

# Deformation and Reformation: Thomas Aquinas and the Rise of Protestant Scholasticism

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A half-millennium separates us from the reform movements of the sixteenth century. Our understanding of the sources of these diverse phenomena have developed over this time in significant and often contradictory ways. One recurring narrative of the Reformation period and beyond emphasizes the rupture and antinomy between Protestant reform movements and the medieval church and its traditions. The specifics of this narrative vary depending on a number of factors, including the confessional or ideological sympathies of the narrator, the significance placed on specific figures, ideas, or events, and the praise or blame credited to different factors. In general, however, such narratives involve the transition between a more-or-less unified world of the Middle Ages to a diverse and dynamic landscape in the aftermath of protest and reform efforts at the dawn of the early modern period. For either good or ill, the sixteenth century saw a substantial change to the world, in theological, social, and political terms.

As one recent historiographical account of this multifaceted phenomenon puts it, “the Reformation ended more than a thousand years of Christianity as a framework for shared intellectual life in the Latin West” (Gregory 2012, 45). Brad S. Gregory’s study emphasizes the discontinuity of this result with the intentions of the Reformers, but there is nevertheless a sharp rupture in the intellectual life of the West from the sixteenth century and beyond. For Gregory, the roots of this break can be traced back to earlier centuries, and it is only with the rise of figures like Martin Luther and John Calvin that these roots grow in size and strength to crack the intellectual consensus of

the Middle Ages. For Gregory, the divergence between two basic traditions can be found in the disputes between the medieval thinkers Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus: “By predicating being of God and creatures univocally, Scotus brought both within the same conceptual framework” (Gregory 2012, 37). This thirteenth-century development “would prove to be the first step toward the eventual domestication of God’s transcendence, a process in which the seventeenth-century revolutions in philosophy and science would participate – not so much by way of dramatic departures as by improvising new parts on a stage that had been unexpectedly transformed by the doctrinal disagreements among Christians in the Reformation era” (Gregory 2012, 37–8). Gregory’s narrative is representative of a much longer line of scholarship that judges the Reformation to be a kind of deformation of the great medieval synthesis, a synthesis most often understood as epitomized in the life and thought of Thomas Aquinas.

Other accounts likewise emphasize the epochal shift represented in the sixteenth century, but read the evidence in diametrically opposed terms. David H. Hopper (2011) thus writes that the “otherworldly religious ethos” of the Middle Ages engendered its own kind of divine domestication, notably manifested in church teaching and practice related to merit, and that Luther’s challenges to teachings on repentance and indulgences overturned these deformations. As Hopper puts it, “the break with obsessive otherworldliness in Luther lies in his (re)discovery of the unnatural grace of a transcendent God revealed in the cross of Christ as testified to in the Christian Scriptures and in interaction as well with events of his time, interactions that lent weight in turn to his interpretation of Scripture” (2011, 69–70). On these kinds of accounts, the Protestant Reformation breaks the chains of human-centered religion and decadent philosophizing characteristic of medieval scholastic theology.

These two contrasting and representative contemporary examples illustrate some of the challenges in attempting to understand accurately the complexities and implications of the momentous events of the sixteenth century. Each account manifests in its own way an update and particularization of older lines of scholarship and interpretation. The confessional or ideological investment that many have in making sure the narrative both places the right people on the proper sides and credits and debits these figures accordingly makes it difficult to get behind modern accretions and intellectual overlays imposed on historical source material. The interpretive significance of individual figures like Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, Martin Luther, and John Calvin, for instance, is at least to some extent a

modern innovation, as the introduction and other contributions to this volume indicate. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries mark a shift in the historical understanding in this regard, and it is here that Thomas Aquinas becomes perhaps the primary touchstone for understanding medieval theology and Luther and Calvin become the chief codifiers of the Protestant reformations.

This is not to say that such figures were not of enormous significance in their own times and afterward. But it is to say that the placing of such figures into a binary, for or against, of historical judgment both constricts and simplifies our historical understanding. It constricts it by reducing the number of significant figures to a handful of the great thinkers of history. And it simplifies our understanding by casting these already stylized and often decontextualized figures into a simple account of villains and heroes.

Coming to better terms with the legacy of Thomas Aquinas among Protestants in the early modern period requires understanding of the varied contexts of the development of Protestant thought, including Protestant narratives of deformation and reformation, the reformers' diverse interactions with and formation in medieval scholastic traditions, and the complex developments of Protestant scholastic theology in the sixteenth and into the seventeenth centuries. Contrary to simplistic depictions of early Protestantism as a radical disjunction with medieval traditions, the reception of Thomas Aquinas among Protestants is indicative of the Reformation as a multifaceted intellectual and institutional phenomenon.

