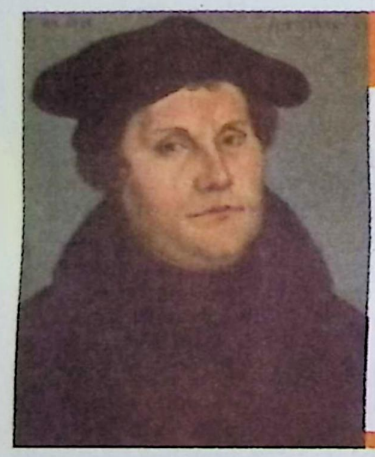
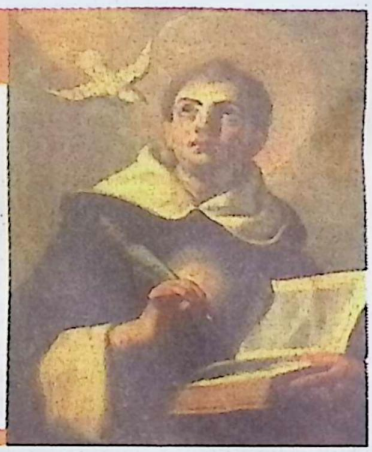


The way to God

Aquinas or Luther?

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THE spiritual world is grossly divided into two territories: Aquinian and Lutherian. The former puts emphasis on the role of reason in religious affairs while the latter on the role of faith. The Aquinians believe that one can reach God with intellect and argumentations; on the other hand the Lutherians believe God is beyond any argument and He can only be reached through the way of soul. That is, either salvation may be met in the rational palace of brains or it is just at heart's distance. In their way, Aquinians led religion to 'deism' while the Lutherians to 'fatalism'.

The Aquinians are the followers of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the great theologian of the thirteenth century. He established the foundation of western theology breeding a new philosophy known as 'scholastic rationalism'. He is famous for his scholastic efforts of combining Christian ideas with classical Greek philosophy. He borrowed logic from Aristotle, which he used to prove the existence of God. With the argument of First Cause he came to the conclusion that God is the primal cause of this world. Despite being a staunch believer, he was a champion of reason.

The Lutherians, on the other hand, are the followers of the sixteenth century German monk Martin Luther, who held the view that faith is the only way to God. For him, Church rituals are only the barriers to salvation. So he proposed reformations in the system of papacy that ultimately led to Protestantism. A doctor of theology and professor of Biblical literature, Luther was influenced by the teachings of Saint Augustine, who dreamt of 'The City of God'. He placed faith over reason and good works.

There exists a Hegelian conflict between Aquinianism and Lutherianism. Since preaching of their philosophies in the Middle Ages and thereafter, pious people have turned either to Aquinas or Luther to find a way to God. Sometimes they have devotedly followed one or the other and sometimes they have just dithered. Some of them have run from pillar to post in search of God, who from behind the screen has only smiled. God has revealed scriptures but left them to the interpretations of the readers, who differed on almost every point. Only He can say who is right and who is wrong.

Though both Aquinas and Luther were practicing Christians, the basics of their philosophy are applicable to all spiritualists. Any believer on earth will essentially face the Aquinas-Luther dilemma -- reason or faith. As an animal with emotion he will feel an urge to believe in God and then the crisis begins. Will he only be limited to belief? Human being is rational, which will drive him to find a reason for his belief. Utilising intellect, he will attempt to solidify his belief with logic. But in practice logic will always prove insufficient to prove the existence of God. God is too abstruse and elusive! He prefers to stay in seclusion never to be seen by anybody. When logic fails, one is left with no other option but faith. On the one hand, human being is not happy with faith only; on the other he/she is not capable enough to vindicate his faith also. It is a real predicament for him/her.

This particular predicament has led some people to scepticism and in extreme cases to atheism. Sceptics believe that it is not possible for human beings to know God, so better not spend time in trying to know Him. The atheists outright rejects the existence of God in the plea that nobody has ever seen Him or He is not amenable to any experiment. Or simply He, as depicted in scriptures, contradicts with scientific truths or rigorous logic. So His existence is redundant and the world or human life can do without Him. Aquinas and Luther lose their way arriving at this hard terrain.

The oriental people, particularly the Bengali, irrespective of their cast and creed, have largely remained Lutherians, though Aquinian tendency is also evident to a limited extent. Its proof is the Bangla proverb "bishwashey milay bashtu, tarkey bahudur." (Belief brings the thing, but argument takes it away.) *Biswash* (faith/belief) is the short-cut but *tarko* (reason/argument) is a long journey. The Bangali have always liked the shortcut. It ensures the direct entry to Heaven with the grace of Almighty.

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