphini Capponi a Porrecta*, 13 vols. (Bonn, 1853).

³⁸ *De veritate*, q. 15, a. 1.

³⁹ Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* 177.

unless read in connection with the sentence immediately following: "We must not, however, think that the trinity of persons is adequately proved by such reasons."⁴⁰ In other words, what proof means here is that the principle in question possesses at least a minimal intelligibility. Proving in this case is a far cry from logically demonstrating. Failure to recognize these very different uses of the term in Aquinas leaves the reader open to disastrous misunderstanding.

Likewise the term "syllogism" can have various meanings in Aquinas since he distinguished between different types of syllogisms. Sophistical syllogisms are simply incorrect; rhetorical syllogisms are those that argue from conjectures; dialectical syllogisms argue from probabilities and arrive at opinion or probable knowledge; demonstrative syllogisms argue from necessary premises and yield scientific knowledge.⁴¹ Thus not all syllogisms prove in the same way. This too is crucial for assessing the place of syllogism in Aquinas's thought.

With this in mind, we can now consider the three well-known passages that comprise Aquinas's discourse on method: the *Summa contra gentiles* 1, chaps. 1-9; the *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 1; and his *Super Boetium de Trinitate*. I will not summarize these passages here but merely highlight a few salient points relating to what Aquinas thought was, and was not, provable.

First, all three passages insist that the truths of faith are not susceptible to proof. In the *Summa contra gentiles* Aquinas argued that reason can "gather certain likenesses" of these truths, but such "likenesses" are "not sufficient so that the truth of faith may be comprehended as being understood demonstratively." Whatever weak arguments we can come up with along these lines, there should be "no presumption to comprehend or demonstrate."⁴² In the final analysis, Aquinas stated, "we believe [these truths] only through the revelation of God."⁴³ In the *Summa theologiae* Aquinas reiterates that *sacra doctrina* "does not argue in proof of its principles, which are the articles of faith."⁴⁴ Again, we believe these "on the authority of those to whom the revelation has been made." This, and nothing else, constitutes the "incontrovertible proof" of the truths of faith.⁴⁵ And in the *Super Boetium* the same point is made: "Human reasoning may be spoken of in two ways: in one way, it may be regarded as demonstrative, forcing the intellect to believe; and this kind of reasoning cannot be possessed in regard to those truths which are of faith."⁴⁶ In fact, Aquinas went so far as to state that in this present life these truths of faith "are neither

⁴⁰ *ST* 1, q. 32, a. 1 ad 2.

⁴¹ *ST* 2-1, q. 53, a. 1; 2-2, q. 48, a. 1; q. 51, a. 2 ad 3; q. 51, a. 4 ad 2; 3, q. 9, a. 4 ad 2.

⁴² *Summa contra gentiles* (hereafter cited as *SCG*) 1, chap. 8.1.

⁴³ *SCG* 1, chap. 9.2.

⁴⁴ *ST* 1, q. 1, a. 8.

⁴⁵ *ST* 1, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.

⁴⁶ *Super Boetium*, q. 2, a. 1, ad 5

known nor understood by any one.”⁴⁷ The truths of faith, in short, can in no way be “proven,” i.e. logically demonstrated.

Moreover, Aquinas was concerned that even attempts to “prove” them would do more harm than good. He warned that for adversaries of the faith, “the very insufficiency of these arguments would confirm them rather in their error, in giving them reason to think that we consent to the truth of faith for these poor reasons.”⁴⁸ Elsewhere, in regard to the Trinity, he explained further why the very attempt to prove (and here he means logically demonstrate) is misguided. “To dare to prove the Trinity by natural reason is to commit a double fault in faith . . .” First, it shows a misunderstanding of what faith is, for, by definition, matters of faith extend beyond reason. And second, it is strategically wrong since unbelievers scorn such attempts.⁴⁹ Not only are such “proofs” impossible but they should not be attempted.