### **Early Protestant Narratives of Deformation and Reformation**

The diverse Protestant narratives of decline at the time of the Reformation provide an important context for understanding the broader reception of medieval theology, including that of Thomas Aquinas.

Perhaps the first major Protestant attempt to systematically explore the history leading up to the sixteenth-century events was the *Chronicon Carionis*, inaugurated by Johannes Carion (1499–1537), and subsequently continued by Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) before reaching its final form under the auspices of Caspar Peucer (1525–1602). Carion's original work, a universal history from ancient times up through accounts of the successive Christian emperors, was amplified and rendered into Latin by Melanchthon. Peucer would add accounts, continuing the chronicle up to

the reign of Charles V. Although the *Chronicon* largely focuses on civil power, it gives occasional and periodic attention to specifically religious or theological matters, particularly as these concern overlap in disputes between ecclesial and civil power (see Prietz 2014).

At a notable point in the *Chronicon* (book 4) there is a discussion of the intellectual contexts of the rise of papal power, pointing specifically to medieval scholasticism. Here the narrative describes Peter Lombard as the originator of scholasticism, which enhanced the authority of the pope by focusing on extrabiblical sources. The complexities of scholastic discourse were increased by Lombard's interpreters, Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus, who, "having contended with each other in subtleties, so filled the church with questions, some fatuous, some impious, some insoluble, and at the same time so corrupted and defiled philosophy, that they imposed on more recent writers, William of Ockham and others, the necessity of disagreeing with them" (Melanchthon and Peucer 1572, 440, as quoted by Gaetano 2010). These scholastic subtleties led to "remarkable conflicts," which were only finally ended with the advent of the "light of restored doctrine" (Melanchthon and Peucer 1572, 440). According to the *Chronicon*, this scholastic doctrine obscured the teaching of Scripture, confusing it with the disputes of the Platonists and the Aristotelians over ethics, physics, and metaphysics. Scholastic teaching also corrupted papal laws, inextricably confusing them with moral philosophy. These canon laws also arose in this period as a counterweight to civil law and served as a means of expanding ecclesial power. All of this combined to overwhelm and obscure the gospel (Melanchthon and Peucer 1572, 440). On this account, then, Aquinas is part of a progressive corruption and confusion of the gospel with scholastic disputations, pagan philosophical speculations, and capitulation to papal tyranny.

Another major historical source for early Protestantism is the collection known as the *Magdeburg Centuries*, a series of volumes covering church history in 13 parts, each covering a century from the early church through to 1298. Thomas Aquinas appears in the final volume along with such luminaries as Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, and Duns Scotus. A summary of Aquinas's life and work appears in a section chronicling bishops and doctors of the church (Anon. 1574, cap. 10). The depiction of Aquinas here is relatively straightforward and evenhanded. It provides basic information relating to his birth and monastic training and includes lists of his major writings and other works (Anon. 1574, cols. 1193–6). Interestingly, the *Centuries* also includes a rather extensive list of

miracles attributed to Aquinas after his death (cols. 1197–8). Elsewhere in the volume Thomas is recognized for achieving such “excellence in teaching that in his time he was unsurpassed in knowledge of philosophy and theology” (cap. 6, col. 657). The depiction of Aquinas in the *Centuries* is thus essentially respectful and complimentary.

The aims of Johann Sleidanus (1506–56), unlike the more ambitious ones of the *Chronicon* or the *Centuries*, were to write a contemporary history of the Reformation, focusing on the use of primary sources to depict with accuracy the conflict arising from Martin Luther’s opposition to indulgences and then to other corruptions in the church (Sleidanus 1556). Perhaps the first to publish publically against Luther’s positions was the Dominican, Sylvester Prierias (1456/7–1527). Prierias held the position of *Magister Sacri Palatii Apostolici*, or Master of the Sacred Apostolic Palace, a posting traditionally held by a Dominican who functions as the primary papal theologian. In his response to Prierias, Luther criticizes Prierias’s reliance upon Thomas Aquinas rather than Scripture in the course of his argument. Thus, writes Sleidanus of Prierias, Luther “objects against him, That he alledged no Text of Scripture, and only quoted the Opinion of *Thomas*, who himself had handled most things, according to his own Fancy, without the Authority of Scripture” (Sleidanus 1689, 3). Because of this kind of argumentation, which relies on “Syllogisms, or the various Devices of Men” rather than with “sound Doctrin, left to us by Divine Inspiration ... thick Darkness has overspread the Church, and jangling about frivolous and needless Questions had broke into it” (1689, 3). In Prierias’s further response, he “strongly defended *Thomas Aquinas*, affirming, That his whole Doctrin was so well Received, and Approved of by the Church of *Rome*, that it was even preferred before all other Writings.” Prierias continued to critique Luther, and “rebuked him for speaking with so little Reverence of so great a Man; and told him, That he looked upon it as an Honour, to be called a *Thomist*” (1689, 3).

