

Via sunt Damascenus dicit. hō
fais ad ymaginē dei dī. Et q̄ p
ymaginē significatur intellectu
ale arbitrio libm̄ p̄ se potesta
tū. Postquā p̄dūm̄ ē de creat
plari. f. de zō z de hō q̄ p̄cessit cr̄dina
potestate sūm̄ et uoluntate. restat ut ostēdā
de et ymaginē. i. de hōie sūm̄ q̄ et ip̄e ē suoz
opum̄ p̄cipū. q̄ libm̄ arbitrium hūm̄ suo
p̄ opū potestate. v. p̄mo ostēdō q̄d de
ulio sine hūane uite. Et dicitur de hūm̄ p̄ q̄
hō ad hūc finē p̄cedit p̄ ul' ab eo recedat.
Et sine n. o. actū rōnes eoz q̄ ordinantur
in finē z q̄ ulm̄ finis hūane uite p̄ ē bi
mō o. p̄ ostēdare de ulmo sine sūm̄. dicitur
de beatitudine. ¶ Circa p̄ q̄ dicitur. v. m. hōmō
ut hōit sū age p̄ finē. ¶ Sed ut hoc sit
p̄ rōal' n. ¶ Secūdo ut q̄ hōit recipiat sū
et sine. ¶ Tertio ut sit al' ulm̄ finis hūane
uite. ¶ Quarto ut vū hōit. possint ēē p̄les
ulm̄ finis. ¶ Secūdo ut oīa sū q̄

nes. s. n̄ p̄e hūane q̄ nō sūnt hōit m̄q̄ e
lymo. aramfān est aut. q̄ om̄s adducit
q̄ p̄cedunt ab alicuiā p̄ Causatur ab ei
sū rōm̄ sūm̄ obi. Obm̄ a uoluntatis est fi
nis z bonū. vū o. q̄ om̄s actōnes. hūane sit
p̄ finē. ¶ Ad p̄ q̄ dicitur q̄ sūnt z si sit postre
m̄ i' creatōne. ¶ In p̄ intentione agentis
z hōc in hō rōm̄ cā. ¶ Ad sūm̄ dō q̄ si
hō actū hūana. sit ulm̄ finis; estū ceu
liberitatū. Alia nō ēēt hūa ut deū ēd' actū
aut. Aliq̄ dī uoluntaria dup' vno m̄ q̄ i'
p̄e a uoluntate. dicitur ambulare ut loquy.
Alto modo q̄ elicitur a uoluntate sic ipm̄
uelle. Imposs' aut' est q̄ actū a uoluntate
elicitur. sit ulm̄ finis. Nam obm̄ uolū
tatis est finis sicut obm̄ in suis est color.
vū sit impo' est q̄ p̄ uisibile sit ipm̄ u
dicit q̄ oīe uidere est. Alia' obm̄ uisibilis
ita est uisus q̄ p̄ uisus q̄ est finis sit ipm̄
uelle. vū relicūm̄ q̄ si q̄ actū hūana sit
ulm̄ finis q̄ vū sit

SECOND EDITION

The Essential Summa Theologiae

A READER AND COMMENTARY

Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt

Con. ut p̄e est hōit hō rōm̄ ulm̄
ut ipm̄ n̄ sonat. q̄ finis n̄ hō rōm̄ cie s; p̄
i ag hō q̄ est cā addit. z cā h̄ p̄ dicit
hōm̄ dicit cā. q̄ hōi n̄ uenit age p̄ finē. ¶ Ad
id q̄ dicitur. ulm̄ finis nō ē p̄ finē. v. q̄ hūm̄
adducit sūe ulm̄ finis ut p̄ p̄ p̄m̄ p̄mo
et hūoz q̄ nō oīa hō agit p̄ finē. ¶ De uic
ut hō agit p̄ finē q̄i delibat s; ulm̄ hō ag
absq̄ delibatione rēq̄; z q̄i; mēq̄ cogitat sūe
cā. Al' mōis p̄cedit aut' manu' alim̄ mēntis
ul' hūar' bar' lum̄. hō q̄ oīa agit p̄ finē. ¶ S;
s' om̄ia q̄ sūe; ulm̄ finis dicitur. a p̄i ul' sūm̄.
s; finis est p̄i' i' op̄abilib; ab hōie ut p̄ p̄e
p̄m̄ in sū p̄ hōoz q̄ hōi sūe oīa agit p̄ finē.
¶ Ad dō q̄ actōnis q̄ ab hōie agunt' ille so
le p̄e dicit hūane q̄ sit. p̄e hōit m̄q̄ ē hō.
Dicitur aut' hō ab alim̄ rēq̄n' abib; dicit
ul' hoc q̄d est suoz actūm̄ ut vū ille solcat
net' uocatur p̄e hūane. q̄z hō est dō est
hō dō suoz actūm̄ p̄ rōne z uoluntate. vū zū
libm̄ arbitriū ēē dī rēq̄l' uoluntatis z
rōm̄. Al' q̄ actōnes p̄e hūane dicit q̄ ēē
uoluntate delibata p̄cedunt. s; q̄ a' al' dō

