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THE LOGIC OF GENRE: THEOLOGICAL METHOD IN EAST AND WEST

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[The author examines and disputes the conventional view that differences in method in Eastern and Western Christian theology arise from disparate appropriations of logic. Borrowing a distinction from Karl Barth, she maintains that the differences are better understood as pertaining to genre. The significance of genre in theology and of the structure of theological texts in turn suggests a large area of inquiry hitherto ignored by theologians that is clearly in need of greater attention.]

FEW WOULD DISPUTE that the temper of theology from the Christian East differs dramatically from that of the West. From theologians and historians on both sides comes a stream of writings pointing to material differences—in the doctrine of God or the doctrine of sanctification, for example—that supposedly demonstrate the irreconcilability of Eastern and Western theology. Other students of East-West relations, while perhaps acknowledging substantive differences, insist that the real divide cuts much deeper. Even if the material positions could somehow be reconciled, they say, we would still confront grave differences of theological method. The implication that seems to lurk ominously behind this last claim is that no matter what progress may be achieved on such hoary issues as the *filioque,* the methodological problems indicate a divide so profound it could never be bridged. The assertion of methodological differences between Eastern and Western theology thus, wittingly or not, often serves to set limits to ecumenical discussion.

The first purpose of this article is to suggest that the claims of irreconcilable methodologies are unduly hasty and the limits thereby set for ecumenism falsely grounded. To illustrate the flaws in the accusations of East and West over the method of the other, I begin by examining the critique of two contributors representative of the debate, the late Illtyd Trethowan,

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O.S.B., and Christos Yannaras,[1] and then sketch a preliminary response to their claims, focusing on the work of two theologians representative of the principal strands of Eastern and Western theology, Gregory Palamas and Thomas Aquinas. My counter to the charges of methodological incompatibility is thus narrower in scope than the charges themselves. This disparity is virtually inevitable, given the lack of specificity of the claims advanced—a lack of specificity that is true of the debate as a whole. Rather than attempting to provide a response that purports to be definitive, my aim is simply to suggest an initial trajectory of inquiry and to propose a way of understanding the different tempers of Eastern and Western theology in such terms that the actual differences need not be taken as divisive. Specifically, I challenge the commonly voiced assumption that the root of the methodological divergence lies in uses of logic, and argue that it lies rather in a difference of the theological genres most characteristically employed in East and West, employing a distinction first formulated by Karl Barth. Genre analysis, I suggest, bears much promise for opening new avenues of theological reflection, avenues that lead well beyond the territory of ecumenical dialogue and that indicate new methods and issues in the interpretation of theological texts.

THE DEBATE OVER METHOD IN EAST AND WEST

Although perhaps more strident in tone than some, the writings of Trethowan and Yannaras are nevertheless characteristic of the kinds of complaints East and West lodge against each other. The history of these accusations is long and acrimonious; theological method has often been claimed as one of the chief—sometimes *the*—chief dividing lines between East and West. Specifically, the West accuses the East of irrationality, largely because of its suspicion of secular philosophy and its use of antinomy, that is, the practice of juxtaposing opposing claims. In the Orthodox view, antinomy expresses the radical transcendence of divine nature and the mystery that perpetually veils God's nature from our sight; from a Western

[1] Illtyd Trethowan, O.S.B. (1907–1993), a monk at Downside Abbey, Bath, England, theologian and translator (of Blondel and Gilson), published numerous essays in British journals, as well as several books including *Absolute Value: A Study in Christian Theism* (New York: Humanities, 1970). Christos Yannaras (b. 1935) is a Greek Orthodox lay theologian, professor of philosophy at Pantion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens. Among his translated works are *The Freedom of Morality,* trans. Elizabeth Briere, with a foreword by Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's, 1984), and *Person und Eros: Eine Gegenüberstellung der Ontologie der griechischen Kirchenväter und der Existenzphilosophie des Westens,* trans. Irene Hoening (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982).

standpoint antinomy constitutes, at best, an inadvertent self-contradiction and, at worst, deliberate obfuscation. From the Eastern perspective, the West's use of reason in theology is unreasonable: it is founded on the lack of recognition of divine mystery and transcendence. Western theology, on this Eastern reading, is a Tower of Babel enterprise that vainly strives to reach God by no more than human means. The Western defense of its use of philosophy and reason is essentially the same as its critique of Eastern method: theology is inherently the enterprise of trying to speak of God, and if that speech is not to abide by such commonsense principles as identity and noncontradiction,[2] there is no point in speaking at all. It is generic charges of this variety that become specific in the critique of Trethowan and Yannaras.

Trethowan's objections to Eastern Orthodox theological method center on charges of irrationality, an irrationality he finds in both the substance of particular doctrines in Eastern theology and in the incoherence he sees in its theological method. This incoherence is evident, in his view, in Orthodoxy's use of antinomy and the *via negativa,* which he believes closes off the possibility of rational discussion of theological loci.[3] "To say that revelation requires us to hold at the same time two contradictory propositions," he writes, "would be to say that it is meaningless."[4] He associates the paradoxes of antinomy not only with holding contradictory propositions about the same thing, but also as denying the possibility of any *genuine* knowledge of God whatsoever.[5] A prime example of the irrationality of Orthodox theology, he claims, is the Eastern distinction between God's essence and his energies. "Must we accept these paradoxes?" he asks, viewing the distinction as blatantly self-contradictory.[6]

On the other side of the dispute stands Yannaras. In his view, Western Scholasticism constitutes an effort to "secure mastery over the whole realm of accessible truth."[7] Its vigorous use of reason, he claims, sets a boundary between humanity and God, specifically between the syllogistic capacity of the subject and the incomprehensible reality of God. Eventually this boundary leads to the neglect of personal participation in the divine truth concerning God.[8] Two points are notable in Yannaras's critique: first, the

[2] The formulation of this law reverts to Aristotle (*Metaphysics* Γ.3), and someone who wanted to deny Aristotle's claim to authority would be justified in disputing it; it also reverts to commonsense, however, and on that ground is harder to dismiss.

[3] Illtyd Trethowan, "Irrationality in Theology and the Palamite Distinction," *Eastern Churches Review* 9 (1977) 19–26, at 19.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid. 20.

[6] Ibid. 21–23.

[7] Christos Yannaras, "Orthodoxy and the West," *Eastern Churches Review* 3 (1970–71) 286–300, at 287.

[8] Part of Yannaras's critique concerns what he sees as the inevitable connection

identification of the problem in Western theological method such as its ready recourse to syllogisms; and second, the connection of theological methodology with questions of humanity's relation to God, taken in the broadest possible sense. This line of reasoning runs as follows: how one goes about thinking and writing theologically determines the character of one's relationship to God, at least insofar as this can be determined from the human side. He writes that "[m]an in the Western scholastic system does not participate *personally* in the truth of the cosmos."[9]

It is notable that the critique of both sides of the methodological debate is not confined to theological method alone. The dispute over method encompasses such issues of philosophy and theological method as logic, epistemology, and the nature of theological language, and it involves questions pertaining to the doctrine of sanctification and the spiritual life, such as our capacity for union with God. Since the debate is interecclesial and framed in explicitly polemical terms, the life of the Church is also in question. Thus what is at stake in the dispute over method is both academic and something much more than academic.

The charges laid by Trethowan and Yannaras are serious, both in virtue of the degree to which each believes the theology of the other side is flawed, and in the putatively extensive effect of faulty methodology. If their charges can cut so broad a swath, however, it is at least in part because of an immediately apparent weakness, a flaw that is common in Eastern and Western appraisals of the other: their criticisms are largely unsubstantiated, and on that count, impossible to refute specifically. In the very general terms that they themselves propose, their charges already seem implausible.

The Western Critique of Eastern Method

Trethowan's critique of the East rests on three principal claims. Two concern methodology proper—the use of antinomy and the *via negativa.* One concerns what he sees as the effects of flawed method on a matter of substance—the Palamite distinction between divine essence and energies. The governing rubric of Trethowan's analysis of all three elements of Eastern theology is that they are irrational. There are some prima facie

between Scholasticism and modern technological society. The latter tries to dominate the cosmos, the former to banish God to a transcendent realm utterly beyond this. The West, he claims, eliminates ontology, which he identifies as dogma, substituting ethics for both. Even the Gothic cathedral is complicit in this sinister scheme (Yannaras, "Orthodoxy and the West" 290–91, 286, 289).