When Aquinas excluded demonstrative reasons for what he called the “truths of faith,” he effectively excluded them almost entirely from theology as such. It is not only the mystery of the Trinity that is “altogether a matter of faith” for which no “necessary proofs of reason” are possible.⁵⁰ Nor is it merely the eucharistic mystery which, he argued, is “not only beyond reason but also contrary to the senses.”⁵¹ This exclusion of demonstrative reason also extends to such fundamentals as the creation of the world by God. Even this, Aquinas reasoned, is held “by faith alone.” An attempt to demonstrate this would be ludicrous: in Aquinas’s words, such an attempt would “give occasion to unbelievers to laugh.”⁵² So, from creation to the entire economy of salvation to eschatology—none of this can in the strict sense be proven.

None of these matters possess any internal necessity. They are as they are only because God has willed them to be such, and in God’s will there is no internal necessity. The whole body of *sacra doctrina* is made up of truths radically contingent on God’s will. Hence strict logical demonstration is out of the question. As Aquinas puts it at the opening of the *Tertia pars*, “What depends on the will of God alone and to which the creature has no right, can be known to us only in the measure in which it is taught in sacred Scripture, which allows us to know the will of God.”⁵³ Jean-Pierre Torrell, one of Aquinas’s best modern interpreters, offers as an admirable summation: “[Aquinas] knew very well that

⁴⁷ Ibid. q. 3, a. 1, c.

⁴⁹ *ST* 1, q. 32, a. 1.

⁵¹ *In IV Sent.*, d. 10, q. 1, a. 1.

⁵² *ST* 1, q. 46, a. 2. Jean-Pierre Torrell, in his otherwise magnificent book on Aquinas, has argued that Thomas had a sense of humor (*Saint Thomas Aquinas: His Person and His Work* [Washington: Catholic University of America, 1996; first published in 1993] 281). The single example he cites is not in the least humorous. This is my only significant disagreement with Torrell. In my many years of reading Aquinas I have yet to find a joke!

⁵³ *ST* 3, q. 1, a. 3.

⁴⁸ *SCG* I, chap. 9. 2.

⁵⁰ *Super Boetium*, q. 1, a. 4 c & ad 7.

theology is not a science of the necessary, in the way that Aristotle conceived it, but an organization of contingent data received from revelation upon which the theologian labors to find the arrangement of God's design."⁵⁴

What, according to Aquinas, can be logically proven? Is there any place in his theology for the demonstrative syllogism? Interpreters such as Chenu and Torrell agree that this is rare.⁵⁵ Yet Aquinas did hold that certain things about God could be known by natural reason. He held this view not only because of his conviction that effects bear within them traces of their causes, but also because Paul declares that this is so in Romans 1:19–20.⁵⁶ And on this, incidentally, Luther agreed. The human mind, Aquinas held, can know those things that necessarily belong to God. These necessary truths are the "preambles of faith."⁵⁷

Perhaps the best-known instances of syllogistic demonstration in Aquinas are his arguments for the existence of God. However, even here, interpreters have questioned whether these are proofs in the strict sense. Otto Hermann Pesch, for instance, points out that each argument concludes with a statement about the Christian God: "and this everyone understands to be God"; "to which everyone gives the name of God"; "this all men speak of as God"; "and this we call God"; "and this being we call God."⁵⁸ This "everyone" or "we" of these statements refers to Christians, those who already believe not merely in a metaphysical principle but in a saving God. The proofs for God, Pesch argues, are "in no way to be understood as a rational ascent to a previously unknown God, but rather as reason's ultimate reaching toward a God who is already known in faith."⁵⁹ Thus these arguments, which at first sight seem to be pure demonstrative syllogisms, already presuppose faith and function within faith. If Pesch is right about this, and I think he is, then nowhere in Aquinas's theology do we find a single proof in the strict sense.

If we agree with Pesch, then we will share his conviction that there is no such thing as autonomous reason in Aquinas.⁶⁰ Autonomous reason is basically a product of the Enlightenment; to read it back into Aquinas is anachronistic. Until recently the modern discussion of the relation of faith and reason in Aquinas, of natural and revealed theology, largely succumbed to this error. The problem of the relation of faith and autonomous reason is a modern problem which Aquinas does not address. Reason for Aquinas is never autonomous; it is always reason within faith. Thus the act of reason that is proof takes place

⁵⁴ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas* 156.