Perhaps because so much of this early dispute had turned upon the commitment to and disagreement with Aquinas on the respective sides, Sleidanus next introduces and summarizes Aquinas’s life and work for his readers. He briefly rehearses Aquinas’s biography, and relates further that Aquinas had been a proponent of papal authority in both the civil and spiritual realms. In addition to Johann Tetzel (1465–1519) and Prierias, two other Dominicans, Jacob von Hoogstraten (c. 1460–1527) and Thomas Cajetan (1469–1534), were also among Luther’s early opponents, further underscoring the centrality of Thomas to these early debates. These

exchanges, in turn, are pivotal for the later course of Luther's work. As Bernhard Lohse writes, for instance, "it was Prierias' *Dialogus* that first evoked the irreconcilable conflict between Luther and Rome" (1999, 109).

A final example of a significant Protestant historical narrative of decline and restoration appears in the work of Lambert Daneau (c.1535–90) on Lombard's *Sentences*. This partial critical commentary on the *Sentences* opens with a prologue that discusses the "origin, progression, and ages" of the *Scholastica Theologia*. Daneau's work has been recognized as important in the historiography of philosophy, as it introduces a tripartite schema of scholasticism: *vetus*, *media*, and *novum* (Gaetano 2010). Daneau attributes the origins of scholasticism to the time of Lanfranc in 1020, and this first period in Daneau's scheme lasts until about 1220, with Albert the Great as a transitional figure between the *vetus* and *media Scholastica*. In this older period, the time of Lombard, Gratian, and Comestor, Daneau contends (possibly depending on the *Chronicon*) that two great classes of people came into being: the canonists and the scholastics. The former are dedicated to supporting the Roman hierarchy and papal tyranny through the promulgation of decretals and canon law. The scholastics, on the other hand "devise new doctrines" for the advance of superstition and error, which further enhances the power of the Roman pontiff (Daneau 1580, cap. 1).

Since the distinctions between old, middle, and new scholasticism are not simply temporal but also qualitative, it is worthwhile to dwell on the characteristics of the old scholastics as opposed to those of the middle period in Daneau's overview. Some scholars, such as Richard A. Muller and Luca Baschera, judge Daneau's commentary to be in one way or another appreciative of the *vetus Scholastica*. As Baschera writes, "Although the general tone of Daneau's treatment of scholastic theology is critical, the distinction of different phases in its history enables him not only to regard the 'old scholasticism' in a relatively favourable way, but also to consider some authors such as Bernard of Clairvaux as 'luminaries of their age'" (2009, 141). Matthew T. Gaetano takes up the legacy of Daneau's periodization and its uses in the history of philosophy, but with a rather different emphasis. Gaetano says that the *vetus Scholastica* was for Daneau "the least evil of them all. Lanfranc of Pavia and Peter Lombard after him, despite their slavishness to human authorities instead of Sacred Scripture, still maintained devotion to Augustine, the greatest of the ancient Fathers" (2010, 2). In Daneau, then, we find an understanding of Lombard in particular and the *vetus Scholastica* in general as "the least evil," or in Baschera's characterization "relatively favourable," form of scholasticism relative to the progressive

deformations to be found in the middle and new periods, the latter of which opens with Durandus's challenge to Aquinas, in about 1330. In Lombard's time, Aristotle had not yet been invited into the inner sanctum of scholastic theology as he would be in the middle period. In this way there remained in the old scholasticism a vestigial reverence for the word of God, extinguished in the middle period.

Thomas Aquinas's theology follows that of Albert the Great, and for Daneau is characteristic of that middle, increasingly corrupted, period of scholasticism, in which the pagan philosophy of Aristotle comes to rule the articles of faith completely (1580, cap. 2). On Daneau's account, any remaining modesty or virtue from the middle period of scholasticism is absent in the new age of scholasticism, which is "by far the most shameless" (1580, cap. 2) and which provides the occasion for the rise of the reform movements inaugurated by Martin Luther. In other works, Daneau reiterates this tripartite schema and, perhaps picking up the judgments of Calvin (Muller 2000, 51; see also Sytsma 2012, 317n85), likewise distinguishes the "sounder scholastics" of the older period from the sophistry of more recent scholastics (Daneau 1586, lib. 4, cap. 8, p. 254), and even includes Aquinas as one of these better authorities, or *puriores Scholastici* (Daneau 1577, lib. 2, cap. 10, fol. 182r-v).