hōit que est ulm̄ finis. ¶ Ad cā dō q̄
hō adducit non sūnt p̄e hūane q̄ n̄ p̄e
dicitur ex delibatione rōm̄ q̄ est p̄ hūa noz
actū. Et iō hōit quid finē ymaginā n̄ aut
p̄ rōm̄ p̄ hūm̄
¶ Ad sūm̄ dō q̄ agit p̄ finē sit
p̄ rōal' n̄. hō n̄ cū est age p̄ finē
m̄ q̄m̄ agit p̄ finē igno'cā. s; m̄lta
sūnt q̄ n̄ cogno'cā finē q̄ ul' oīo ca
rent cogno'cā. sic caruit i' sētib; les
ul' non a p̄ hōm̄ rōm̄ finis. sic beata
alia. vū q̄ p̄ ēē rōal' n̄ agit p̄ finem.
¶ Ad age p̄ finē est ordire suā actōm̄
ad finē s; hoc est rōm̄ opul. q̄ nō onēit
hūm̄ q̄ rōne caruit. ¶ P̄ bonū z finis
est obm̄ uoluntatis. s; uoluntas i' rōne
est ut dī mēto de aīa. q̄ age p̄ finē
non est n̄ rōnal' n̄. s; ē est q̄ p̄ p̄e
i' hō p̄ hōoz q̄ nō sūnt intellectū s; i' h̄
agit p̄ finē. ¶ Ad dō q̄ om̄ia agentia
nēce est age p̄ finē cāz. n̄. ad finē ordi
natū s; p̄ sūctatur nēce est alia' s;
trah. p̄ aut' inter om̄s cāntal' est cā
finis aut' rō est q̄. s; non nēce
formā n̄ sūm̄ q̄ mouet' ab age' uic' n̄ re

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Introduction

How to Begin with a Text for Beginners

Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* is undoubtedly a great work of theology.¹ Indeed, it is the only volume of anything like dogmatic or systematic theology among Britannica's Great Books of the Western World series. If there is a work of theology that needs no introduction, this is it. Moreover, Thomas himself says that he is writing it to aid those who are instructing "beginners" (*incipientes*), so it seems as if anyone ought to be able to sit down with the first article of the first question and work their way through it on their own.

But recalling my own initial attempts, now many years ago, to read Thomas, as well as my experience of attempting to teach Thomas, it seems evident to me that Thomas's theology is not immediately accessible. This may be because "beginners" in the thirteenth century were smarter than beginners today, or because Thomas misread his audience, or (what seems to me most likely) because Thomas never actually meant for beginners to read the *Summa*, but rather saw it as a guide for teachers, so that their pedagogy would have a reasonable structure. But whatever Thomas's original intention, the *Summa* has become a "great book" that people want to read—or want their students to read—despite the difficulties it may present. This is why I came up with the idea of a selection of key texts from the *Summa* accompanied by a running commentary that would explain terms, provide historical background, outline the shape of arguments, and make connections between different areas of Thomas's thought. My primary desire was to make it possible for those who are beginners in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, or even beginners in theology in general, to read him fruitfully.

1. *Summa theologiae* is "Summary of Theology." It is also called the *Summa theologica* or "Theological Summary."

But this book was also born out of a desire to help people read Thomas Aquinas differently. I hope this book will show that there is much of interest in Thomas that for many people remains unknown because it remains unread. Many people think they know what is important in Thomas's *Summa theologiae*: his proofs for the existence of God and perhaps what he has to say about natural law. While these things certainly are important, focusing on them exclusively distorts our image of what Thomas is up to in the *Summa*. He himself describes the *Summa* as an exercise in *sacra doctrina*, which is sometimes translated as "sacred doctrine," but which I think is better rendered as "holy teaching." This is an activity that is first and foremost God's activity of self-revelation through the prophets, the apostles, and preeminently through Jesus Christ. It is secondarily our human activity of passing on that revelation through teaching, which involves not simply rote repetition but a kind of critical reflection by which we seek to understand how to hand on this teaching faithfully.

So in this book I hope not simply to introduce the *Summa theologiae*, but to introduce it in such a way that its character as "holy teaching" is manifest.

Thomas's Life and Times

When studying some theologians, it seems crucial to understand their lives in order to understand their thought. If one wants to study Augustine, for example, his *Confessions* would seem the logical place to start, not least because his account of his own conversion illuminates the struggle between sin and grace—the earthly and the heavenly cities—that is at the heart of his theology. But not so with Thomas Aquinas. His writing displays little of the passion of Augustine: the tone is measured, the language without rhetorical flourish—reduced to essentials for the sake of clarity. One interpreter, presumably paying Thomas a compliment, went so far as to say that he "is hardly an 'author,' or even a 'man,' but rather a channel connecting us directly with intelligible truth" (Sertillanges 1932, 109). When confronted with a direct channel to intelligible truth, one is likely to be far more interested in the truth revealed than in the channel's family history. Thus have some viewed Thomas.

But I think this view of Thomas is mistaken. His life, while lacking the drama of Augustine's, is still important for understanding his work. More specifically, although one could remain ignorant of the pious anecdotes that surround Thomas without much loss in understanding his theology, some knowledge of the context in which he lived, taught, and wrote is crucial. Even

if Thomas's theology is one for the ages, one cannot properly understand that theology if one does not understand its author's place within his own age.

For those seeking a full presentation of Thomas's life, Jean-Pierre Torrell's (1996) biography remains the authoritative text. For those who want something briefer, Simon Tugwell (1988) provides an excellent short biography in the introduction to his *Albert and Thomas: Selected Writings*. For those who want to know only the most essential information, I offer the following.