[9] Ibid. 287. This sentence is echoed by Stavros Yangazoglou, "Philosophy and Theology: The Demonstrative Method in the Theology of Saint Gregory Palamas," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 41 (1996) 1–18, esp. 17–18.

problems with this notion, which I note before passing to a more detailed examination of Trethowan's charges and their validity.

While Trethowan's critique addresses largely modern Orthodox writers, his position is rendered questionable by its ultimate reversion to the Byzantine theology that the modern writers interpret. The facts of Byzantine higher education are inconvenient for his thesis. Byzantine education at both the secondary and tertiary levels included focused study of Aristotle. While a youth of a pious family intending a career in the Church would not proceed to university study of Aristotelian metaphysics, he would be thoroughly trained in Aristotelian logic at the secondary school level.[10] The very thinkers Trethowan accuses of irrationality and illogicality, then, would have to be aware of the conventions of logic and deliberately flouting them, or not breaking the rules at all or be unaware that they were breaking the rules. The last suggestion is scarcely tenable, unless one wishes effectively to claim the complete failure of their education.

Trethowan's notion that the Orthodox appeal to antinomy and the *via negativa* somehow entails the cessation of rational reflection or discourse is cast in doubt in the second instance by the existence of a tradition of carefully argued theological treatises extending from the earliest centuries of the Church to the present day, penned by the very theologians who make use of antinomy and advocate the *via negativa:* Gregory Nazianzen, Pseudo-Dionysius (the Areopagite), Gregory Palamas, and Vladimir Lossky. Given the indisputably authoritative status of the first of these, Trethowan needs at the very least some criterion by which to distinguish admissible from inadmissible apophaticism.

Most importantly, Trethowan seems to misunderstand the function of the apophatic way in Eastern theology. As Vladimir Lossky writes, "[t]o the economy in which God reveals Himself in creating the world and in becoming incarnate, we must respond by theology, confessing the transcendent nature of the Trinity in an ascent of thought which recessively has an apophatic thrust."[11] The apophatic way is the consequent of divine transcendence, whose end is ascent to God.[12] Perhaps the strongest counter to Trethowan's suggestion of the necessary irrationality of Orthodox theological method may be seen in Pseudo-Dionysius. For the Areopagite, the end of the apophatic way is contemplation and union with God; it is attained through knowledge of the Scriptures and mediated by symbol and

[10] See John Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas,* Patristica Sorbonensia 3 (Paris: Seuil, 1959) 45–48, 190–91; and George Every, *Misunderstandings between East and West,* Ecumenical Studies in History 4 (Richmond: John Knox, 1966) 35.

[11] Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God,* ed. John H. Erickson and Thomas E. Bird (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's, 1985) 15.

[12] Ibid. 14–16.

analogy.[13] The end of theology may be adoring silence, but for the Greek Fathers as for the Latin Fathers, one does not come to such a silence through wilful ignorance of the things of God, but rather, *after* thorough meditation on and assimilation of such knowledge.

The theology of Palamas, to choose a figure whom Trethowan criticizes sharply, is certainly Dionysian. Palamas always points beyond. In his triads within his *Defense of the Holy Hesychasts* (I.3.4),[14] apophatic theology lies beyond the expressive word that employs examples and analogies, but contemplation and union lie beyond apophatic theology (II.3.35). He does not conceive of apophatic theology as an end in itself; *both* apophatic and kataphatic theology are meant to culminate in union. While there is a hierarchy of value here, the value of the bottom rung (kataphatic theology) is strongly affirmed: shortly after he has referred to Gregory Nazianzen, John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Macarius the Great, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Maximus, Palamas speaks of an analogical theology destined to elevate us (II.3.21–22). The words, the examples, analogy, the theological tradition in both its kataphatic and apophatic forms, all have their value. Indeed, Palamas explicitly points out that Moses, *after* he has seen God on Mount Horeb, still continues to teach in words (II.3.55).

Antinomy for Palamas subsists in relation to straightforwardly apophatic theology. To the "no" of apophaticism, antinomy responds with both-this-and-that. Both the apophatic and the antinomous ways speak correctly, and both can simultaneously correct because both fall short of any kind of definitive accuracy. Both are consequents of transcendence; both are consequents of the theological imperative to speak of utter mystery; both are means of acknowledging this fundamental problem of theology. Understood in its relation to apopathic theology, antinomy cannot be as Trethowan takes it to be, namely, synonymous with violation of the law of noncontradiction wherein one simultaneously holds to be true propositions that are contradictory. His complaint seems to consist, however, not so much in the inherent problem this poses as in its consequence: antinomy denies the possibility of genuine knowledge of God. In answering Trethowan, then, we are pursuing two questions: first, whether antinomy constitutes violation of the law of noncontradiction; and second, whether Eastern use of antinomy denies, either in intention or in fact, the possibility of knowledge of God.

[13] *The Divine Names,* I.1–4.

[14] *Défense des saints hésychastes: Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes,* ed. and trans. Jean Meyendorff. Etudes et documents 30 and 31 (Louvain: Spicilegium sacrum lovaniense, 1959) 2 vols. Palamas's nine treatises in defense of hesychasm are grouped into three "triads." In the following paragraphs, I follow the standard method of referring to passages from the *Triads* also used by Meyendorff.

Preliminary Response

There is no doubt that Palamas makes many statements that sound contradictory: God is participable, God is imparticipable; we have knowledge of God, God is unknowable (III.2.25; I.3.5 and III.3.13); and so on. The question is not whether such statements can be found in his work, but whether they in fact violate the law of noncontradiction, which does not stipulate that something cannot be both x and not-x, but that it cannot be x and not-x at the same time and in the same way. If one acknowledges this point and looks at Palamas's claims in context, it becomes clear that he does not violate the law of noncontradiction.

The distinction between divine essence and energies, a prime example of Eastern irrationality in Trethowan's view, is a case in point. While the idea of these fundamental oppositions in divine being may or may not accurately correspond to the reality of divine life, there is no reason to assume it necessarily forecloses the possibility of intelligible theological reflection; indeed the distinction may be read precisely as an attempt to avoid violating the law on noncontradiction. The distinction as Palamas formulates it answers the charge of self-contradiction, for it seeks to stipulate how God can be both participable and imparticipable by specifying in what respect God is the first (the energies) and in what respect the second (the essence). The distinction no more violates simplicity, as Trethowan claims,[15] than does the distinction between essence and hypostases in trinitarian theology, a paradigmatic similarity he fails to acknowledge. While the doctrine ultimately creates a paradox, it is an acknowledged paradox, not an inadvertent lapse in reasoning, and a paradox moreover formally similar to the paradoxes in the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, parallels we will examine shortly. For the moment, however, we turn our attention to the alleged irrationality of antinomy, illumining the *ratio* of Palamas's theological method by a comparison to that of Aquinas.

The inadequacy of human language to the theological task is a recurrent problem, and while the proposed solutions of East and West differ in their particulars, their essential aims clearly coincide, as a comparison of Aquinas and Palamas on theological language reveals. Palamas's way of handling this hoary theological problem differs from the acknowledged Western solution, but his goal is the same as that of the West. There is moreover a formal similarity in the means employed by both traditions. The Thomistic means of contending with the problem of the incommensurability of theological language to its object is by means of analogy, with the explicit caveat that there is always a gap between our understanding and use of our words and God in se. The Palamite way is by way of

[15] Trethowan, "Irrationality in Theology" 21.

antinomy, accompanied by frequent warnings about divine transcendence, from which the reader must infer that the superficially contradictory statements all express something true of God, as surely as all fall short of it.