⁵⁵ Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* 179; Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas* 266.

⁵⁶ *ST* 1, q. 12, a. 12.

⁵⁸ *ST* 1, q. 2, a. 3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 127.

⁵⁷ *Super Boetium*, q. 2, a. 3.

⁵⁹ Pesch, *Thomas von Aquin* 132.

within faith. Proof for Aquinas is never proof in the strict sense. Even those syllogisms that he called “demonstrative” function within the horizon of faith.

This is what Aquinas meant when he wrote in *Super Boetium* that philosophy should be subject to the measure of faith.⁶¹ If it is, its use in theology is legitimate: “those who use philosophical doctrines in *sacra doctrina* in such a way as to subject them to the service of faith, do not mix water with wine, but change water into wine.”⁶² Faith should be the measure of philosophy and not vice versa. For if philosophy is made the measure of theology, this is to make creaturely truths the measure of the truths of faith. To do this, Aquinas stated, is ultimately idolatry.⁶³

All of this implies that philosophy is not the starting point for theology. This may be a surprise to those who have read the numerous textbooks on Aquinas’s thought that begin with metaphysics or epistemology, and to the seminarians who began their study with philosophy and ended with theology. This tradition may have some pedagogical benefits, and the *Summa theologiae*, which approaches theology with the needs of learners in view, is heavily philosophical in its first part. Nevertheless, the inner logic of Aquinas’s theological system does not take philosophy as its point of departure. As Aquinas puts it, “philosophical doctrine ought not to be used as if it had first place, as if on account of it one believed by faith.”⁶⁴ As Aquinas made clear, even in the opening pages of the *Summa theologiae*, the starting point of *sacra doctrina* is *sacra pagina*, not philosophy.⁶⁵

To return to syllogistic reason, the crucial point is, as Chenu argued, that it functions “within the mystery.”⁶⁶ Thus, for Aquinas, *sacra doctrina* accepts the articles of faith as its first principles and goes on from there to prove something else.⁶⁷ But the word “prove” here should not be taken in the strict sense. As an example of what he means, he refers to the way in which Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 proves the general resurrection from the Resurrection of Christ. Even if we concede that Paul’s argument can be reduced to a syllogism of some sort, we can see that it is not a demonstrative syllogism. It is not even really what Aquinas called a “dialectical syllogism,” yielding probable knowledge. As Aquinas was fully aware, the argument does no more than indicate that the conclusion is not utterly irrational. The syllogism here clarifies and to some extent makes intelligible, teases out the implicit, and really nothing more.

This is the way syllogisms most often function in Aquinas. As Chenu

⁶¹ *Super Boetium*, q. 2, a. 3 c.

⁶² *Super Boetium*, q. 2, a. 3 ad 5.

⁶³ *In Epistolam ad Colossenses* 2, lect. 2 (Marietti, II, 143 f.). This is a remarkable parallel to Luther’s protest against philosophy.

⁶⁴ *Super Boetium*, q. 2, a. 3 ad 1.

⁶⁵ *ST* 1, q. 1.

⁶⁶ Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* 180 n.

⁶⁷ *ST* 1, q. 1, a. 8.

stated, such syllogisms are “purely expository in character.”⁶⁸ They do not demonstrate but they put on display an intelligibility that is already there. Torrell goes even further, writing that Aquinas’s theology is not demonstrative but rather “ostensive,” uncovering the deeper meaning of the Christian faith.⁶⁹ And Torrell adds, it is exhortative and pastoral: in other words, Aquinas is ultimately interested in the meaning of the Christian faith *for us*.