Youth

Thomas Aquinas was born around the year 1225 at the Aquino family castle in Roccasecca, midway between Rome and Naples, in what was then the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Thomas was the eighth of nine children born to Landulf and Theodora d'Aquino. Landulf was a minor noble, described in the necrology of the monastery at Monte Cassino as a "knight." Thomas was born at the beginning of a time of conflict between Emperor Frederick II and a series of popes,² which caused problems for his family, since his father was a vassal of Frederick and their lands lay on the border between imperial and papal lands.

It was customary for the youngest son of a noble family to be offered for service to the church, and so, around the age of five (ca. 1230/31), Thomas was taken to live at the famous Benedictine monastery of Monte Cassino (which was nearby) as what was called a "child oblate." This may sound a bit callous to us, but it was a common practice in the Middle Ages, not unlike sending a child to boarding school. *Oblatio* is different from *professio* (i.e., becoming a monk) in that it does not involve solemn vows. Thomas would have eventually been able to decide for himself if he wanted to profess vows, but it is not unlikely that his family hoped he would one day become abbot of the monastery, which would be a suitably important role for the son of a noble family. But Monte Cassino was a contested territory between the emperor and the pope, and in 1239 Frederick's troops took it over, turned it into a fortress, and began expelling the monks. Thomas probably left about this time, with a recommendation from the monks to his family that he should go study at the University of Naples.

Around the age of fifteen Thomas entered the *studium generale* at Naples to study the liberal arts and philosophy (not theology). Universities were a relatively recent educational innovation, and this one had been founded by Frederick II with the idea of training men to serve the emperor in various

2. Honorius III, Gregory IX (who excommunicated Frederick at least twice), and Innocent IV (who declared Frederick guilty of heresy and tried to depose him as king).

official capacities. The education offered in Naples was broader and more secular than in some of the other universities. Thomas would have studied the seven “liberal arts”—what Vergerius called “those studies . . . which are worthy of a free man.” These were divided into the word-focused *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and the number-focused *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) and were the basis for any higher study, whether in law, medicine, or theology.

At Naples, Thomas encountered two new phenomena that would profoundly influence him and that are crucial for understanding him and his times: the writings of Aristotle and members of the Order of Preachers, more commonly known as the Dominicans.

Aristotle

Though separated from Aristotle (385–323 BC) by 1500 years, Thomas encountered his works as something newly arrived on the intellectual scene. Boethius, in the sixth century of the Christian era, had conceived a plan to translate all the works of Plato and Aristotle into Latin, so that they would remain available to a Western Europe rapidly losing its intellectual ties with the Greek-speaking East. He had gotten only as far as translating Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*, a work on logic, when this plan was cut short. Boethius ran afoul of Emperor Theodoric and was executed in 524. As a consequence, until the twelfth century most of the works of Aristotle were lost to the West. His logic was available in Boethius’s translation, but no one had firsthand knowledge of his works of natural science, metaphysics, or ethics.

During the twelfth century works by Aristotle and by Arabic philosophers commenting on his work began to be translated into Latin, and in the thirteenth century intellectual engagement with those works began in earnest. This was a revolutionary event. Rather quickly, the Western intellectual world was introduced to a body of thought offering a comprehensive interpretation of the world. Most disturbing was the fact that this interpretation seemed to have no need for Christian revelation. Christianity had long before made a kind of peace with Platonic thought (e.g., in St. Augustine and, in a very different way, in the anonymous Syrian monk who wrote under the name Dionysius the Areopagite), but Aristotle contradicted Plato on many points and seemed to call into question the harmony of natural and supernatural wisdom. For example, Christians had long before appropriated Plato’s notion of a realm of “forms” as a way of speaking of the Christian notion of divine ideas in the mind of God. Aristotle, however, conceived of “form” as existing not in a transcendent realm but immanently in particular things. In this and many

other cases, Aristotle's departure from Plato seemed to threaten established Christian doctrine. And it did not help Aristotle's case that his work arrived accompanied by commentaries and paraphrases done by Muslim infidels.

Because of the threat that Aristotle seemed to pose to faith, the teaching of his scientific and metaphysical works was banned at many universities, most notably at the University of Paris (the full Aristotelian corpus finally became an official part of the curriculum at Paris sometime between 1252 and 1255, though it was undoubtedly read and taught unofficially before this). But this ban was not in effect at Naples, and it was here that Thomas first studied Aristotle—not only his logic and ethics but also his scientific and metaphysical works. Later, in his formation as a Dominican, Thomas continued to study Aristotle under Albert the Great, and later in life he wrote several commentaries on the works of Aristotle. To anyone who has read Thomas, it is clear that Aristotle's philosophy is one of his chief tools for solving intellectual puzzles, though he not infrequently ends up making that tool do jobs for which it was never designed.

The Order of Preachers

Dominic Guzman was born in Spain around 1170 and died in 1221. He founded the Order of Preachers in 1215 to combat heresy—specifically, the Cathar or Albigensian heresy in southern France—through preaching. The Dominicans were part of a broadly based and diverse movement known as the *vita apostolica*, which sought a return to the kind of life depicted in the book of Acts: a shared life of preaching, prayer, and poverty. Along with the Franciscans (founded around the same time by Francis of Assisi), the Dominicans were *mendicants*: rather than living off income from property and manual labor, like traditional monastics, they supported themselves by begging. Freedom from income-generating property allowed them to minister in cities, which were undergoing a revival. The mendicant orders emphasized active service and were not strictly contemplative—again, differentiating them from traditional monastics. Because of their emphasis on preaching, the Dominicans also emphasized education, establishing houses of study at major universities, along with their own network of institutions for educating Dominican friars.