The issue that underlies Aquinas's discussion of language is not the possibility of true speech about God per se, but the possibility of knowledge of God: "We can give a name to anything in as far as we can understand it" (*ST* 1, q. 13, a. 1).[16] Because God is above all that we can understand and signify in a name, Aquinas acknowledges that God can in a sense be said to have no name (1, q. 13, a. 1, ad 1). While some names of God do apply literally—namely, those that signify perfections that are properly God's, such as goodness and life (1, q. 13, a. 3)—any term predicated of both God *and* creatures must be used analogously (1, q. 13, a. 5). Human language runs up against two formidable problems in its attempt to designate God. First, God is not known to us in his nature, but only from his operations or effects (1, q. 13, a. 8). Second, because we cannot see God as considered in himself, we divide up divine nature into discrete concepts, giving a distinct name to each, and thus fundamentally misrepresent the nature which is simple (1, q. 13, a. 12). Analogy allows us to speak of God using the language we have—for which equivocal predication does not allow—and it simultaneously allows us to speak of God in a way which preserves the truth—for which univocal predication does not allow (1, q. 13, a. 5). Analogy is thus a stepping stone across the breach separating God and the farthest reach of human language, and Aquinas explicitly announces its inadequacy: names predicated substantially of God "fall short of full representation of him" (1, q. 13, a. 2). Aquinas's doctrine of analogy thus functions not only to explain how we are able to speak of God, but is also an explicit admission of the inadequacies of human language in a theological context.

We find a similar tension in the writings of Palamas. His greatest work, *Triads in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts,* is not systematically ordered and lacks any codified treatment of theological language, so we cannot go to his text and conveniently find a treatment of antinomy. What we can determine is what he regards as the use of language in the sphere with which he is concerned. First, he clearly assumes the need for theological explanation, as is evident both from his constant approving quotation of earlier theologians, and from the fact that in the *Triads* he essays a theological justification of mystical experience. If Palamas had wished to dispense with theological explanation, he would presumably have spent his time solely in contemplative prayer. He further stipulates that theology is advanced not only through words, but by the forms of reasoning and demonstration (I.3.42); these are necessary if one wishes to have knowledge and to com-

[16] *Summa theologiae* (Cambridge: Blackfriars, 1964).

municate it to others. He also affirms the need for theology to employ symbol and analogy (II.3.67, quoting Nyssa; II.3.21 and III.1.13, both in reference to Maximus).

His quarrel, then, is not with theology's standard means of discourse; rather, the question is one of the relative values of the means to that end. Palamas's chief theme, and one of the core issues in the quarrel he wages with his adversary Barlaam in the *Triads,* is that knowledge is inferior to possession (II.3.35; II.3.49; II.3.53; II.3.57). In asserting that union with God is superior to talking about God, he might be taken as disparaging theology, but for the fact that his quotations from the Fathers (as well as in the passage from I.3.42 cited above) show he assumes a use for theology. While Western theologians have generally been less concerned to make such a comparison of relative goods, those who accept the notion of mystical union would surely also accept Palamas's point. There can be no question that Aquinas would have.

Without specifying the rationale for antinomy—indeed, without explicitly acknowledging his use of antinomy as such[17]—Palamas gives some important hints as to its use in theology. It is necessary to speak of God; the prophets, the apostles, and the Fathers do so (II.3.53). Simultaneously, however, one uses negation (II.3.57). Affirmation and negation are both related to the things of this world, kataphatic theology through the use of symbols and examples, apophatic theology through the negation of those symbols and examples (I.3.4 and II.3.35). In prayer, on the other hand, the mind abandons all relation to beings and is drawn into union (II.3.35). Antinomy is for Palamas, first, no more than this recognition of the merits of both apophatic and kataphatic theology, and second, the simultaneous recognition that human language in neither its positive or negative forms approximates or effects that attainment of God afforded by union. Antinomy in a sense bridges the gap between theology and prayer, giving each its due and binding both into a whole.

While Palamas provides us with no explicit theory of language as Aquinas does, such a theory is implicit, for antinomy furnishes a means of speaking about God that contains within itself an acknowledgment of the difficulties inherent in the enterprise. At first apparently brazen in its flouting of logical convention, antinomy turns out to be so self-effacing that it blatantly declares its own inadequacy. By juxtaposing contraries, antinomy forcibly recalls the inadequacy of language in the face of utterly transcendent truth, and simultaneously, of humanity's need to speak of God, humbling though this necessity is given human inability to speak truly of God. Yet antinomy does not proclaim or assume that knowledge of God is impossible, for if it were, human speech about God would be impossible

[17] At least as far as I have been able to determine.

also, and there would be no occasion for antinomy in the first place. Antinomy gives voice to such knowledge of God as we have, in such terms as we have, declaring both the fact of knowledge and the fact of language's poverty. It is because we know God and because our knowledge impels us to speak that we are forced to the chastisement of antinomy.

Palamas's understanding of the aims and means of antinomy therefore bears some substantial resemblances to Aquinas's understanding of analogy. Both analogy and antinomy affirm that now we see in a glass darkly and yet faith obliges us to speak of God. Our speech is therefore shrouded; both analogy and antinomy are the dark speech of theology and mystical experience alike.

Eastern Critique of Western Theological Method

In turning to the Eastern assessment of Western theology, we find that Yannaras's criticisms of the logic of Western theology prove as misleading and oversimplified as Trethowan's of the East. At the core of Yannaras's quarrel with Western theology is the claim that it is rationalistic because it is syllogistic. Yannaras does not ask *whether* Western theology is syllogistic, but we might, rather than merely assuming that it is so. Yet this question immediately poses the problem of what exactly one means by *syllogistic.* One possibility is that one means explicit use of syllogism. There is indeed one instance in Western religious thought where the syllogism is used to a theological end, Leibniz's theodicy. This case proves little about a broader trend in Western theology, however, for two reasons: first, Leibniz is not generally regarded as a theologian but as a philosopher; second, he seems to be an isolated case. If by *syllogistic,* one means that a theological argument is advanced through the use of syllogisms in the classical form, Yannaras's claim is obviously untenable.

Another possibility is that one describes as syllogistic those arguments that admit of reduction to syllogism. In this case, one would be looking not only for compacted forms of the syllogism, such as enthymeme and sorites, but any argument whatsoever that someone might alternatively express as a syllogism.[18] There are two fundamental problems with this approach. First, it presents a task of insurmountable proportions: the painstaking

[18] "[Syllogistic argument refers] to any argument that either *is* a standard-form categorical syllogism or *can be reformulated* as a standard-form categorical syllogism without any loss or change of meaning" (Irving M. Copi and Carl Cohen, *Introduction to Logic,* 9th ed. [New York: Macmillan, 1994] 273). According to Jonathan Lear, Aristotle claims in the *Prior Analytics* (A23 and A25) that every deductive argument can be expressed by a series of syllogistic inferences Lear himself seems to find that claim unconvincing (*Aristotle and Logical Theory* [Cambridge. Cambridge University, 1980] 1x)

work of sifting through the vast literature of Western theology in an attempt to reduce it to syllogisms would produce, for even a single work, an exceedingly long string of brief arguments. The fact that no one has time for this labor is not a trivial point, for it already suggests that the original claim is not only undemonstrated, but is effectively unsustainable. In this instance there is good reason to appeal to the principle that the burden of proof rests on those who assert, even though this principle reverts to the kind of formal rules of argumentation to which Yannaras presumably objects. Second, there is the problem of verifiability: whether a complex prose argument has, in fact, been adequately rendered by a series of syllogisms would be difficult to determine in any conclusive fashion; and this inherent awkwardness about criteria for equivalence again suggests a flaw inherent in the original claim.

A different approach to the accusation of syllogistic reasoning in Western theology would be to bracket the question of whether Western theology is syllogistic in the second, looser sense and then investigate what is objectionable in such nonexplicit use of syllogisms. Yannaras points to two potential problems: first, syllogistic reasoning leads to a neglect of personal participation in the truth concerning God; and second, such use of reason sets up a boundary between the syllogistic capacity of the subject and the incomprehensible reality of God. A third possibility is one to which Yannaras only alludes: the Western stance constitutes "rebellion against the transcendent."[19]

Preliminary Response

Before examining these charges in their specificity, let us begin by noting a problem with the notion that is a common denominator of them all: that the West uses syllogisms in a way the East does not. If Yannaras is correct in this estimation of the problem inherent in using syllogisms in a theological argument, one would expect syllogistic reasoning to be entirely absent in the East. It is not. As Stavros Yangazoglou points out, the East in general and Palamas in particular do not regard syllogistic reasoning per se as problematic[20] except when it departs from principles that are merely probable (as opposed to principles that are derived from Scripture or tra-

[19] Yannaras, "Orthodoxy and the West" 289.

