

St. Thomas Aquinas

I Brief Bio

Historical background to Aquinas's life: From monasteries and villages to towns, friars and universities

Beginning in the 11th Century, Europe began to undergo what is known as the 'commercial revolution.' More people made their living by manufacture of goods and trade, and currency begin to develop. Towns are effectively permanent commercial centers, as opposed to villages, which are the collections of people living in the midst of farms that support them.

The two great new religious orders that mark the beginning of the later Middle Ages are the Franciscans and Dominicans.

'These two orders, because of the novelty of their way of life were received with joyful enthusiasm wherever they began to preach the Word of God. The unusual quality of their life attracted to them elite personalities among the young and cultured at the very moment that they were about to cover the face of the earth.' (Norman Annals)

The monastic schools of the early Middle Ages gave way to new centers of learning, schools situated in the cities. The new schools soon joined together to form 'universities' of studies, corporate societies representing the teaching profession, which were modeled on the guilds of skilled tradesmen.

The 3 entries of Aristotle

The first 'entry': *Categories* and *On Interpretation*, devoted to the categorization of 'entities' and their characteristics, such as quantity, color, etc.

The second entry, in the 12th Century, was the recovery, through contact with Arab civilization, of texts that study the nature of reasoning.

The third entry came in the later 12th and early 13th Century, when Aristotle's works of natural philosophy (what would be call today natural science), anthropology, and metaphysics came into the hands of the West.

1215 Foundation of the Order of Preachers

1224 Thomas born at Roccasecca, near Naples to a minor aristocratic family

1230-39 Oblate at OSB Abbey of Monte Cassino; as younger

1239-44 Studies in Naples, making acquaintance with Aristotle

1243 Albert the Great arrives in Paris

1244-45 Thomas (secretly) becomes a Dominican, detention by family at Roccasecca

1245-48 Studies with Albert in Paris

1248-52 Studies with and assists Albert in Cologne, teaching on Scripture

1252-56 Teaches in Paris as Bachelor of the Sentences

1256-59 Becomes Master of Theology, Regent-master in Paris

1259 Returns to Italy (Naples?)

1261-65 Conventual lector in Orvieto (preparing members of OP for preaching and confessions)

1265-68 Regent-master in Rome

1268-72 Second regency in Paris

1272-73 Regent-master in Naples

1274 Death in Fossanova on the way to Council of Lyons

1277 Condemnation in Paris of 219 heterodox propositions

1277 Condemnation in Oxford by Robert Kilwardby, Dominican Abp. Of Canterbury, of propositions inspired by his work

1284 Confirmation of condemnations by Franciscan Abp of Canterbury

1323 Canonization

1325 Revocation of condemnations of 1227

1567 Named *Doctor ecclesiae* by Pius V

II Aquinas' Works and Thought

Overview of his writings

Biblical commentaries: Psalms (1-54); Isaiah; Ezekiel; Jeremiah; Lamentations; Job; Matthew; John; Catena aurea on the gospels; letters of Paul; Hebrews

Commentary on The Sentences of Peter Lombard

Commentaries on Aristotle (13% of total): On Interpretation; Posterior Analytics; Physics; On Heavens and Earth^{*}; On Generation and Corruption^{*}; on the Soul; Ethics; Politics^{*}; Metaphysics

Truth known by revelation and by natural reason must cohere. They approach truth from different directions, like ascending or descending a ladder. The truth is one, though the direction of approach may differ.

Summa contra gentiles

Probably a work intended to help show the coherence of natural reason and revelation.

Summa theologiae (unfinished)

1. The ST is intimately connected to a life of contemplation *and* to active moral life.
2. The ST is *theocentric*. It does not 'begin with human experience.'
3. It is concerned throughout, though not always in an explicit manner, with the purpose, or 'end,' the goal, of human life, the 'happiness' of the human being.
4. It is concerned throughout to present the *coherence* of Christian doctrine as a whole.

Compendium of Theology (Unfinished)

"Love cannot be rightly ordered unless the proper goal of our hope is established; nor can there be any hope if knowledge of the truth is lacking... The first thing necessary is faith, by which you may come to a knowledge of the truth. Secondly, hope... that your intention may be fixed on the right end. Thirdly, love... that your affections may be perfectly put in order."

* Unfinished

Disputed Questions: On Truth; on Evil; On Spiritual Creatures; On the Union of the Word; On Power; On the Soul; On the Virtues; Quodlibetal Questions

Shorter works: in defense of the mendicants; philosophical topics; theological topics

Some revealing excerpts.

On Divine Mercy

“God is said to be **rich in mercy** because he possesses an infinite and unfailing mercy, which man does not. For man has a mercy that is bounded or limited in three ways. Firstly, in bestowing temporal benefits, man’s mercy is restricted by the amount of his own possessions.... Secondly, the mercy of man is limited since he can only pardon offenses against himself...; he should not forgive so indiscriminately that whoever is pardoned becomes more bold, prone and ready to offend again.... But nothing can harm God and hence he can forgive every offense. Thirdly, a man shows mercy in remitting punishment; yet... he must not contravene the justice of a higher law. God, on the other hand, can remit all punishment since he is not bound by any higher law.... Thus the mercy of God is infinite because it is not limited by a scarcity of wealth, nor is it restricted through a fear of injury, nor by any higher law.” Comm. On Eph. 2:4

On Happiness

“It is therefore necessary for the last end so to fill man's appetite, that nothing is left besides it for man to desire.” ST II/1 1, 5

“Man's happiness cannot consist in natural wealth. For wealth... is sought for the sake of something else” ST II/1 2, 1

“Happiness is the perfect good, which lulls the appetite altogether; else it would not be the last end, if something yet remained to be desired. Now the object of the will, i.e. of man's appetite, is the universal good... This is to be found, not in any creature, but in God alone; because every creature has goodness by participation.” ST II/I 2, 8

On whether Christ’s passion is a fitting way to deliver the human race

“In the first place, man knows thereby how much God loves him, and is thereby stirred to love Him in return, and herein lies the perfection of human salvation; hence the Apostle says (Rm. 5:8)...Secondly, because thereby He set us an example of obedience, humility, constancy, justice, and the other virtues (1 Pt. 2:21)... Thirdly, because Christ by His Passion not only delivered man from sin, but also merited justifying grace for him and the glory of bliss. Fourthly, because by this man is all the more bound to refrain from sin, according to 1 Cor. 6:20...’ Fifthly, because it redounded to man's greater dignity, that as man was overcome and deceived by the devil, so also it should be a man that should overthrow the devil; and as man deserved death, so a man by dying should vanquish death. ST III 46, 3

III Aquinas and Our Times

Intellectual integrity and consistency

“He who uses a lie to show God’s justice or goodness not only does a thing which God does not need, but even goes against God by this very act, for since God is truth, but every lie is contrary to the truth, whoever uses a lie to show God’s magnificence by this very fact acts against God.”
Literal Exposition on Job 13:7-8

The apostolate of the Intellect

‘It is better to give the results of one’s contemplation to others than simply to practice contemplation on one’s own.’ (ST II-II, 188, 6)

Seeing all Things sub ratione dei

“In sacred science, all things are treated of under the aspect of God: either because they are God Himself or because they refer to God as their beginning and end.” ST I 1, 7