Just as Aristotle's works presented a new way of proceeding intellectually, the mendicant orders presented an innovative form of religious life, one that responded to recent developments such as the rise of universities and the revival of urban life. As such, they were the object of much suspicion. The Dominicans had founded a priory in Naples in 1231, though only two friars

were in residence when Thomas arrived (Frederick II had kicked most of the mendicants out of his realm). One of these friars, John of San Giuliano, inspired in Thomas a desire to join the Dominicans and live their life of prayer and study in the service of preaching.

We are not sure when exactly Thomas joined the Dominicans, though it was probably early in 1244,³ and it touched off the most obviously dramatic event in his life. His family was not thrilled at his interest in the Dominicans, who seemed to them a bunch of scruffy upstart radicals, and certainly not the kind of group with which the son of a nobleman should associate. Thomas's family no doubt still harbored the hope that he would someday become the abbot of Monte Cassino.

The friars, foreseeing trouble, decided Thomas should get out of Naples, so they sent him first to the Dominican community at Santa Sabina in Rome and then on to either Bologna or Paris (scholars differ as to his destination). His mother, seeking to talk some sense into him, just missed him in both Naples and Rome.⁴ Thereupon she sent a force, which included his brother Rinaldo, to intercept him and take him to the family castle in Roccasecca, so they could persuade him to adopt a more conventional path than that of a Dominican friar. His family kept him under a sort of house (or castle) arrest for about a year, during which time he is said to have memorized the Bible and studied the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. John of San Giuliano was able to visit him. Thomas also engaged in discussions with his sister Marotta that eventually led her to become a Benedictine nun. His brothers, frustrated with their lack of progress, smuggled a prostitute into his room to dissuade him from his chosen path, but Thomas kept her at bay with a burning stick, with which he then inscribed a cross on the wall of his room. This scene indicated, at least to his mother, that the case was hopeless. According to legend, she supplied him with a rope that he used to climb out the window of his room to the ground below. Torrell (1996, 11) thinks "the truth is no doubt more prosaic" (i.e., they simply let him go).

Legend tends to exaggerate the conflict between Thomas and his family, and it is clear that later in life he had good relations with them; but it *is* important to remember that his decision to join the Dominicans, like his interest

3. Tugwell (1988) inclines toward an earlier date (1242/43), which would indicate a fuller period of formation for Thomas prior to the events that were to follow.

4. The *Vita* of Thomas by Bernard Gui (in Foster 1959, 25–58), written in the early fourteenth century, tells the story slightly differently, perhaps in order to put Thomas's family in a better light. In Bernard's version, Theodora was thrilled that Thomas was joining the Dominicans and went to Naples to congratulate him. The Dominicans, misunderstanding her motive in coming to Naples, secreted Thomas away, thus arousing the ire of his mother.

in Aristotle, was seen as something radical. Thomas has come to be seen by so many as the standard-bearer for theological orthodoxy and intellectual conformity that it is worth noting his association with two movements that in his day were seen as dangerously nonconformist.

Student

Upon his release by his family, Thomas first went back to Naples, but then his movements become difficult to track. Apparently the Dominicans sent him to study first in Paris (1245–48) and then in Cologne (1248–52), where he was ordained a priest in 1250/51. In both places he studied with the Dominican theologian Albert the Great, who used the philosophy of Aristotle extensively. Apparently, neither Albert nor Thomas’s fellow students were particularly impressed with him at first. Tall and somewhat stout,⁵ Thomas never spoke much and often seemed lost in his own thoughts. His fellow students referred to him as the “dumb ox.” Albert, however, recognized fairly quickly Thomas’s great intellectual gifts and took a special interest in him. Eventually, his fellow students also came to recognize Thomas’s gifts and depended upon him to help them understand Albert’s lectures. One of Thomas’s earliest works, *On the Principles of Nature*, is thought to be something like a study guide to Aristotle’s natural philosophy that Thomas prepared for his fellow students.

In 1251/52 Thomas went to Paris as a *baccalarus sententiarium*—roughly equivalent to a doctoral student. As the title suggests, his job was to lecture on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. Lombard’s text was a collection of quotations that represented conflicting authoritative opinions (which is what *sententia* means) from Scripture and the church fathers on a host of topics. Lombard (ca. 1100–1161) put these conflicting opinions into something like a coherent structure and often added his own resolutions. The *Sentences* became the standard theology “textbook” for medieval universities. Thomas spent his time lecturing on the *Sentences* and composing those lectures into a commentary, which would serve as the functional equivalent of a modern dissertation and become the first of his comprehensive summaries of Christian doctrine, the *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* or *Commentary on the Sentences*.

Thomas was a good student because he was inquisitive and, like all truly inquisitive people, open minded (though not, perhaps, in our modern sense). He read voraciously in a time when books were hard to come by (he once

5. Though probably not, as some have claimed, obese. Like all Dominicans, Thomas would not ride a horse, traveling by foot on his various journeys. If one takes into account all of Thomas’s travels, it becomes apparent that he got plenty of exercise—much more so than modern-day academics.

said he would give the whole city of Paris for a copy of John Chrysostom's commentary on Matthew). He sought truth wherever he could find it, including in Muslim and Jewish and ancient pagan sources. But his fundamental understanding of truth was shaped by his identity as a Christian. Those who disagreed with the Christian faith were worth listening to, but the goal was always the vindication and deeper understanding of Christian truth.