Thus, though one finds a good number of such syllogistic arguments in Thomas, a far more common type of argument is the “argument from convenience.”⁷⁰ These too Aquinas at times called proofs.⁷¹ But he fully realized that they are far removed from any kind of logical demonstration. They are arguments that uncover coherence, internal suitability, and a measure of intelligibility. They are essentially contemplation on the mystery of faith which, as Chenu notes, is directed toward “discovering, ordering, dressing up these internal suitabilities.” This, far more than demonstrative syllogizing, is the true core of Aquinas’s work, and to relegate it to a secondary status is to distort Aquinas. In Chenu’s words, “Anyone scamping all this and pursuing in subtle distinctions what is rational in the mysteries, would be proceeding in a direction opposed to true theology as well as to the real work accomplished by Saint Thomas in his thinking.”⁷² And Aristotle, Chenu points out, would have had contempt for arguments from convenience.

With this in mind, we return to Luther’s critique. We recall that he drew the sharpest contrast between his theology and a theology of glory whose hallmark is its use of syllogistic reason. Can we affirm that Aquinas was a theologian of glory? What many followers have done with his thought might suggest that. And this is certainly what led Luther to think so. But a closer look at Aquinas himself invalidates this label. For we cannot say that syllogistic proof in the strict sense plays a major role in his thought. This prime characteristic of a theology of glory is, in fact, severely limited.

But is there room in Aquinas’s theology for paradox—the mode of expression typical and indispensable to a “theology of the cross”?

THE ROLE OF PARADOX IN AQUINAS

It may seem at first sight that the Scholastic method is fundamentally inimical to paradox. For one of its paramount goals was a con-

⁶⁸ Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* 180.

⁶⁹ Torrell, *Thomas Aquinas* 266.

⁷⁰ On these, see most recently G. Narcisse, “Les enjeux épistémologiques de l’argument de convenance selon saint Thomas d’Aquin,” in Carlos-Josaphat Pinto de Oliveira, ed., *Ordo sapientiae et amoris: Image et message de saint Thomas d’Aquin à travers les récentes études historiques, herméneutiques et doctrinales: Hommage au Professeur Jean-Pierre Torrell O.P. à l’occasion de son 65e anniversaire* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1993) 143–67.

⁷¹ E. g. *ST* 1, q. 32, a. 1 ad 2.

⁷² Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* 182.

ceptual clarity that could not tolerate ambiguity at any point. This goal eventually developed into an obsession in neo-Scholasticism, with the result that the theologian's awareness of working in the presence of mystery evaporated. Clearly there could be little room for paradox in such a theology.⁷³ But was this true of Aquinas himself?

It should be noticed that the Scholastic method took as its most basic task the resolution of contradictions. As it developed in the wake of Abelard, the simultaneous *sic et non* of authorities to a question was the starting point. In Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* and even more so in his *Quaestiones disputatae*, this development reached its highest level of sophistication. Each article sets up the theological problematic in the initial arguments and the *sed contra*—a yes and no. The mind, ill at ease in the presence of this contradiction, then works to resolve it in the response. The resolution it achieves is more often than not another yes and no which can be held simultaneously because of a distinction Aquinas makes in his response. Still, the fact remains that Aquinas's answer to most questions is a simultaneous yes and no. Whenever this is the case, we are in the proximity of paradox. For is paradox not an apparent contradiction that the mind suspects is not utter nonsense but points in fact to a hidden truth? The Scholastic method then, at least in Aquinas's hands, is not as utterly inimical to paradox as might at first appear.

Aside from these formal considerations, paradox has a more proper function in Aquinas's thought since it finds a place in his very theological method. For in every part of his "discourse on method" that I have already mentioned, we find his crucial "apophatic declaration" which is itself paradoxical. This is present in the *Summa contra gentiles* where Aquinas wrote: "Now, in considering the divine substance, we should make use of the method of remotion [*via remotionis*]. For, by its immensity, the divine substance surpasses every form that our intellect reaches. Thus we are unable to apprehend it by knowing what it is. Yet we are able to have some knowledge of it by knowing what it is not."⁷⁴ And this is also present in the *Summa theologiae*: ". . . what [God] is not, is clearer to us than what he is . . . [B]ecause we cannot know what God is, but rather what he is not, we have no means for considering how God is, but rather how he is not."⁷⁵ Finally the apophatic principle is present in his *Super Boetium*, where Aquinas states that "the mind is found to be most perfectly in possession of knowledge of God when it is recognized that his essence is above everything that the mind is capable of apprehending in this life."⁷⁶ Aquinas's sharpest formulation of this apophatic principle is found in his disputed ques-

⁷³ Josef Pieper argued that this criticism was justified in the case of neo-Scholastic Thomists (*The Silence of St. Thomas* [New York: Pantheon, 1957] 37).