[20] Yangazoglou, "Philosophy and Theology" 8–9. Indeed, on his account, Palamas takes quite a sanguine view of syllogistic reasoning of a certain kind. Yangazoglou relies on works of Palamas other than those examined here, and is not fully consistent in providing references for the claims he makes about Palamas's views (ibid. 8–12). For a qualified assertion in favor of the syllogism by Palamas which Yangazoglou does not document, see ibid. 13.

dition),[21] or when it attempts to reason about the divine essence.[22] Reasoning about "things surrounding the divine essence," that is, the "natural characteristics and the hypostatic attributes, which are caused"[23] is apparently acceptable. The most fundamental objection to the syllogism, therefore, seems to be the possibility of its abuse as an aid to speculation about the sheerly transcendent, rather than its legitimate use as an aid to clarification.

Thus, connected to the specific charge about syllogisms is a broader objection to the attempt to employ reason in the ascent to God. In this regard, the methodological objection of the East to the West is to the use of philosophy in theology proper, that is, the doctrine of God. Yangazoglou links such use of philosophy to "Western scholasticism,"[24] although, once again, there is no attempt at documentation of this claim. Given that Yangazoglou explicitly acknowledges the origin in "Greek thought" of such key theological terms as nature, essence, hypostasis and person,[25] it is not clear to what use Aquinas, for example, is putting philosophy that exceeds its employment in Greek theology. Categories such as matter and form or genus and species are enlisted as conceptualities that explicate the biblical notion of God's uniqueness and distinction from the created order. In these instances, as in his theology generally, Aquinas enlists philosophy as a heuristic device to explicate fundamental Christian belief, rather than to add new beliefs to the Christian repertoire. If his method is syllogistic, it is so in a precisely Aristotelian sense, for Aristotle did not understand the syllogism as a means of reaching new conclusions, but only as a means of clarification.[26] To the extent that Aquinas's theology is syllogistic in the Aristotelian sense, it cannot represent an intellectual rebellion against transcendence.

[21] Yangazoglou, "Philosophy and Theology" 9. See also Frederick W. Norris's discussion of Nazianzen's attitude to formal logic in the *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity,* ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1990) 399. P. F. Strawson expresses well what a theologian might find worrisome about such reasoning: "A deductive argument is a sort of threat, which takes the form: if you accept these premises as true, then you must accept this conclusion as true as well, on pain of self-contradiction" (*Introduction to Logical Theory* [London: Methuen, 1952] 2).

[22] Yangazoglou, "Philosophy and Theology" 10

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid. 14 and 16.

[25] Ibid. 16.

[26] "[Aristotle] always understood his syllogistic as a method of looking for right premises, not of drawing new conclusions" (Ernest Kapp, *Greek Foundations of Traditional Logic,* Columbia Studies in Philosophy 5 [New York: Columbia University, 1942] 80; see also 72). It was Cicero who thought the syllogism capable of expanding knowledge and demonstrating something hitherto unperceived (ibid. 74).

If Aquinas's use of reason is consonant with what the East acknowledges as legitimate, what of Yannaras's claim that Western theology advocates or fosters neglect of personal participation in the truth concerning God? Let us again take Aquinas as our case in point. The starting point of his discussion of knowledge of God is simply to assert that such knowledge is possible. It is so because our intellect's fulfillment, beatitude, must consist in God (*ST* 1, q. 12, a. 1), and if we could not know God, we would be unable to attain our intended end. Beatitude, in turn, is there equated with intellectual fulfillment because it is the use of our highest function, the intellect. Beatitude, knowledge of God, and perfection are all equated in the Thomistic schema with attaining to God. Even from this very early stage of Aquinas's epistemology, it is clear that knowledge of God entails intimacy with the object of knowledge.

This principle becomes even clearer as Aquinas develops his doctrine of knowledge of God. He takes for granted the Platonic principle that truly to know something is to become like it (1, q. 12, a. 2). Because it does not lie in our powers to attain to God of our own accord, we know God only through God: "This [created] light is not needed as a likeness in which the essence of God may be seen, but to perfect the mind and strengthen it so that it may see God; it is not the medium *in* which God is seen, but the means *by* which he is seen" (1, q. 12, a. 5, ad 2). As truly part of the creature, the light is created, yet Aquinas makes clear that from another perspective, it is divine: "The things seen in the essence of God by those who see it are not seen through any likeness but through the essence of God itself in their minds" (1, q. 12, a. 9). It follows that the creature's intellectual power, while certainly not equatable with the essence of God, is a participated likeness of the First Intellect (ibid.); that is, knowledge of God conceived in this fashion necessarily posits personal participation in God. In addition to using the language of participation, Aquinas describes human knowledge of God as a form of union: "the created intellect cannot see the essence of God, unless God by His grace unites Himself to the created intellect (1, q. 12, a. 4), so that God becomes "the intelligible form of the intellect" (1, q. 12, a. 5). Indeed, Aquinas posits a triple participation in God as necessary if we are to know God: first, the creature's very existence is a form of participation in God; second, God becomes intelligible because of a union with the creature by grace; and third, any knowledge whatsoever results from the participation of the knower in the known (implicit in 1, q. 12, a. 4, though not explicitly stated). If human knowledge of God were not the result of participation in God, it is difficult to see how it would make us deiform; yet Aquinas asserts emphatically that it does (1, q. 12, a. 5 and 1, q. 12, a. 5, ad 3). From an Eastern perspective there are obviously some worrisome assertions in this account, notably, the claim

that it is the divine essence with which the human intellect is united and which, in beatitude, the human intellect sees.[27] The quarrel over the accessibility of the divine essence should not, nevertheless, obscure the fact that the specific claim advanced by Yannaras, that Western theological epistemology neglects personal participation in divine truth, is patently untrue.

What of Yannaras's claim that Western theology sets a boundary between the syllogistic capacity of the subject and the incomprehensible reality of God? To begin, let us note that shortly before making this claim, Yannaras quotes Aquinas on the nature of sacred doctrine, apparently intending that his charge follows logically from the quotation. This quoted passage of Aquinas asserts that sacred doctrine makes use of human reason, and although it begins with "nevertheless" (which Yannaras includes), he does not acknowledge that Aquinas is allowing reason a role that is much less than primary. Yet Yannaras does not bother either to quote or to take into account the context of the passage he cites. Far from asserting that reason obtains for us knowledge of God, this article (1, q. 1, a. 8) affirms the primacy of *revelation,* precisely because God so exceeds the human intellect that we could never attain to him without him. "In thy light we see light" is very much the governing rubric of Aquinas's methodological prolegomenon in this first article of the larger *Summa,* as well as of his theological epistemology. The role he grants to reason is purely clarificatory; it implies no more than that we use our minds in interpreting revelation, a point no patristic or Byzantine exegete would deny.

The intellect does not, therefore, set a boundary between humanity and God in the Thomistic epistemology; quite to the contrary, as the seat of the image of God, the intellect provides the point of connection between God and humankind. This connection is, furthermore, explicitly described by Aquinas as humanity's participation in God and union with God. This union and participation does not come about, as Yannaras claims, because of the use of reason, the clarification of divine truths, individual mastery of truth, or the use of syllogisms. It comes about through God's self-disclosure in Scripture and through God's gift of light. Without this gift of self, there can be no theology—a point Aquinas himself makes, and precisely in the question from which Yannaras quotes.