In this way early Protestant historiographical attitudes toward medieval scholasticism in general, and Thomas Aquinas in particular, are largely (but not simply) critical and negative. Even if Thomas is to be accounted as a luminary of his age, his is an era of increasingly abstruse speculative theological reflection and a point on a historical continuum leading toward utter corruption and decadence. These narratives of decline and deformation anticipate similar evaluations among later Protestant scholastics. As Richard A. Muller summarizes, "It was virtually a truism among the Protestant scholastics that the earlier medieval scholasticism of Anselm and Lombard was more congenial to the Reformation and less troubled by philosophical and speculative questions than the scholasticism of the later Middle Ages, particularly from the time of Duns Scotus onward" (2003a, 29).

### School Theology and the Early Reformers

We must account for the early reformers' own formation in, and familiarity with, these medieval traditions within the context of this largely antagonistic posture toward the scholastic theology of the Middle Ages. The



earliest reformers were largely schooled within the context of medieval scholastic traditions and religious orders, or were otherwise familiarized with these traditions in their education.

At the time of his turn toward ecclesial reformation, Martin Luther was an Augustinian friar. Against some accounts of Luther's background, Scott H. Hendrix writes that

Martin Luther did not leave Erfurt as a troubled monk who quivered in his sandals while occasionally reading a theology book. Quite the contrary. The nine years in Erfurt and the one year in Wittenberg had turned him into a skillful young scholar who also happened to be a conscientious Augustinian friar. During the next six years in Wittenberg, before he questioned the validity of indulgences, Luther matured rapidly in both roles. (Hendrix 2015, 39–40)

As David C. Steinmetz documents, there have been great efforts to explore to what extent Luther's education introduced him to medieval thought: "There is, of course, little evidence that Luther, whose theological course of study prescribed large doses of Biel and d'Ailly, ever spent much time in the direct reading of Thomas" (Steinmetz 2002, 47; see also Pesch 1970; Janz 1983, 1989). Whether or not Luther gained an accurate understanding of Thomas's own theology, or whether Thomas's teaching was filtered through various later developments, remains a point of some debate. Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen, in his survey of the scholarship, concludes that "Luther was able to gain reliable knowledge of Aquinas, especially from Gabriel Biel" (2002, 70).

But whatever familiarity with Thomas Luther gained prior to his disputes was tempered by his more substantive formation in the *via moderna*. We find in Luther's 1517 *Disputation against Scholastic Theology* that he contradicts by name such theologians as John Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, Pierre d'Ailly, and Gabriel Biel. Emphasizing the late medieval *via moderna* contexts of Luther's thought, Steinmetz concludes, "Whatever Luther owed to his colleagues and enemies, it was in the school of William Ockham and not in the school of John Capreolus or Cardinal Cajetan that he first encountered the theology of Thomas Aquinas" (2002, 48). As we have seen from Sleidanus's account of the early debates between Luther and various Thomists, the authority of Aquinas became a point of contention at the very beginning of Luther's reform efforts. As zur Mühlen writes, "In contrast to this merely indirect encounter or argument with Thomas Aquinas up until 1517, Luther's explicit confrontation with St. Thomas begins in the quarrel over indulgences, as his opponents Tetzl, Eck, Prierias and Cajetan seek to



call on the authority of Aquinas” (2002, 75). Aquinas largely became Luther’s target because his opponents appeal to him as an authoritative source for their teaching. Luther’s opposition to Aquinas is thus to a great degree occasional: “Following this phase of criticising Thomas Aquinas from 1517–1520, Luther speaks of him less and less, and even starts to treat him in a more discriminating way” (zur Mühlen 2002, 81).

If Luther’s engagement with medieval theology, and that of Thomas in particular, was colored by disputes with Dominicans like Tetzels, Prierias, Hoogstraten, and Cajetan, as well as his formation in nominalist scholasticism, other reformers were more grounded in *via antiqua* traditions. As Gottfried W. Locher relates, at a young age Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) attended the Latin school in Basel, was accepted as a novice in the Dominican monastery in Bern, and studied in Vienna before graduating with a master of arts from Basel. Thus, writes Locher, “His studies at Vienna and Basel would provide a thorough introduction to late-medieval scholasticism” (Locher 1981, 150–1). Such study “acquainted him with the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna*, although the former almost certainly predominated” (Stephens 1986, 6). Zwingli’s successor in Zurich, Heinrich Bullinger (1504–75), was schooled in the *via antiqua* (Rüetschi 2004, 217) and likewise evidences familiarity with Thomas Aquinas, as indicated by reference to the *Summa Theologiae* in his *Decades* (Bullinger 1849–52, 1.IX:160–1; 5.VI:239; 5.IX:443; 5.IX:464). Johann Oecolampadius (1482–1531) of Basel was also substantially acquainted with Thomas’s work. Educated in Heidelberg before his parish work, Oecolampadius favored Aquinas over the works of other scholastics such as Duns Scotus (Herzog 1843, 1:105).