⁷⁴ *SCG* I, chap. 14. 2.

⁷⁵ *ST* 1, q. 1, a. 9 ad 3; *ST* 1, q. 3 prol.

⁷⁶ *Super Boetium*, q. 1, a. 2 ad 1.

tion *De potentia*, where he declared that "humanity's ultimate knowledge of God is to know that we know nothing of God."⁷⁷ The paradoxical character of the apophatic declaration becomes obvious. It stands at the beginning of the entire theological enterprise. It means that theology as such, in its most proper sense, is paradoxical. All the arduous labor of reasoning, arguing, and clarifying that follows does not invalidate this. In the end, the mind falters in the face of absolute mystery, and theology falls silent.

A growing realization of this perhaps explains why Aquinas put down his pen for the last time on December 6, 1273, and pronounced his life's work to be "straw" as has been suggested by some interpreters.⁷⁸ But I believe Torrell is correct to reserve judgment in that matter.⁷⁹ Since we have no explanation from Aquinas as to why he put down the pen, scholars would do well to be cautious here. Yet it seems fair to say that Aquinas never lost sight of the paradox of the *via negativa*.

Aquinas also held that we can say something about God by analogy. I will not enter into the discussion about Aquinas's doctrine of analogy or the debate whether in fact he had such a doctrine.⁸⁰ Aquinas certainly held that names or attributes are applied to God analogously. This means that they are neither univocal nor equivocal, but somewhere between the two. As he puts it, "For in analogies the idea is not, as it is in univocals, one and the same, yet it is not totally diverse as in equivocals; but a term that is thus used in a multiple sense signifies various proportions to some one thing."⁸¹ Thus when we say that God is powerful, we mean that God's power is somewhat like and yet also unlike the power that we perceive in the world. The analogous statement is thus at best a half-truth: it has a positive and a negative aspect, and both must be held together.

Alister McGrath believes that Luther's theology of the cross is precisely "a programmatic critique of the analogical nature of theological language."⁸² It is this, McGrath argues, because in the theology of the cross, God is understood to reveal (and simultaneously hide) himself under his opposite. Thus God's power is revealed above all in the cross as weakness. But is this really a critique of what Aquinas means by analogical predication? Is it not rather a way of stressing the negative aspect of the analogy, i.e. that God's power is unlike what we experi-

⁷⁷ *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 5 ad 14. Karl Rahner brilliantly analyzed this in his essay "Thomas Aquinas on the Incomprehensibility of God," *Journal of Religion* 58 (1978) supplement, S107-S125.

⁷⁸ E.g., G. M. Pizzuti, "Per una interpretazione storicizzata di Tommaso d'Aquino: Senso e limite di una prospettiva," *Sapienza* 29 (1976) 429-64.

⁷⁹ Torrell, *Thomas Aquinas* 294.

⁸⁰ See David B. Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1979) 55.

⁸¹ *ST* 1, q. 13, a. 5.

⁸² McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* 159.

ence as power in the world? Yet this stress does not absolutely exclude the positive, for Luther, as McGrath agrees, “readily concedes that man has a natural knowledge of God.”⁸³ This knowledge is stated analogically. Rather than seeing the theology of the cross as a radical critique of analogical predication, I suggest we should see it as a critique of analogical language that forgets, obscures, and leaves behind its own negative aspect, and thereby tends toward the univocal. Luther’s point is that as we move through the various concentric circles of God’s revelation to its very heart and core, our language becomes less univocal and thus more equivocal. That is why Luther was convinced that when we arrive at the cross we must confess that God’s power is revealed in weakness. This knowledge must condition all the rest, or as Luther wrote, “The cross proves [*probat*] all things.”⁸⁴ Luther’s emphasis differs from that of Aquinas, but one cannot conclude that his theology of the cross is a radical critique of Aquinas’s teaching on analogy.