Aquinas's epistemology is explicit regarding participation, but his claim that knowledge of God can come only from God is affirmed by the vast majority of theologians in the West. Before the Enlightenment, no major Western theologian claimed that one could know God through reason

[27] Eastern objections on this point fail to take into account that, because Aquinas does not distinguish between divine essence and energies, seeing God's essence implies no more than seeing God.

alone, and after it, that view has been no more than a minority opinion. Knowledge of God comes, for the Reformers, the medievals, and the Fathers, through Scripture, at least principally, and sometimes solely.[28] While some have insisted we can know of God's existence and infer certain divine attributes through the application of reason alone, few Christian theologians in the West would regard such knowledge as providing an adequate picture of God. We know God because of God's desire that we know him; and conversely, it is only at God's good pleasure that we know him. If there is a potential epistemological barrier between God and humanity, it is not one erected by human beings, but one determined by the difference and disparity between the Uncreated and the created. This divide is also affirmed by all the major patristic and Byzantine theologians. For Aquinas, Scripture, as God-given, is alone the incontrovertible guide to the things of God (1, q. 1, a. 8), with tradition supplying only probable evidence (1, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2), and reason serving only as an adjunct. And because his theology is so firmly rooted in Scripture, he is no more susceptible to Yangazoglou's critique of the West's use of philosophy than he is to Yannaras's charges regarding the West's use of syllogisms and denial of participation. If Aquinas reasons syllogistically at all, he does so not speculatively, but in the way Yangazoglou regards as legitimate and in the spirit of Palamas—from the data of revelation.

Against the claim that humanity does not participate in the truth of the cosmos in Western theology, we may juxtapose other parts of Aquinas's theology, as well: the treatise on virtues in the *Summa theologiae* (1–2, qq. 55–67; 2–2, qq. 1–170), the treatment of such issues as prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and justice, all of which follow from the conviction that human existence in its totality lies under the sign of grace. These, together with Aquinas's epistemology, suggest that Yannaras's characterization of Western theology is untenable, at least to the extent that Aquinas is representative of it. The character of Western theology is precisely the opposite of what Yannaras maintains, for it seeks the very end he claims it ignores: the union of God and humanity through contemplation of divine truth.

The methodological critique of the West, exemplified by Yannaras, is no more apt than the West's critique of the East exemplified by Trethowan. It fails both for lack of evidence and because there is significant evidence that counts against it. The objection to syllogism misses its mark because prolonged searching would yield very few uses of syllogism in either medieval or later Western theology, and certainly not syllogism used to establish doctrine that is unavailable in the pages of Scripture or the Fathers. Western theology indeed often begins from a point of biblical or patristic doc-

[28] It is only with Trent that tradition is accorded an authority equal to that of Scripture (Session IV, Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures).

trine and goes on to ask what this indicates about God or humanity or our relation to God; this extension, however implies not the rejection of biblical or patristic data, but precisely a meditation on the fullness of their significance that might be termed contemplative. Like Trethowan, Yannaras would be hard-pressed to explain how the extensions of doctrine he criticizes differ fundamentally from those of the Fathers, whether patristic or Byzantine.

The Patristic Common Ground

Although Trethowan and Yannaras appear in this debate on opposing sides, their views in fact reflect a single, common insight: that the methodological difference between East and West amounts in large part to differing uses of logic. The complaints of each side against the other are determined by what one regards as appropriate uses of logic. In the East's view, the West's problem lies in overuse; as the West sees it, Eastern theology falters for lack of use. At first glance, then, we have an irresoluble problem deriving from incompatible assessments of how much logic is enough. Perhaps the best way to address this dispute is to appeal to the practice of earlier theology, which both sides acknowledge as authoritative.

Let us use a doctrine uncontested in both East and West as a benchmark: the Cappadocian statement of the mystery of the Trinity (we might equally well use the Chalcedonian decree on Christology). We refer to two elements of the Cappadocian settlement: the means by which it articulates a solution to an apparent conundrum and its intention in doing so. The problem with which the Cappadocian Fathers wrestled was the legacy of the biblical description of God: God is one, but the Father, Son, and Spirit are all distinct and not simply different names for the one God. The problem, then, is of a logical contradiction: the same thing cannot be both one and three. That the Cappadocians chose to seek some sort of resolution to this problem in itself indicates that they were not happy simply to label it a contradiction reflecting the inherent impossibility of any true or coherent speech about God. Furthermore, their solution was not drawn from biblical categories, but represented a significant advance beyond the theology developed before them, drawing from the philosophical notions of essence, hypostasis and person (*prosopon*). The Cappadocians seem to have felt, therefore, not only that apparent logical contradictions demand at least an attempt at resolution or explanation, but that in trying to understand more fully the things of God, one might make use of those insights, categories, and terms that seemed helpful, whatever their provenance. Nevertheless, secular thought forms are only an adjunct to theology, and the Cappadocians hold fast to a set of theological data that a secular logician would have

abandoned long before.[29] Maligned though the inquiry after intention is, we can safely say that the means used by the Cappadocians to articulate the Christian understanding of God indicate they neither viewed logical contradictions as inevitable or desirable in Christian theology, nor secular conceptualities as necessarily harmful to it. In a very real sense, the Cappadocian doctrine of the Trinity arises from what we might anachronistically term an Anselmian impulse, to embrace with the mind that faith to which the will has assented.

Taking the Cappadocian trinitarian theology as a benchmark we can measure subsequent Eastern and Western theological developments, their alleged irrationality and hyperrationality. If we compare fourth-century trinitarian doctrine with the later codified distinction between essence and energies, we find little difference in conformity to accepted codes of logicality. The essence-energies distinction asserts that God's being in se is distinct, although inseparable, from God's working ad extra. The alleged problem is how divine unity and simplicity can be maintained in the face of such a distinction. But those who would raise this point apparently fail to notice that precisely the same objection can be lodged against classical trinitarian doctrine, if one fails to take seriously what have been called the grammatical rules governing the use of doctrine, but which I will term rubrics.[30] In the case of the Trinity, the rubric states that the distinctiveness of the Three is not to be taken as any denial of unity. There are two ways of looking at this principle. The first perspective would be to say it shows that at the heart of the Christian doctrine of God lies a contradiction that cannot, indeed must not, be resolved: the rubric itself acknowledges the appropriateness of speaking of God as both one and three. The other perspective appeals to a kind of balancing mechanism of the opposing tendencies at the heart of the doctrine, and their function in regulating one another. According to this perspective, we are to understand God as one, but not in any way that would exclude the possibility of three distinct persons; likewise, we are to understand the three Persons as distinct, but not in any way that compromises divine unity. Similarly, the rubric of the essence-energies distinction asserts that God is participable in one respect, imparticipable in another, but that the division implied by such a statement should not be taken as compromising divine simplicity. The distinction tells us we are to understand God both as freely self-implicated in his creation, and as utterly transcending it, but that the assertion of these qualities is not

[29] For an account of the complexity of the Cappadocians' attitudes toward philosophy, see Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and Background* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 101–5.

[30] See George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984) esp. 18–19 and 79–84.

to be taken as implying division within, or multiplication of, divine being. A formally similar argument might be made with respect to the Christology of the Chalcedonian decree.[31]

From this perspective of theological rubrics and their function, later Western doctrine begins to look formally similar to that of the East. Just as the essence-energies distinction asserts that God is apprehensible in one respect and inapprehensible in another, so the Thomistic distinction between created and uncreated beatitude, for example, deems the same beatitude created in one respect and uncreated in another (*ST,* q. 1, a. 31). In being able to view beatitude in this way, Aquinas does not intend to undermine the fundamental distinction between created and uncreated, any more than Palamas so intends when he allows that through deification the saints become uncreated by grace. Aquinas, indeed, intends to underline this ontological distinction so essential to Christian theology by affirming that what is essentially uncreated (beatitude) can become fully incorporated into the creature without destroying the creature's creatureliness. This incorporated beatitude is called created not because it undergoes any fundamental change of ontological status but because even as God draws the creature to share divine life, the creature remains a creature and does not become another divine hypostasis. Is Aquinas then not positing two beatitudes? No. He is saying that beatitude is to be considered fundamentally and primarily as uncreated, but that one is to understand its uncreated status neither as rendering union with the creature impossible nor as transmuting the creature into another divine person in virtue of the bestowal of the gift of beatitude.