The major early reformer Martin Bucer (1491–1551) was a Dominican monk before his conversion to the evangelical faith. W. Peter Stephens (1970, 18n3) writes of Bucer that “it is not clear how far the influence of Thomism is more than superficial, affecting Bucer’s language rather than his fundamental understanding of the Christian faith.” As Martin Greschat documents, however, Bucer’s early formation in Dominican theology was extensive: “About half his library, to be sure, as shown by 1518 inventory of his books, did consist of theological and philosophical works representing the thought of the great Dominican teacher Thomas Aquinas. But the other half of his collection covered rhetoric, history, grammar, as well as poetry, and thus was humanistic in the broadest sense” (2004, 18). For Greschat, the makeup of Bucer’s inventory is proof that in Bucer there was a coherent synthesis of medieval scholasticism and Renaissance humanism, with a

special emphasis on the work of Aquinas (see Greschat 2004, 22–5; Fink 2007; Leijssen 1979; Noblesse-Rocher 2001; Pauck 1969, 156).

The Alsatian Wolfgang Musculus (1497–1563) was a member of the small Benedictine monastery in Lixheim where he became acquainted with the theological insights of the Reformation. His advocacy of the evangelical perspective led him to be known as “the Lutheran monk,” and indeed Musculus remained convinced of both the truth of Luther’s views on salvation and the obedience due to his order (Farmer 1997, 6). Although he was among the older of the second generation of reformers, he left the monastery relatively late, and it was in 1527 that he journeyed from the Lixheim cloister to Strasbourg, where he worked and learned with Bucer and Wolfgang Capito. Although during his career Musculus was especially concerned with patristic theological sources, he did have some knowledge of medieval theology, and is noteworthy particularly for his relatively moderate and sometimes even positive reception of Lombard’s *Sentences* and Gratian’s *Decretum* (Ballor 2012, 113, 139, 215). Musculus’s interaction with Thomas Aquinas appears particularly in his engagement with the topic of natural law, both in Musculus’s commentary on Romans (1555) and in his *Loci Communes* (1560), where he also discusses Thomas in relation to the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. Musculus essentially accepts Thomas’s definition of natural law but notes it as incomplete and corrects it to apply more properly to human beings than to all rational creatures, including the angels (Ballor 2012, 197). As for the Eucharist, Musculus contends that communication in both kinds (wine and bread) was practiced in the church up until the time of Aquinas, and that the Angelic Doctor in particular effectively argued against the practice and thereby corrupted the church’s practice (Musculus 1560, loc. 34, pp. 476–7).

Although much more work remains to be done on the familiarity, use, and grounding of such early reformers in medieval theological traditions, there has been significant scholarly attention to scholastic influences on Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) and Girolamo Zanchi (1516–90). Both Vermigli and Zanchi were Italian émigrés, who fled after being members of the Canons Regular of St. Augustine. Vermigli was schooled in scholastic theology, particularly Thomism, at the famed University of Padua while he lived in the Saint John of Verdara monastery. As Frank A. James III writes, in Padua “Vermigli acquired a thorough training in Thomistic scholasticism which was tempered with a deep appreciation for Augustine and a vibrant Christian humanism” (James 1998, 5; on Padua see also more generally Gaetano 2013). It was during his later time as prior of the Basilica of

San Frediano Lucca that Vermigli influenced the younger Zanchi. Both Vermigli and Zanchi have been the focus of significant studies dealing with the reception of Thomas in the Reformed tradition (e.g., Budiman 2011; Donnelly 1976; Goris 2001; Gründler 1961; James 2013; McNair 1967; Rehnman 2013).

Philip Melanchthon and John Calvin (1509–64) were two of the most significant early reformers who had not been ordained as Roman Catholic clergy or were not members of religious orders. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to trace the complex contours of Melanchthon's philosophical and theological thought, some writers have identified an important line of continuity between Melanchthon and medieval scholasticism, particularly Thomism, in connection with his doctrine of law and legal philosophy. Thus, writes Franz Wieacker, Melanchthon is to be understood as a “restorer of scholastic jurisprudence” and as representing “the later return of Lutheran theology to a natural-law theory rooted in Thomistic Aristotelianism” (Wieacker 1967, 165, 264, as quoted in Berman 1993, 152n25). Melanchthon's sympathies with Aristotle on various points do not entail similar sympathies with Thomas, however, and, as with Luther and Calvin, Melanchthon's relationship to Thomas, construed either positively or negatively, has been the matter of some debate. Merio Scattola, for instance, has explored the extent to which Thomas's *lex aeterna* coheres and conflicts with Melanchthon's *lex Dei* (1999, 868–73). Whether or not Melanchthon is directly dependent upon “Thomistic Aristotelianism,” it is significant to note that connections between medieval and Reformation thought can be explored in areas including law, philosophy, and jurisprudence as well as theology proper (see, e.g., Ballor 2014).