Furthermore, if for Aquinas there is no such thing as autonomous reason, then analogical predication is not a philosophical device that enables us to construct a natural theology independent of faith. As Chenu put it, “the *analogia entis* does its work at the heart of an *analogia fidei*. Faith can put to her use all the techniques of reason, but she subjects the objects and tools of it to a purifying process such as meets the demands of the mystics. It is actually in the climate of mystery that these analyses unfold, and therein success is achieved through negation.”⁸⁵ Analogy gave Aquinas a way to speak about God, but the divine mystery is respected insofar as analogy is simultaneous affirmation and denial, and especially insofar as it functions under the umbrella of the more fundamental apophatic declaration. For it is this *via negativa* that, Aquinas stated, expresses “the ultimate” knowledge of God.⁸⁶

The foregoing comments on the function of paradox in Aquinas’s theological method lead us now to an examination of the way he handles paradoxes in the concrete subject matter of theology. It can immediately be conceded that Aquinas’s mind was not the type that revels in paradox, as was the case of Luther and Kierkegaard. Nevertheless paradoxes were unavoidable for him, as for every theologian, since Scripture itself abounds in paradoxical language. How specifically does Aquinas deal with it?

As a first example, we can take the familiar Pauline paradox of 2 Corinthians 12:9: “for my power is made perfect in weakness.” In two

⁸³ Ibid. 161.

⁸⁴ WA 5, 179, 31.

⁸⁵ Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* 165.

⁸⁶ *De potentia* q. 7, a. 5 ad 14. If I am not mistaken, my interpretation is in fundamental continuity with the revised views of Jean-Luc Marion; on this, see Brian J. Shanley, “St. Thomas Aquinas, Onto-theology, and Marion,” *The Thomist* 60 (1996) 617–25.

passages in the *Summa theologiae* Aquinas explains that this "weakness" refers to the lower, physical and sensitive powers of the body and not to the higher powers of the soul. For the soul, fortitude, not infirmity, is commended.⁸⁷ This interpretation, we can immediately see, introduces a distinction and thereby essentially translates the paradox into a straightforward assertion.

Another example of this is the way in which Aquinas handled many of the paradoxes in Matthew. The saying "Many who are first shall be last, and the last shall be first" (Matt 19:30) is taken to be an exhortation to humility. The first shall be last because of their pride.⁸⁸ Aquinas explained the saying "These things are hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed to the little ones" (Matt 11:25) as referring to scoffers, those who are prudent and learned in the wisdom of the flesh; the "little ones" on the other hand, are the humble, the simple. If we ask why God does this, Aquinas added, "Concerning this we should not inquire into the cause, for in such things it is the will of God which is the cause."⁸⁹ The saying "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humiliates himself shall be exalted" (Matt 23:12) Aquinas interpreted as a straightforward exhortation to humility.⁹⁰ And the saying "Whoever finds his soul will lose it, and whoever loses his soul will find it" (Matt 10:39), Aquinas noted, refers to the willingness to expose oneself to physical danger for Christ's sake.⁹¹ Whatever we may think of Aquinas's exegesis here, one must admit that his explanations to some extent empty the paradoxes of their mystery, or weaken the power of these paradoxes to disrupt conventional ways of thinking. Here the paradox seems to be reduced to ordinary language and thought forms. But does not any attempt to explain a paradox do this to some extent? Which thinker, when faced with a paradox, does not attempt to explain it in some way? Even Luther put great effort into explaining, for instance, the theological paradoxes of the *Heidelberg Disputation*.

But there are also two examples of paradoxes that in Aquinas's hands are not weakened, dissolved and rationalized away. In these examples he probed, explained, clarified, but then in the end permitted the paradox to stand with all its arresting, mysterious force. The first has to do with the paradox of the Incarnation and the second with the paradox of the cross.