Teacher and Preacher

In the spring of 1256 Thomas incepted as a master of theology (*magister in sacra pagina* or “master of the sacred page”), which involved a two-day disputation on four questions as well as an inaugural lecture on a passage of Scripture. Once Thomas was a magister, his job was threefold:

Legere: to lecture/comment on Scripture. This task was a significant part of Thomas's responsibilities. From the texts that survive, we know that Thomas lectured on the Old Testament books of Isaiah and Job as well as the first fifty Psalms. Among the New Testament books, lectures on the Gospels of Matthew and John and on the letters of Paul (including Hebrews) survive. Thomas's role as a commentator on Scripture is worth underscoring since for him this is at the heart of his intellectual enterprise. Indeed, one might say that the whole point of studying the fathers of the church—and even Aristotle—is to understand Scripture better.

Disputare: to participate in disputations, which were, along with the lecture, one of the chief ways of teaching in the medieval university. In a disputation, a question (e.g., “Is any further teaching required besides philosophical studies?”) was proposed; a group of students would first present arguments and citations of various authorities for the “no” side; then another group of students would present arguments and authoritative citations for the “yes” side. The next day the master would offer his own position, resolving the conflicts between the various authorities and responding to the specific arguments. A number of these disputations are preserved in edited form, and Thomas uses a modified form of the disputation to structure his arguments in the *Summa theologiae*.

Predicare: to preach. Thomas was, after all, a member of the Order of Preachers. But a reader of the *Summa theologiae*, or one of his commentaries on Aristotle, might find it difficult to imagine what one of Thomas's sermons would have been like. We have transcripts of a number of Thomas's sermons, which indicate that he shied away from high-flown

speculation in his preaching, which he often did in his native Neapolitan dialect. His early biographer Bernard Gui notes, “To the ordinary faithful he spoke the word of God with singular grace and power. . . . Subtleties he kept for the Schools; to the people he gave solid moral instruction suited to their capacity; he knew that a teacher must always suit his style to his audience” (in Foster 1959, 47).

In addition to these official duties, Thomas wrote on a variety of topics. It is noteworthy that many of the works for which he is best known—specifically, his two *Summae* and his commentaries on Aristotle—were works he accomplished in his “spare time.” In 1259, he was given Reginald of Piperno as a *socius*: what we might call today a research assistant. Reginald became important to Thomas in helping him carry out the vast amount of work he took on. Among other things, apparently, Reginald had to remind Thomas to eat, since Thomas often forgot to do so. During this time in Paris, Thomas began writing his second comprehensive work of Christian doctrine, the *Summa contra Gentiles*.

The habits Thomas formed as a magister in Paris between 1256 and 1259 in many ways defined the rest of his life, which he lived according to the relatively ordered pattern of lecturing to classes, conducting disputations, preaching, reading, writing/dictating, and praying. His world was primarily an academic one. He spent many years in Paris at the university, but he never learned French, since this was the language of the marketplace, whereas Latin was the language of the university. Thomas rose early, said Mass, attended another Mass, and then spent the rest of the day working.

Between spring 1259 and fall 1268, Thomas was in Italy, mainly teaching Dominicans. In Rome (beginning in 1265) he was the regent master of the Dominican *studium* (house of studies), where he was given free rein to develop his own ideas about how theologians were to be trained. During this time he finished the *Summa contra Gentiles* (1264) and soon after began the *Summa theologiae* (1266). No doubt, his experience at the *studium* in Rome prompted him to think about how one should proceed in teaching theology, and the students he had in mind were quite possibly the kind of men he was teaching at the *studium* in Rome: those preparing for pastoral ministry as Dominican friars.⁶

In 1268 Thomas returned to Paris as a regent master. It is possible that he was sent back to Paris to address the brewing controversy between the arts faculty and the theology faculty. The arts faculty, which instructed the students

6. This is Torrell's view (1996, 144–45), based on the arguments made by Leonard Boyle (1982).

in the liberal arts prior to more advanced study, was much enamored of Aristotle, particularly as interpreted by the Arabic philosopher Averroes. The theology faculty remained suspicious of the Aristotelians. They were willing to employ Aristotle's philosophy for certain purposes, but they suspected that the arts faculty was more Aristotelian—or in fact Averroist—than they were Christian.

Thomas had been critical of the so-called Averroists on a number of issues; yet, despite his disagreements with them, he was highly admired by many of the philosophers on the arts faculty—no mean achievement for a theologian, even in Thomas's day. His reputation was more mixed among the theologians, many of whom, particularly the Franciscans, accused him of being a closet Averroist and of holding something like a “double-truth” view of the relationship between philosophy and theology (i.e., the view that something could be true philosophically but not theologically, and vice versa). This charge would not go away quickly. The secular masters (i.e., those theologians who did not belong to the Franciscans or the Dominicans or any other religious order) disliked Thomas because he was a mendicant, and mendicants, as noted, were thought to be dangerous innovators.

While in Paris, Thomas continued work on the *Summa theologiae* (the *secunda pars*) and began working on commentaries on the works of Aristotle. In addition, he delivered his lectures on the Gospel of John, which are widely considered one of his masterpieces; he also wrote numerous smaller works. In 1272 he was once again sent to Naples, where he was to set up a *studium*, again with freedom to organize it as he wished. Here he delivered his lectures on Paul's Letters and continued work on his Aristotelian commentaries and on the *tertia pars* of the *Summa theologiae*.