While such a description of the rubrics of trinitarian doctrine, the essence-energies distinction, and the Thomistic conception of beatitude quietly rejects the idea of any fundamental logical contradiction, ultimately it does rest on the same basic assumption as antinomy: the rubrics tell us we are not to interpret the central assertions of these doctrines so that they undermine one another, but we are left in the end with a proposition that defies complete logical resolution. Such a state of affairs might well seem unsatisfactory to a secular logician, but Christian theologians must either accept it or be prepared to discard the classical understandings of the Trinity and the hypostatic union in Christ.[32] In accepting it, however, they

[31] The Chalcedonian decree does not resolve the logical difficulties inherent in positing a single subject with two natures. It is precisely this difficulty that leads to the Monothelite controversy, and while that controversy is eventually settled at the Sixth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople III), even then the difficulties posed by Christ's having both a divine and a human *mind* are not addressed. Aquinas is one of very few theologians to address this problem, and the questions where he treats it are among the most unsatisfactory in the *Summa* (3, qq. 9–12).

[32] Rowan D. Williams is apparently prepared to entertain this idea. He chastises

accept a rule of law that applies to all—one cannot hold others to it and then claim exemption for oneself so that the tradition one cheers for is allowed leeway that others are denied.

The struggle to understand and to speak of God entails reducing the level of logical contradiction to its lowest point; the acknowledgment of divine transcendence entails the acceptance, finally, of mystery that resists fully logical resolution. The similarity of the ways in which Cappadocian trinitarian theology, Christology after Chalcedon, the Palamite essence-energies distinction, and the Thomistic conception of beatitude function indicates not only that both East and West faithfully incorporated the spirit of the Fathers into their theological method, but also that East and West do not differ significantly with respect to their application of reason to theology.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GENRE

If neither logic in itself nor logic applied to particular theological conundrums allows us to declare a divide between East and West, nevertheless, no one who reads both kinds of theology would deny a difference of temper. If there is such a broad difference between the two, one which does not lie in the use of logic, where does it lie?

A Barthian Distinction

Help in answering this question can be found in an unexpected source, unexpected at least as far as East-West dialogue is concerned, for Karl

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Palamas for philosophical lapses with far greater specificity and persuasiveness than any other Western critic ("Philosophical Structures of Palamism," *Eastern Churches Review* 9 [1977] 27–44). Since these supposed lapses concern substance metaphysics rather than logic proper, they can be answered here only very briefly. His argument turns on the incoherence of Palamas's use of the term *ousia,* which Williams claims is used by Palamas both for what Aristotle calls primary substance and for what he calls secondary substance. Aside from the question of the factual accuracy of this claim, Williams does not explain why Palamas is bound to use terminology only as Aristotle did, nor whether there is a metaphysical framework in which his usages *are* coherent. The question is not specious, for Palamas is arguably using the term as did the Fathers before him, notably the Cappadocians. Williams is scarcely troubled at the prospect of having to discard the prior tradition to be consistent with his critique of Palamas: when he accuses Palamas of operating with a metaphysical theory that is ultimately incoherent, he notes that the same holds true of the metaphysics of Nyssa, Augustine and Aquinas (ibid. 42). Ironically, if Williams is right, he is showing Palamas to be no *more* illogical than the greatest Western thinkers and in approving Trethowan's views (ibid 31 n. 34), he inadvertently undermines the latter's accusations of the East's supposed irrationality by showing the West to be equally illogical.

Barth is not generally noted for his ecumenical generosity. In the first volume of his *Church Dogmatics,* however, Barth pointed to a distinction between two types of theology, a discussion, which although brief, is illuminating for our purposes.

Barth identified two theological forms: regular and irregular dogmatics.[33] Regular dogmatics is characterized by three features: its completeness, systematization, and association with a particular school. Irregular dogmatics, on the other hand, lacks association with any school, has no particular concern for completeness, and may take the form of theses or aphorisms. In focusing on individual themes rather than the whole spectrum of theological investigation, irregular dogmatics may be described as both partial and free-ranging, addressing problems arising from the life of the Church. Because of the aphoristic forms it often takes, it can be described as fragmentary.

Thus far, and especially in light of the systematic character of his own magnum opus, it might seem that Barth's distinction was motivated by an impulse to make judgments of quality, but this is clearly not the case. Barth was not finding tactful labels for what he regarded as good and bad theology (tact, in any case, was not Barth's strong suit), nor does the term "irregular" have any pejorative sense in this context. Indeed, Barth cautioned against the overhasty disparagement or estimation of either kind of dogmatics. He refused to accord either form a more rigorously intellectual (*wissenschaftlich*) character than the other; if anything, he bent over backwards to affirm the place and contribution of irregular dogmatics. "On the whole," he wrote, "it must be admitted that in spite of its name irregular dogmatics has been the rule, and regular dogmatics the exception, in every age of the Church. It should also be noted that regular dogmatics has always had its origin in irregular dogmatics, and could never have existed without its stimulus and co-operation."[34] While Barth clearly worried about what he saw as the decline of regular dogmatics in the 20th century, he admitted that the transition from irregular to regular dogmatics had often been accompanied by a decline in the seriousness, vitality, and joyfulness of Christian insight, a decline he further linked to a loss of the intellectually rigorous character of theology.[35] For Barth, then, there was no question of choice between irregular and regular dogmatics; each is appropriate in different ways and each has its own strength. Both, it seems, are necessary to the health of the Christian theological tradition.

In seeking to use Barth's distinction as an aid to understanding the

[33] *Die kirchliche Dogmatik* I/1 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1932) 291–96; English trans., *Church Dogmatics* I/1, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936) 275–80.

[34] Ibid. 278.

[35] Ibid.

methodological differences between East and West, we must begin by being very clear that Barth's terms do not permit the assignment of Eastern theology to one side of the distinction and Western theology to the other. Barth's own examples of each form indicate as much. As instances of regular dogmatics he gave from the patristic period Origen's *On First Principles,* Gregory of Nyssa's *Great Catechetical Oration,* and John Damascene's *On the Orthodox Faith;* from the Middle Ages, the entire Anselmian corpus, Peter Lombard's *Sentences,* and the great Franciscan and Dominican *Summae;* and from the Reformation, John Calvin's *Institutes.* As examples of irregular dogmatics, he gave all the works of Athanasius and Martin Luther. One cannot maintain on the basis of Barth's distinction that Eastern theology has consistently taken the form of irregular and Western theology of regular dogmatics. Indeed, if one extends the list of examples using Barth's own criteria, one would find so eminent an Orthodox theologian as Staniloae on the side of regular dogmatics (at least with respect to his systematic theology) and such influential Western theologians as Newman and Bonhoeffer on the side of irregular dogmatics. If Barth was right that the Church needs theology in both forms, then this state of affairs is exactly as it should be.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that both traditions have made use of both genres, clearly the West since the Middle Ages has tended to privilege regular dogmatics, while the East has often regarded it with suspicion, preferring the forms and method of irregular dogmatics. Even this broad tendential difference between East and West in genre cannot, however, account for the history of charges of irrationality and hyperrationality. To understand how and why the differing tempers of East and West might be understood as relating to logic, we must look beyond genre distinctions to the correlation of genre and textual structures.

The suggestion I would like to develop is twofold. The first prong simply notes that each tradition has tended strongly to favor one form of theology over the other. Irregular theology has often been overlooked in the West; this disregard has especially affected the appraisal of the place of mystical and ascetical theology in the Western tradition. The problem is not so much that the West lacks irregular theology, as that much of it tends to get ignored or undervalued by academic theologians steeped in regular dogmatics. In the Eastern tradition, on the other hand, it is regular theology that has sometimes been regarded with suspicion simply because it is systematic. From the 17th century onward a great deal of polemic against Orthodox theologians who are criticized for being unduly Western has been directed not only against the content of their theology but its systematic form of argumentation, its categories and terminology.