The Christian belief that God became human, or as Aquinas puts it, that "one and the same person is God and man" is a paradox.⁹² This is easy to overlook when one has heard it innumerable times. And it is also easy to forget this when one reads the treatise on Christology in the *Tertia pars*. Yet, though Aquinas here develops intricate technical explanations for the mode of union of the divine and human, and

⁸⁷ *ST* 1-2, q. 55, a. 3 ad 3; 2-2, q. 123, a. 1 ad 1.

⁸⁸ *Super Mattheum* 19.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 11.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 23.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 10.

⁹² *ST* 3, q. 59, a. 6 ad 3.

though he struggles mightily to make sense of the whole, the word “mystery” continually reappears throughout the treatise, reminding us that reason has its limitations. We should also note that it is not “proofs” but rather arguments from convenience which dominate here. Indeed the treatise begins with the question on “the fitness of the Incarnation.”⁹³ Thus the entire discussion is opened by dealing with the fact that to all human appearances the Incarnation was *not* fitting (or appropriate or convenient). Aquinas’s sharpest formulation of the paradoxical nature of the Incarnation comes in the question on the *communicatio idiomatum* where he takes up the meaning of such statements as “God is man,” “man is God,” “Christ as man is God,” etc.⁹⁴ When he comes to the concrete details of Christ’s life, almost everything seems to Aquinas at first sight to be unfitting. That God “chose a poor mother and a birthplace poorer still,”⁹⁵ or that “he chose to be born in the rough winter season”⁹⁶—these things are apparently inappropriate for God, paradoxical. Hence, once again, only the argument from convenience can predominate in this section. With these arguments Aquinas searches for intelligibility among the multiple paradoxes, but in the end he realizes that the mystery of the Incarnation is intractable.

This intractability becomes even more sharply into focus when Aquinas comes to comment on St. Paul’s reference to “the mystery of his [God’s] will” in Ephesians 1:9. Aquinas explains that the mystery of his will is precisely the “mystery of the Incarnation.” This, he states, is “more hidden than anything else”; it is a “sacred secret” whereby God wills “to re-establish all things in Christ.”⁹⁷ And a little further, where Paul speaks of the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (3:8), Aquinas explains: “These riches are unsearchable indeed, he [Paul] affirms, since they are as great as his mercy which can neither be understood nor analyzed.”⁹⁸ Ultimately, Aquinas confesses, understanding and analysis fail when it comes to the mystery and paradox of the incarnation. All of his attempts to explain, he realizes, result only in fragments of rationality within the larger mystery. Aquinas cannot be accused of dissolving the paradox.

The same is true in Aquinas’s treatment of the paradox of the cross. We may begin with the question in the *Summa theologiae* where he took up this issue.⁹⁹ Here, at first sight, the cross of Christ seems eminently reasonable. Aquinas argued for instance that Christ’s passion was the most suitable way of delivering the human race from sin. And he reasoned that the cross was the most appropriate way for Christ to die. But Aquinas made these arguments precisely because it seemed utterly incongruous to the human mind that the Son of God

⁹³ *ST* 3, q. 1.

⁹⁵ *ST* 3, q. 35, a. 7 ad 3.

⁹⁷ *In Epistolam ad Ephesios* 1, lect. 3.

⁹⁹ *ST* 3, q. 46.

⁹⁴ *ST* 3, q. 16.

⁹⁶ *ST* 3, q. 35, a. 8 ad 3.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 3, lect. 2.

should be executed as a common criminal. His arguments from convenience are intended to reduce this apparent incongruity but not to eliminate it.