Silence and Death

While celebrating Mass on December 6, 1273 (the feast of St. Nicholas), Thomas underwent some sort of extraordinary experience. After Mass, he did not set to work, as was his habit, but returned to his room. Reginald tried to get him to work, but Thomas said, “Reginald, I cannot, because all that I have written seems like straw to me.” Thomas seemed as if he were in a daze—something different from his usual abstracted state. A few days later Reginald pressed him about the problem, and Thomas replied, “All that I have written seems to me like straw compared to what has been revealed to me.”⁷

7. From Bartholomew of Capua's testimony at Thomas's first canonization inquiry (in Foster 1959, 110).

What happened? Scholars differ. Thomas had been working at an incredible pace and was undoubtedly under a certain amount of stress, both physically and mentally. Clearly Thomas experienced more than a simple mental breakdown, because the historical sources emphasize his physical weakness after this event. Some scholars have speculated that it was something like a stroke. But was this simply a psychological/physical event, or was there a spiritual component? Thomas's remark about "what has been revealed to me" seems to indicate a spiritual experience. Simon Tugwell notes that Thomas had just finished the section of the *Summa theologiae* dealing with the sacrament of the Eucharist, and whatever it was that happened occurred while he was celebrating Mass (Tugwell 1988, 265). Thomas had always had a strong devotion to Christ as present in the Eucharist, and perhaps he was granted some extraordinary insight into this mystery, an insight that made him unwilling or uninterested or unable to continue writing.

Some people wish to see in the words "All that I have written seems to me like straw" Thomas's repudiation of his own writing. However, Tugwell suggests a different interpretation: "'Straw' is a conventional image for the literal sense of scripture, which is worth having, even if it is only a beginning. Words can lead us to reality. But if Thomas had, in some way, peered beyond faith and glimpsed something of the reality to which the words of faith point, of course the words would lose their appeal. They had served their purpose" (Tugwell 1988, 266–67).

Although he had ceased his scholarly work, Thomas was still a friar in service to the church. So when in February 1274 he was summoned to attend the Council of Lyon, which was seeking to reunite the Eastern and Western churches, he set out, despite his physical weakness. While traveling, he hit his head on a tree branch and was unable to continue. He was taken first to the nearby house of one of his sisters and then, at his request, to the nearby Cistercian monastery at Fossanova, where he died on March 7.

The Character of Thomas's Thought

I make no pretense that the comments that accompany this selection of texts from the *Summa theologiae* represent anything like a "neutral" interpretation of Thomas. I have tried to make comments that will help the reader understand Thomas, but I, like all interpreters, have my biases. So I will spell out here what I take to be characteristic of Thomas's thought, noting where I differ from other interpreters.

First, I take Thomas to be a theologian through and through. Though philosophically astute, Thomas does not think of himself as a philosopher.

Indeed, he reserves the title “philosopher” for non-Christian lovers of wisdom. Thomas, by contrast, is a master of the sacred page—an interpreter of Christian Scripture who is willing to use whatever tools are at hand, including philosophical ones, to bring out the meaning of God’s revelation. Thus the image some people have of Thomas as a philosopher who wrote a bit of perfunctory theology is *prima facie* incorrect. The more sophisticated view that there is within Thomas’s theology a philosophy that can be detached and stand on its own is, to my mind, equally wrong. It is true that, for Thomas, things can be known about God apart from divine revelation, but he never tries to construct a system of thought out of those things, since he sees them as radically inadequate to true human flourishing.⁸ And even when writing his commentaries on Aristotle, Thomas is always writing in service of the Christian faith.

Second, on a related point, I take Thomas’s relationship to Aristotle to be a complex one, inadequately described as that of disciple to master. Thomas is surely an admirer of Aristotle and a brilliant commentator on his writings. He thinks Aristotle more useful for Christian theology than Plato (of whom he has, at best, secondhand knowledge), not least because Aristotle helps him focus on and analyze the concrete particular existing thing, which for him fits well with the Christian ideas of creation and incarnation. But Thomas is *not* an Aristotelian in at least two senses. First, his strong interest in Aristotle must be balanced by the fact that he draws upon a wide range of thinkers, including the two very different forms of Neoplatonic Christian theology represented by Augustine and by Dionysius the Areopagite, both of whom are pervasive influences on Thomas’s writings. Second, although he finds Aristotle useful for his theological purposes, he is willing to change Aristotle both when the latter conflicts with divine revelation and when Thomas judges him to be philosophically mistaken. The common view that Thomas’s reconciliation of Christian revelation with Aristotelian philosophy is one of his great achievements is true, in a sense, but we must always keep in mind that Thomas accomplishes this reconciliation only through a fundamental transformation of Aristotle.

Third, whereas some scholars think of Thomas as someone who thinks that we can know quite a lot about God, I take him quite seriously when he says that we can know more easily what God is not than what God is. For Thomas, God’s essence—what God is—is ungraspable by created intellects,

8. It can appear in the first three books of the *Summa contra Gentiles* that Thomas does try to build a system out of what we can know of God apart from revelation. But for an argument that this is not the case, see Hibbs (1995).

and his theology always proceeds with this fact in mind. God's essence is ungraspable not because God hides from us, but because when we turn our minds to God there is too much offered to our understanding. We get a sense of this excess in Thomas's words to Reginald: "All that I have written seems to me like straw compared to what has been revealed to me." As Joseph Pieper (1999, 38) puts it, "He is silent, not because he has nothing further to say; he is silent because he has been allowed a glimpse into the inexpressible depths of that mystery which is not reached by any human thought or speech."