The failure in each tradition to appreciate the value of both kinds of theology stems not only from an overly one-sided reliance on one form and

an attendant devaluing of the other; what has equally been overlooked is that each variety of theology has its own characteristic and distinctive methods of development. Understanding and appreciating these generic forms is crucial to understanding and appreciating the theology itself.[36] The force of Barth's distinction is useful for East-West dialogue not only because each tradition fails to acknowledge one of the two forms flourishing within it as an authentic medium for the expression of its theological vision, but also because the habitual forms of the neglected genre lead commentators to misunderstand it. It is these differences of prose structure and the mechanics for developing of ideas in regular and irregular theology, I would suggest, that give the impression of differing uses of logic in East and West. Grasping the form and order of the unfamiliar genre is thus essential to accurate estimation of both regular and irregular theology and in allowing both their constructive place within the tradition. Furthermore, understanding the genre's method of exposition helps to clarify what competencies in the reader are demanded by the text. It is this question of competence, I will suggest, that may often determine whether the logic of the text is understood.

The Logic of Genre

The regularity of regular dogmatics subsists not only in its systematization, the consistency of assertions in one locus with those in another, or the coherence of the whole; it is evident also in the development of any single idea. The usual method of exposition entails the statement of an assertion and the relating of that assertion to given warrants. The order of exposition may vary, certainly; one might either first present the warrants and then show an assertion to be their logical consequent, or state the assertion, showing how it is supported by evidence. In either case, though, the reader's task consists in essentially two operations: judging the acceptability of the warrants and then ascertaining that they have been properly adduced in favor of the assertion. Theological arguments of this type we will designate "linear": one traces the warrants themselves back to predetermined criteria of acceptability (whether *sola scriptura,* or Scripture and tradition, or something else). If the warrants are deemed both acceptable and relevant, one examines the linkage between the warrants and the assertion. This kind of argument fails only if the reader deems faulty or weak the lines between the warrants and the criteria of acceptability and relevance, or the lines between the warrants and the assertion.

[36] James L. Kinneavy remarks that what counts as logical is culturally conditioned: different ethnic, and even professional, groups reason in different ways. Thus, in his view, one may speak of "ethnologic" (*A Theory of Discourse* [New York: W. W. Norton, 1971] 127–29).

This description may evoke two kinds of objection. The first would most likely be offered by Westerners, for whom the method of exposition just described seems self-evident: How else would one construct an argument? The second sort of objection would tend to come from Easterners, for whom the whole structure of that method seems to depend on logic: If this is how Western theology advances, we were right all along in maintaining its captivity to secular thought forms. The answer to the Western complaint will become clear as we describe the rhetoric of irregular dogmatics. So for the moment we will respond only to the Eastern charge that the linear argument is captive to secular logic.

I rely here on essentially the same insight that informed my discussion of the role of logic in Orthodox theology. In Western theology the lines connecting warrants to methodological criteria on the one hand and posited assertions on the other may be deemed logical insofar as the reader must be able to see how they are mutually compatible. If one starts from the *sola scriptura* principle, then warrants from tradition will not serve to establish one's point; nor will warrants derived from experience, if one accepts only Scripture and tradition. The process for determining a warrant's acceptability thus obviously relies on the application of principles of logic in a very broad sense, but in this sense Eastern theology is also logical. But without the application of any such general principles of identity and nonidentity, compatibility and noncompatibility, it is difficult to see how any intelligible discourse would be possible. The contentious issue, then, concerns not logic in this very mundane sense, but the application of formal logic for speculative purposes.

The expository method just outlined has indeed some connection to the syllogism, for as Günther Patzig notes, the Aristotelian syllogism is a single proposition of the form "If A, then B."[37] The East's charge, however, is not against such consequential reasoning (which Eastern theologians also use), but against its formalized expression in the syllogism. In describing the logic of the linear method, have we conceded what was earlier denied, that Western theology is captive to the forms and assumptions of secular logic, and specifically, the syllogism? As we have noted, the oft-maligned syllogism makes very few appearances in Western theology, a scarcity puzzling

[37] Günther Patzig, *Aristotle's Theory of the Syllogism: A Logico-philological Study of Book A of the Prior Analytics,* trans. Jonathan Barnes (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1968) 8. See also William Kneale and Martha Kneale, who claim that Aristotle's definition of a syllogism at the beginning of the *Prior Analytics* is a formula wide enough to cover almost any argument in which a conclusion is inferred from two or more premisses, and that it had already been used in that inclusive sense in the *Topics.* They state that Aristotle also has a narrower usage of the term, but this excludes arguments with a compound statement in the premiss (*The Development of Logic* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1962] 67).

in light of the frequency of Orthodox polemic against it. Moreover, as long as one is reasoning on the basis of the data of faith, the more general charge of speculation is likewise misplaced, even given disagreement over what constitute the data of faith. For instance, to object to a position based on data from experience is not to argue about the place of speculation in theological inquiry, or the relation of theology and philosophy, but to ask the specifically theological question regarding acceptable warrants for Christian doctrine.

A theological argument expressed in this linear way might admit of reduction to a set of syllogisms, yet if one takes the prose structure of the text to be significant, this possibility of reduction to syllogism is irrelevant: the ideas were expressed in this form, and not some other. Not only is it significant that the author did not choose to write in syllogisms, but the same ideas expressed in different forms cannot be taken as identical. The text takes a specific form, and it is that form with which one has to deal, and not some putatively equivalent one. Indeed, the very notion that it is desirable to convert thought into the logician's tidy structures and to judge its adequacy on that basis is a logician's assumption[38]—although logicians themselves acknowledge the limitations inherent in the form.[39]

The expository method we have identified as characteristic of regular, and therefore most modern Western, theology is thus no more formally logical, philosophical, or inappropriately rationalistic or secular than is the kind of reasoning used by the Fathers in formulating the doctrines of the Trinity or of the hypostatic union as we know them. The linear method is rational in the sense that it seeks to speak intelligibly of God as far as is possible, and to engage in sustained meditation on the faith as a whole. It is not rationalistic in the sense of claiming to render God the involuntary captive of human intellect unaided by grace, nor in the sense of regarding divine nature as transparent to those who think hard enough.

What now of the Western objection we envisaged, namely, that the

[38] Logicians may not always measure up to their own standards in this regard. Patzig notes: "There is an inconsistency between Aristotle's *doctrine* that every proof must be in syllogistic form and his *practice* of deducing the imperfect from the perfect syllogisms with the help of certain *non-syllogistic* (propositional) laws" (*Aristotle's Theory* 134).

[39] Thus Ernst Kapp: "the definition of [an Aristotelian] syllogism must be understood as follows: A syllogism is an argument in which, sentences affirming or denying one thing of another having been assumed, another sentence affirming or denying one thing of another follows of necessity by virtue of sentences assumed. This is not any longer a description of what is actually practiced in dialectical games, or even in serious thinking, or of what is actually counterfeited in pseudo-syllogisms; it is rather like a mathematical problem and strictly enough determined so that . . . a predominantly theoretical solution is secured" (*Greek Foundations of Traditional Logic* 69–70).

expository, linear method is inevitable, for how else would one argue? The alternative is the rhetorical form characteristic of irregular theology. It is no doubt an exaggeration to refer to it as *a* form. Irregular theology, precisely because it is less codified, takes a greater variety of forms and is consequently harder to reduce to a single generalized model. What I will sketch, then, is one way of developing a thought that one might commonly find in a work of irregular theology, a method that might loosely, at least, apply to any number of variations on the basic procedure.

Earlier we dubbed the method of regular theology linear; we might in contrast describe the method of irregular theology as helical.[40] The author of such a work might begin with an essential insight that the divine presence is light, say, and develop this thought by considering it from a number of different perspectives, for example, by giving a number of different senses in which it might be true: light is both that which is encountered as Other, that which one contemplates as without, and that which illuminates from within, the means by which one sees and is transformed. Perhaps the completeness of the image may be rendered only by giving senses of the image that appear conflicting: the light is both apprehensible to the physical senses and it surpasses all sense perception.

The author may furthermore give differing images for the same cognoscendum: the divine presence may be rendered as light, but also as grace or glory. Each of these images may then be developed, presenting the reader with a complex interpretative task. The differing senses of each individual image must be held together in a creative tension, and then the various images must be aligned alongside one another.[41] In this process of synthesis, a conventional consistency may not emerge, hence the assertion of antinomy's illogicality. In actual fact, I would suggest, such blatant contradiction is rather rare in texts structured in this way. Palamas, we recall, claims God is both participable and imparticipable, but not so in the same respect. The images of human participation in God, such as light, and images of divine transcendence, such as darkness, do not so much present us with mutually irreconcilable views of God as with a picture that is complex precisely because that which it seeks to describe exceeds both the mind's capacity to comprehend and the power of human language to de-

[40] Long after I had first suggested this model, I encountered another writer who uses the model of a circular stairway to account for the structure of a Western text; see M. L. del Mastro in his introduction to Walter Hilton's *The Stairway of Perfection* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1979) 11–47. As it happens, del Mastro's analogy is intended to counter none other than Illtyd Trethowan who also accused Hilton's text of being muddled.