The nature of Calvin's relationship to medieval theology is a subject for scholarly dispute that is perhaps only surpassed by the question of Luther's own relationship to the preceding era. Since Calvin was not formally educated in theology, his exposure to Thomism would have come from other sources. A leading possibility is Martin Bucer, given his Dominican training and the friendship between Bucer and Calvin. In a close study of the exegesis of Romans 9 by Calvin, Bucer, and Aquinas, Steinmetz concludes that “the thesis that Calvin is the beneficiary of a Thomistic school tradition mediated to him by Martin Bucer finds no support in the admittedly limited context of the interpretation of Romans 9” (1995, 153). This is not to say that Calvin was unaware of Aquinas's theology, but rather that the basis for assuming great familiarity is not as strong as it is in the case of many of those figures mentioned above. Indeed, recent scholarship has increasingly

questioned whether Calvin is directly engaging Thomas's work, for instance, rather than versions of Thomism represented by late-medieval figures. The popular McNeill–Battles edition of Calvin's *Institutes* further complicates the picture, as it regularly adds specific references to Thomas's work that do not appear in Calvin's own work, leaving in the impression that there is more direct engagement and opposition between Calvin and Thomas than the text actually sustains. As Charles Raith II writes of such notations, "the result of Battles's footnotes has been to convey to decades of unsuspecting readers a level of conflict between Aquinas's and Calvin's theology that simply does not exist" (2014, 13).

A number of significant points can be gleaned from this brief and impressionistic survey of early reformers' formation in and familiarity with medieval theological traditions. Even from this selected group we see some diversity of institutional affiliation: Dominicans, Augustinians, Benedictines, secular clergy, and laypersons are all represented among the early generations of reformers. With some notable exceptions, particularly Luther, those with formal theological training were educated substantially in the *via antiqua*, in some cases with an explicit emphasis in the theology of Thomas Aquinas. This diversity of schooling in medieval scholastic traditions indicates the general familiarity of these early reformers with school theology. Whether this familiarity bred contempt in the form of negative substantial reception in later articulations of Protestant theology is connected with the development of Protestant scholasticism itself.

### **Protestantism and the Second Scholasticism**

Coming to terms with Protestantism's relationship with Thomas Aquinas requires coming to terms more broadly with the Reformation and post-Reformation theological developments. This means particularly that post-Reformation Protestant theology must be understood as to a great extent taking the form of a distinctive variant of the Second Scholasticism rather than a wholesale rejection of scholasticism as such.

In his summary of the conflict between Luther and Prierias and Hoogstraten, Sleidanus writes that the topics under dispute "were in a Scholastick manner managed and debated by Writing on both Sides" (1689, 4). In this observation Sleidanus captures the ambivalent nature of Protestant reception of scholasticism. As we have seen, in historiographical and polemical contexts, medieval scholasticism is largely characterized as

speculative and vain, a degeneration from theological focus on the pure gospel. At the same time, however, and sometimes even in the process of making such claims, scholastic tools and forms are often employed. Thus Willem van 't Spijker writes of the purported wholesale rejection of scholasticism by the Protestant reformers, "it has become obvious that this farewell to scholasticism as a method was not decisive or final" (2001, 291).

What we find when examining these sources, then, is not a univocal rejection of scholasticism as such. Instead, when characterizing the historical paths from the early church to their own times, the Protestant Reformers were inclined to describe as "scholastic" the problematic doctrinal innovations implicated in idle speculation and humanistic reasoning, particularly that which served to build up human active participation in justification and the perceived tyrannies of the papacy, for example. In this regard the Reformers' complaints had more to do with scholastic content, and particular content at that, than with the form of argument or the genre of school theology as such (Muller 2000, 39). Muller writes that Protestant scholasticism "must be understood primarily as a method of theological discourse, suited to the classroom and altered in the light of changes in logic and rhetoric that belonged to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries" (2003b, 1: 39). If we consider what the Reformers tend to say about medieval scholastics, we find a dominant narrative of decline and deformation that typically focuses on what is being taught. If we consider what the Reformers tend to do with respect to these same sources, however, a much more nuanced and even positive picture comes into focus, which employs many of the methods, and even some of the conclusions, of medieval scholasticism, adapted to fit the newer intellectual contexts arising out of humanistic learning and reformed models of scriptural exegesis.

When viewed from the perspective of how medieval sources were actually employed, the Protestant Reformation thus becomes better understood as a kind of reformation rather than a rejection of school theology. In this regard, the reform movement inaugurated by the early generations of Reformers is institutionalized, developed, and codified in the context of reform of school curricula as well as the polemical and apologetic needs of contemporary doctrinal theology.