This becomes even clearer if we look at Aquinas's treatment of the cross in his *Collationes Credo in Deum*, a series of Lenten sermons probably given in the vernacular in Naples in the last year of his life.¹⁰⁰ He begins with a ringing affirmation of the rational incomprehensibility of the mystery of the cross: "That Christ died for us remains so impenetrable that our intellect is scarcely able to comprehend it. Indeed, in no way does it fall within our understanding . . . So great is the favor and love of Christ for us, that he does more for us than we can comprehend."¹⁰¹ This opening declaration is followed by a "nevertheless." Aquinas then proceeds to bring some intelligibility to the mystery for his audience. But at the end, he returns to the essential hiddenness, to the fundamentally paradoxical nature of the subject. He exhorts his listeners: "Follow behind him who is King of Kings, Lord of Lords, in whom are found all the treasures of wisdom and who, nevertheless, on the cross, appears naked, the object of mockery, spat on, beaten, crowned with thorns, given gall and vinegar to drink, and put to death."¹⁰² Here, where Aquinas approaches the very centerpiece of *sacra doctrina*, and at the point where theology becomes pastoral, he begins to sound like Luther!

A final example of Aquinas's treatment of the paradox of the cross is to be found in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:17-31. This is the passage where Paul warns not to preach "with the wisdom of words" so as not to empty the cross of Christ, where he speaks of the foolishness of the cross and the weakness of God. Aquinas's exposition of this passage ought to be read in its entirety, but I can point out at least a few of its features. First, what does Paul mean by "the wisdom of words"? For Aquinas, Paul means "ornate words and reasons of human wisdom,"¹⁰³ which later in this passage Aquinas associates with the wisdom of the Gentiles, and even the Greeks.¹⁰⁴ It means, in other words, philosophical reason. This, he wrote, "is inappropriate to the teaching of faith." Why? "[T]he principal thing in the teaching of the Christian faith is the salvation accomplished through the cross of Christ . . . But whoever relies principally on the teaching of the 'wisdom of words' . . . empties the cross of Christ. Therefore to teach in the 'wisdom of words' is inappropriate to the Christian faith . . . that is, if I preach in the 'wisdom of words,' faith in the power of Christ's cross

¹⁰⁰ For details see Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas* 358; and N. Ayo, trans. and ed., *The Sermon-Conferences of St. Thomas on the Apostles' Creed* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1988).

¹⁰¹ *Collationes Credo in Deum*, chap. 6.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *In Primam Epistolam ad Corinthios* 1, lect. 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

will be done away with."¹⁰⁵ From the vantage point of philosophical reason, the cross of Christ is foolishness. It appears foolish, Aquinas states "in that preaching the cross of Christ includes what appears to be impossible according to human wisdom, namely that God should die, that omnipotence should be subjected to violent hands." To the saved, however, those who see through the eyes of faith, "these recognize God in the death of Christ on the cross. . ."¹⁰⁶ This is a scandal and foolishness to all Jews and Gentiles, Aquinas observes, until they recognize God's power and wisdom in the cross.¹⁰⁷ And this discernment of God's power and wisdom, which are hidden beneath their opposites in the cross, is the gift of faith. What follows from this is that "If human salvation does not proceed from some human excellence but from the power of God alone, humans ought not to be glorified but God."¹⁰⁸

Enough has been shown to suggest that paradox does indeed have a place in Aquinas's theology. It has a place here because Aquinas wished to be faithful to the witness of Scripture, which expresses itself frequently in paradoxical language. It also has a place in Aquinas's theology because of his fundamental intuition that theologians, no matter what they can understand and explain, work constantly, as Chenu expressed it, "in communion with mystery."¹⁰⁹ On this terrain, paradox is more agile than syllogism.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted to expose a dimension of Aquinas not often recognized by Thomists. Not surprisingly Luther did not recognize it either. Though he read more of Aquinas than he has often been given credit for, he did not grasp Aquinas any more deeply than many Thomists. Hence he could indict Aquinas as a "theologian of glory," one who reveled in syllogism and ignored paradox. Here, Luther believed, was the crux of the difference between them. But in this respect Luther was incorrect. A closer reading of Aquinas shows that he did not employ syllogistic reasoning in theology to the extent that Luther thought. Aquinas afforded paradox a far larger role than Luther realized. This is not to say that the theologies of Luther and Aquinas are wholly alike. Obviously there are vast differences. But the difference that Luther identified as the fundamental one was not as absolute as Luther thought.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* 196.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., lect. 4.