[41] For an example of what such a study would look like, see A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (New York: Oxford University, 1999).

scribe. Texts of this variety ask the reader to live with a certain level of unresolved tension in order to expand upon the ways of describing what is essentially undescribable. Tracing the patterns of imagery within such a text may nevertheless reveal a coherence that is nowhere explicitly expressed.

This method of textual development highlights the interrelatedness of the various themes. Because they are developed simultaneously, they are effectively considered in the light of their inseparability and their interdependence. The implicit message of this kind of text is of the whole-cloth quality of theology. To speak of God, for example, implies some reflection on, or assumption about, the speaker and the speaker's relation to God. Theology may indeed still be primarily contemplation of God (as it is for the Byzantines), but it is of necessity to some extent simultaneously a meditation on the human person standing before God. Likewise, Palamas rarely gives explicit guidelines as to how one is to understand the relation of human striving and divine aid, yet in developing each theme alongside the other, he makes a tacit statement of their relation that yields a classic Eastern doctrine of synergy.

What we have called the helical method also reveals the complexity of both individual theological themes and their relation to each other. One reaches the fullness of understanding of a particular text only by its end. In the course of reading, we are given a variety of perspectives on each theme. Rather than forcing a choice between them, the text encourages us to see how something could be both one thing and another. The result is not ideational chaos, but a depth and vibrancy of tone comparable to what a painter achieves by laying color on color.

Genre and Reader Competence

The texts of irregular theology thus make demands of the reader that are assuredly different, and in one sense also more exacting, than those of regular theology. The reader's role in relation to such texts is both synthetic and comprehensive: to compare and contrast the multitude of images and perspectives, allowing both a plurality of compatible images, and the juxtaposition of contrasting ones. The task now lies not so much in judging the consistency of the argument with criteria of appropriateness and relevance, but in seeing as the author sees, in order to share the richness of the author's vision.

To describe the reader's role in this way is not to deny any evaluative function whatsoever, and certainly not to demand the suspension of one's critical faculties. The author's vision may still be deemed an inappropriate model of God or humanity or anything else. What is distinctive about the reader's role in interpreting irregular theology is that grasping the nature of

the author's case does not in the first instance entail evaluating the strength and legitimacy of the links between elements of the argument which the author has forged for us, as the expository method demands, but in comprehending the unarticulated wholeness that suffuses the discrete images and their variants.

Because the whole is complex, formed at times not only of various elements, but of apparently contradictory ones, and because the act of reading is more purely an act of interpretation, the intelligibility of the texts of irregular theology becomes more dependent on the competence of the reader. (In that respect, these texts do not differ from others, if we are to believe literary critics such as Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, and Roman Ingarden.) The strand of the Christian mystical tradition, for example, which speaks of God as unknown, could easily be interpreted as simple agnosticism by an unsuspecting reader. The reader steeped in the literature and liturgy of the Christian tradition, on the other hand, will realize that the claim being made is not that we cannot know whether any God exists, but that the God revealed in Scripture and proclaimed in the tradition so far transcends us that we cannot claim him as one item of human knowledge among others, or even claim to know him as we know other persons. The classic texts of the mystical tradition, however, rarely state such assumptions boldly; they presume that readers are implicitly aware of them. Readers who do not bring such awareness to a text will badly misapprehend its structure and coherence.

Because of their distinctive rhetorical pattern, and because of the formation in a tradition that they generally assume, the texts of irregular theology require competencies in the reader that differ radically from those required by regular theology. Western readers whose training and scholarship have been undertaken almost wholly in connection with regular theology are thus less well prepared to understand these texts; and the charges of illogicality, irrationality, and incoherence, we may surmise, may often stem from this misunderstanding. Conversely, once genre distinctions have been understood and accepted, the way is opened to understanding the texts of irregular theology on their own terms.

In addition to encouraging comprehension of an unfamiliar variety of theology, genre analysis may also serve to permit a fuller appreciation of texts of the more familiar one by fostering habits of reading that enable the reader to see new patterns in regular theology. I have argued that the consistency and coherence of irregular theology becomes more apparent when analyzed in terms of its patterns of imagery. Another, slightly more provocative, way of stating the same point would be to say that understanding its native forms brings out the regularity of irregular theology. Conversely, the same techniques applied to regular theology may reveal unsuspected affinities to irregular theology. Aquinas, for example, appears

to give no sustained treatment to light in that most regular of regular theologies, the *Summa theologiae,* because he devotes no single question to it. If one looks, however, for references to light scattered throughout the text, as they might appear in a work of irregular theology, one discovers a plethora of such images, indicating the readiness with which Aquinas reaches for such imagery. Only a sustained analysis of the patterns Aquinas does not make explicit could determine whether they have the same force as the images of light and illumination used by Eastern theologians, such as Palamas. By applying rhetorical strategies appropriate to irregular theology to texts from the tradition of regular theology, then, one might well find similarities between writers of the two genres that would otherwise escape notice.

The Value of Genre Analysis

The significance of genre analysis lies initially in its power to show the coherence, and therefore the meaning, of texts whose genre is unfamiliar to the reader, as well as perhaps permitting the discovery of new meanings in familiar texts. By focusing on describing *how* the logic of theological texts works, rather than assuming logical malfunction, genre criticism may quell some of the unproductive and misleading bickering over hyperlogicality and illogicality. By directing attention to genre differences, it may encourage the acceptance of both regular and irregular theology as beneficial to the health of the Christian tradition. If mutual recriminations over logic have drawn a line that seems irrevocably to separate East from West, attention to genre may provide a more accurate guide to the true nature of these differences, as well as how much each tradition has yet to learn from the other. Above all, patient and sustained genre analysis may show that the methodological incompatibility of East and West is vastly overstated, if it exists at all.

The issue at stake here is broader than the ecumenical question, however, important though that is. The question is a fundamental one about the nature of theological discourse and the technique of interpreting theological texts. If theology subsists not only in the lexis and syntax of natural language, but in the agglutinations of sentences that are texts, then those texts are tradents of theological meaning just as much as words and sentences are. Like all tradents, these texts are not neutral carriers, but are significant in themselves. Acknowledging this point does not commit one to the view that the ideas in the text are conditioned by the text and its structure, but merely stipulates that one take these textual forms into account as means by which the text signifies and acknowledge that they contribute to its meaning.

The examples considered here suggest, first, that when the structures of

theological texts are taken as tradents of its meaning and one tries to understand them on their own terms, one may find a coherence that one could not see before, and in seeing the structure of the text, may see also the logic of its ideas. When the structures of the texts themselves are taken seriously, one can no longer polemicize against their utter incoherence on the basis of a putative convertibility into other forms, the text now being deemed objectionable on the basis of the unacceptability of these other forms.

Second, the application of genre criticism to theological texts may function as a broader corrective in the practice of theology. Theologians have long been concerned to reflect upon the methodology of biblical interpretation, but have devoted scant attention to reflecting on method in the interpretation of theological texts themselves. Theology, it seems, has been treated as a discipline of ideas, and strangely disembodied ideas at that. If we grant the point, however, that theology is prosecuted in texts, then it follows that theologians must attend to texts as significant in themselves, and indeed, reflect more systematically on method in interpreting theological, and not only biblical, texts.

The significance of genre distinctions in theology, then, is both inter- and intra-ecclesial, concerned with specifically ecumenical issues and those pertaining to theological interpretation more generally. The immediate consequence of genre analysis for ecumenical dialogue is readily discernible: the silencing of at least some of the inaccurate polemic. The significance of genre analysis for theology as a whole, however, awaits its prosecution in more extended and nuanced forms.