Muller provides a good summary of this relationship between the early generations of Protestant theologians and their later successors:

Where the Reformers painted with a broad brush, their orthodox and scholastic successors strove to fill in the details of the picture. Whereas the

Reformers were intent upon distancing themselves and their theology from problematic elements in medieval thought and, at the same time, remaining catholic in the broadest sense of that term, the Protestant orthodox were intent upon establishing systematically the normative, catholic character of institutionalized Protestantism, at times through the explicit use of those elements in patristic and medieval theology not at odds with the teachings of the Reformation. (2003b, 1: 37)

Although the term “Second Scholasticism” is most often used to identify a particularly Roman Catholic phenomenon from the beginning of the sixteenth through the first half of the eighteenth century (e.g., Heider 2014, 8), when we see the continuity as well as the development of medieval scholasticism as applied in Protestant thought it is entirely appropriate to characterize Protestant scholasticism as a variant of this broader neo-scholasticism (see Muller 2003a, 4). The larger unity of scholastic method between Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians thus undermines attempts to define scholasticism along confessional lines (see Rehnman 2002, 37).

This is not to say that there are not distinguishing characteristics that differentiate Protestant from Roman Catholic scholastic theologies. On the whole, Protestant scholasticism tended to be much more critical in the use of medieval theological sources as authoritative, and this is perhaps most noteworthy in the difference in the inclination toward commentating on such sources directly. When compared with their Roman Catholic contemporaries, Protestant scholastics tended to downplay the authority of church fathers and medieval doctors relative to Scripture. But even with this tendency as a point of departure in the earliest generations of Reformation, there were parallel developments of doctrine among the Protestant scholastics. If Roman Catholic traditions of the Second Scholasticism often took the form of commentaries on Thomas’s *Summa*, the closest analogues among Protestants would be later commentaries on confessional documents like the Heidelberg Catechism, or more singular instances like the commentary of Bernardinus De Moor (1709–80) on the work of Johannes a Marck (1656–1731). While Luther initially criticized Dominicans like Prierias and Cajetan for their reliance on extrabiblical sources and authorities like Thomas, Protestants would eventually develop their own genres focused on confessional and scholastic authorities.

In these ways the modifications of medieval scholastic theologies in the thought of Protestant scholastics mirror similar developments and deployments of medieval school theology among Roman Catholics: “The rise of

scholastic method in Protestant theology brought about a clarity in organization and argument reminiscent of the clarity of the medieval *summas* and commentaries on the *Sentences*” (Muller 2003a, 79). With respect particularly to Aquinas and within the context of his own study of John Owen (1616–83), Christopher Cleveland writes, “The discussions of Thomistic influence upon the early reformers have remained separated from the discussions of Thomistic influence upon later Reformed orthodoxy. This is unfortunate, considering that the earliest reformers provide a precedent for the presence of Thomistic ideas in Reformed theology from its earliest days” (Cleveland 2013, 12). From this perspective, figures like Zanchi and Vermigli function as gatekeepers or entry points for Thomism in Reformed scholasticism in ways analogous to the influence of Cajetan for early modern Dominican theology. As Baschera writes, “Zanchi’s appreciation for Aquinas, due especially to his Augustinianism in matters of soteriology, did not remain an isolated phenomenon” and was “shared by many other Protestants” (2009, 140). If Calvin and Luther set the polemical or rhetorical edge of the Reformation, then others, such as Vermigli and Zanchi, provided the intellectual and architectonic framework for the development of mature theological systems. Thus, concludes Donnelly:

The theology of Vermigli and Zanchi, together with parallel developments within Lutheranism, shows that when Protestants came to recast their theology into a scholastic form, they rather consistently avoided nominalism as a base. Insofar as the roots of Protestant scholasticism go back to the Middle Ages, they tend to go back to the *via antiqua* and Thomism. Protestant fruit grows quite well on the Thomist tree, even better than on the bad nominalist tree. (1976, 454)

And while a great deal of work has been done on the Thomistic sympathies of Zanchi and Vermigli, as well as on the antipathies between Thomas and Luther and Calvin, more work remains to be done on the reception of Thomas among specific figures, among the earlier as well as the later generations of the Reformation. There has been a dearth of any scholarship on many major Reformed figures like Oecolampadius and Musculus, much less specific inquiry about the connections between such theologians and Aquinas. One of the great promises of this current volume is to help reintroduce and reinvigorate such focused and specialized study. Such explorations have and should continue to focus both on the broad reception of Thomas among specific figures, such as Franciscus Junius (1545–1602),



William Ames (1576–1633), Richard Hooker (1554–1600), and John Owen, as well as on the doctrinal development of specific topics, such as Scripture, the doctrine of God, anthropology, creation, providence, and law (Hampton 2008, 221–65; Sytsma 2013; see also Junius 2015; for Ames see van Vliet 2013; for Hooker see Littlejohn 2015; for Owen see Cleveland 2013 and Rehnman 2002, 34–7).