Fourth, I do not take Thomas to be someone who thinks that the ungraspability of God's essence consigns us to silence. In Christ, God has given us a language to speak, by which we can speak truly about God, even if the concepts to which our words refer are inadequate to the truth we seek to articulate. Some interpreters have taken the fact that Thomas's discussion of Christology is deferred to the third part of the *Summa theologiae* as an indication of a lack of interest on his part. This is, I think, too wooden a reading of the structure of the *Summa*. But whatever opinion one holds about the structure of the *Summa*, careful attention to the actual content that fills that structure reveals that Christ pervades the entire work. Indeed, the whole point of the *Summa* is to help us learn to follow Christ by teaching us the truth that God has revealed in Christ.

Reading the *Summa*

The format of the *Summa theologiae* can appear confusing at first, but once you grasp how Thomas proceeds, it is in fact a model of clarity.

The *Summa* is structured in three "parts." The *prima pars* (first part) concerns God and creation. The *secunda pars* (second part) concerns human action and is subdivided into a theoretical treatment of human action (the *prima secunda*, or first half of the second part) and a detailed examination of human virtues and vices (the *secunda secunda*, or second half of the second part). The *tertia pars* (third part) concerns Christ: his person and work, the continuation of his work in the church through the sacraments, and his second coming and the consummation of creation (though this eschatological section was never written). There are numerous theories about the significance of the structure of the *Summa*; although such theories can be illuminating, they should not distract us from its actual content.

Each part contains numerous "questions," which are further subdivided into "articles." Your reading of Thomas will be greatly helped if you understand how he proceeds in these articles.

As mentioned above, the articles of the *Summa* grow out of a medieval teaching practice known as “disputation.” The pattern of the disputation was as follows:

- A question, or thesis, is put forward.
- Objections against the thesis are offered by students and other masters (these can be quite numerous).
- Counterobjections that speak for the thesis are offered by students and other masters (these also can be quite numerous).
- The master (usually the next day) offers a response outlining his own position.
- The master replies to any of the objections that remain.

If we look at any of Thomas’s collections of disputed questions (e.g., *On Truth* or *On the Power of God*) we can see that these disputations could become quite unwieldy. After all, some students talk even when they have nothing to say; and so too in the disputed questions some of the objections and counterobjections are quite repetitive, and others are of dubious value. In the *Summa*, Thomas refines this form, boiling it down to its essentials:

- He states the thesis in the form of a question.
- He raises objections against the thesis—usually two or three, but occasionally more.
- He offers a counterposition, introduced by *sed contra* (on the contrary), which is almost always reduced to a single counterpoint and usually cites a biblical passage or other authority, instead of making an argument.
- He gives his own response, introduced by *respondeo* (I answer)—usually inclined toward the *sed contra*, but not always.
- He marshals replies to each of the initial objections.

We might note a few key points about reading an article. First, it is never enough to read the *respondeo* alone, since Thomas sometimes makes his most important point in the replies to the objections. Second, the objections are not “straw men.” Of all the possible objections, Thomas chose those he thought most convincing. Often an objection is at least half of the way, and sometimes three-quarters of the way, to the truth. Third, we should not presume that the *sed contra* is Thomas’s position. On occasion it misses the truth as much as the objections, albeit in a different direction. Finally, we should note how this structure, based as it is on the disputation, is dynamic. There is always

an argument that is moving forward through objection and counterobjection. Indeed, we should think of the *Summa* as a vast, extended discussion of the truth of the Christian faith, a discussion we are invited to join.

Note on the Second Edition

Because the first edition of this work, under the title *Holy Teaching: Introducing the “Summa Theologiae” of St. Thomas Aquinas* (2005), proved useful to people teaching Thomas Aquinas, I have had the good fortune to be able to produce this second edition. Let me note some of the changes and additions from the first edition.

First, the content is expanded, primarily with material from the *secunda pars*. In part this is in order to make the book more useful for those who want to focus on Thomas’s moral teachings. But mainly it is because in the intervening fifteen years I have come to understand better what Thomas is doing in the *Summa*. My original desire was to redress somewhat the bias against the explicitly theological elements of Thomas—his writing on the Trinity or Christology, for example. What I have come to see is that the second part of the *Summa* is just as theological as the first and third parts, and in a sense the first and third parts exist to give a capacious theological context for the second part, which was crucial for preparing Dominican friars for their ministry of caring for souls through the sacrament of penance.

So I have tried to select texts that will give an accurate, if not exhaustive, picture of how Thomas thought about human action—what makes it good and what makes it bad. The selections from the first half of the second part contain key elements of what modern philosophers might call Thomas’s “action theory”: the end-oriented or teleological nature of human action, the nature of the will and its freedom, the role of virtue and law in guiding human acts, and the role of God’s grace. From the second half of the second part, which is structured around the cardinal and theological virtues, I have chosen one or more general questions on each virtue, along with some questions that show how what Thomas thinks about these virtues plays out in terms of practical questions, ranging from the toleration of heretics to the licitness of war to economic justice.

Second, I have identified for each article one or more key secondary readings, in part as an attempt to show my own intellectual indebtedness. I have tended to choose sources that have informed my own readings, but in some cases I have chosen readings that disagree with my interpretations, and some that disagree with one another, in order to initiate readers into the vast and

sometimes fractious world of Aquinas interpretation. When at all possible, I have chosen secondary readings in English.