While Roman Catholics may have been loath to make positive use of Protestant thought, the reverse was certainly not always the case. Writing much later in the development of Protestant scholasticism, Richard Baxter (1615–91) captures this broader dynamic well:

The divers understanding of words among us, and the weakness and passions of Divines, and a base fear of the censures of a party, hath occasioned many on both sides to feign the differences to be much wider than indeed they are: so that when an *Alvarez*, a *Bannes*, a *Gibieuf*, have spoken the same things as the Protestants do, they are presently fain to pour out abundance of unworthy slanders against the Protestants, for fear of being accounted Protestants themselves. (1659, 365).

Baxter observes that many Protestants do the same, manufacturing differences where they do not exist or exaggerating them when it serves some polemical or apologetic purpose. Indeed, the polemical and apologetic contexts of the development of Protestant scholasticism are important to recognize as well as the more general concerns regarding institutionalization and development (Baschera 2009, 140–141; Broeyer 2001). But a more general continuity with scholastic theology is evidenced when Protestants make positive use of diverse figures, which in fact does occur. Thus, attests Baxter, “Our students would not so ordinarily read *Aquinas*, *Scotus*, *Ariminensts* [Gregory of Rimini], *Durandus*, &c. if there were not in them abundance of precious truth which they esteem” (1659, 365). Baxter’s openness in acknowledging dependence and agreement wherever it could be found is noteworthy for its forthrightness, but such positive use of medieval and contemporary Roman Catholic sources is not unique to him among the Protestants.

## Conclusion

In an astute survey of recent developments in scholarship concerning the Reformation and post-Reformation eras, Willem van Asselt emphasizes the emergence of a desire “to foster an interdisciplinary approach, and in so

doing put forward the claim that the emergence of Protestant scholasticism was no ‘regression’ to medieval patterns of thought, but rather the result of a progressive development related to the impact of the Renaissance” (2001, 273). This perspective provides an understanding that “it is incorrect to suppose that the Renaissance, humanism and the Reformation were by definition anti-scholastic” (van Asselt 2001, 273).

This chapter has advanced this basic perspective by showing that accounting for the complex convergences and divergences among the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and post-Reformation periods must account for the self-understandings of the early Reformers relative to earlier eras, their familiarity with medieval traditions, and the actual employment of scholastic forms and methods in the early and following generations of the Reformation. When the early Reformers described the Middle Ages, and particularly the theology of the schoolmen, they tended to emphasize the decadence and deformation of doctrine. Such narratives were to a great extent based on familiarity derived from their actual formation and education in late-medieval theology, and a significant number of major reformers received substantive training in these various schools. But when we turn not only to what the early reformers say but how they actually engage their opponents and develop their own teaching, a much more complex picture comes into focus. We find a willingness as Protestant schools form and reform, and indeed even an enthusiasm, for employing scholastic methods as well as scholastic figures in the formulation and defense of Protestant doctrine. By the time the great Protestant academies of the seventeenth century have matured, we find a Protestant school-theology that has developed in dialogue with and alongside of the neo-scholastic trends among Roman Catholics.

Contrary to accounts of the Reformation which assert a radical intellectual break effected by Luther’s increasingly hostile criticisms of particular doctrines and figures, this broader perspective provides evidence for seeing a greater intellectual coherence and continuity from at least the Middle Ages and the time of Thomas Aquinas to the post-Reformation period (ca. mid-eighteenth century). The magisterial Protestant Reformation, in its various forms and dispensations, is more properly understood then as a diverse group of variants within an even larger and more diverse landscape of the Second Scholasticism.

In his insightful study of Luther’s interaction with contemporary Thomists, Steinmetz concludes that “there were Thomists who were converted to the Protestant cause and who remained, to a greater or lesser

degree, Thomists all their lives: theologians like Martin Bucer, Peter Martyr Vermigli, and Jerome Zanchi” (2002, 58). What this means for studies of Thomas Aquinas among the Protestants is that, in Steinmetz’s memorable formulation, “The story of Thomas Aquinas and Protestantism has yet to be written, and it is not identical with the story of Thomas and Luther” (2002, 58). If the tale of Thomas and Protestant theology is not reducible to the reception of the Angelic Doctor by individual theologians, even those of the stature of Martin Luther or John Calvin, then it is a much larger and more complex story than is often thought. It is a story that must involve recognition of the (dis)continuities both between the medieval and the early generations of the Reformation and, in turn, between the Reformation and post-Reformation periods. To a significant extent these developments involved commitment to scholastic modes of discourse, even as these modes were developed in significant ways and deployed to sometimes radically different and conflicting purposes.

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