Third, Thomas changed his mind on a number of questions, and so have I. The commentary on all articles has been revised, and I hope the changes reflect my growth in understanding Thomas over the past fifteen years. Most of what I said in the first edition I stand by, but I have also come to a deeper understanding of how Thomas was not a unique beacon of truth in the thirteenth century; he was rather a member of a community of scholars who had their differences, but who also agreed on much. I have softened some of my judgments regarding those who disagreed with Thomas and become more aware of how much he took from predecessors and contemporaries, and I hope the commentary reflects this.

I too have lived as a member of a community of scholars, and like Thomas I have taken much from them. As was the first edition, this book is dedicated to Stanley Hauerwas, who showed me what it means to have a passion for teaching theology. But Stanley must now share that honor with his fellow Texan, Trent Pomplun, from whom I have learned much in the past two decades about theology and life.

Some Technical Matters

Text and the translation. The translation has been thoroughly revised from the first edition and is much more my own work, though I must acknowledge the debt I owe to the various English and French translations I consulted: the early twentieth-century translation by Laurence Shapcote (widely available online, usually identified as translated by “Fathers of the English Dominican Province”); the collaborative translation edited by Thomas Gilby (Cambridge, 1964–72); the as-yet incomplete translation of Alfred Freddoso (<https://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/summa-translation/TOC.htm>); and the various volumes published in French by Cerf under the imprint *Éditions de la Revue des Jeunes*. The Latin text upon which the translation is based is that of the Leonine edition, though in a few places that I note I prefer readings from earlier editions.

Citations. The *Summa theologiae* itself is cited by part, question, and article, so that 3.24.2 means third part, question twenty-four, article two. In referring to the reply to an objection, I use “ad,” plus the number of the objection, so that 3.24.2 ad 1 means third part, question twenty-four, article two, reply to objection one. Because the second part of the *Summa* is itself divided into two “halves,” references to this part begin with an additional numeral to designate the “half”; thus 1–2.5.1 means the first half of the second part, question 5, article 1. For

other works by Thomas, I have noted standard divisions including parts, books, chapter, articles, and so on that should be clear to anyone consulting those works.

My annotations to Thomas's text appear as footnotes that are numbered sequentially within each question. In other words, as you move from one of Thomas's questions to the next, you will see that the numbering of the annotations starts over again with the numeral 1. Cross-references between notes thus rely on the same method of citation just described, although only the part and question number are required. For example, if I say "see 2–2.19 note 5," I mean "see the second half of the second part, question 19, note 5." When I refer to texts from the *Summa theologiae* that are contained in this volume, I add the word "above" or "below" (as appropriate).

I have tried to fill out all of Thomas's citations using the common English title of each work (except where the work is better known by its Latin title; for example, Augustine's *De Trinitate*) and to give the book and chapter divisions as they appear in most editions. Thomas typically cites the Bible according to the Vulgate, which in some cases (particularly the Psalms) has different chapter and verse numbering from modern Bibles. In these instances, the citations have been changed to conform to the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, though the quotations themselves are translated from the Vulgate. In the case of Aristotle's works, I have also included the column number of the Berlin edition, which can greatly aid in locating texts in different translations. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations of ancient and medieval sources appearing in the notes have been taken from the translations listed in the "Ancient and Medieval Sources" section of the bibliography. Perhaps I should also note that Thomas refers to Aristotle as "the Philosopher," just as he refers to St. Paul as "the Apostle" and to Peter Lombard as "the Master."

PROLOGUE TO THE *Summa theologiae*

Because the teacher of catholic truth¹ ought not only to instruct the advanced but also to enlighten beginners, since according to the Apostle, “As unto little ones in Christ, I gave you milk to drink, not solid food” (1 Cor. 3:1–2), the intention we set before us in this work is to treat whatever pertains to the Christian religion in a way suited to the instruction of beginners.²

For we have considered how newcomers to this teaching have been greatly hindered by what is written in various places, partly on account of the multiplication of useless questions, articles, and arguments. It is also because the things they need to know are not passed on according to the order of the subject matter, but according to what is required for commenting on a book or what is produced by the occasion of an academic debate. Finally, it is also because frequent repetition produced distaste and confusion in the minds of hearers.³

1. Note that Thomas here addresses “the teacher of catholic truth.” This suggests that Thomas intended the *Summa* to be, rather than a textbook for students, something like a guide for instructors: a model for how to shape theological inquiry, as well as a sourcebook of important authorities and arguments that a teacher would consult when lecturing or conducting disputations.

2. There has been much debate over what Thomas means by *incipientes* (beginners). A growing consensus holds that his intended audience was those who were teaching students in the various provincial centers of study (i.e., *studia*) of the Dominican order, students preparing not for teaching careers but for pastoral ministry (see Boyle 1982). Thomas began writing the *Summa* while teaching not at a university but at the *studium* of Santa Sabina in Rome, and the innovative and detailed treatment of moral theology in the second part may suggest such a pastoral orientation. He clearly does not mean, however, those with no theological knowledge whatsoever.

3. We can infer what Thomas has in mind here. We know that theological instruction in medieval universities and *studia* took primarily two forms: lectures that commented on the books of Scripture or on Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*, and “disputations” in which students and faculty debated specific theological questions (see the introduction to this book). It is perhaps these two forms of instruction that Thomas means when he says the things students need to know “are not passed on according to the order of the subject matter, but according to what is required for commenting on a book [i.e., of Scripture] or what is produced by the occasion of an academic debate [i.e., the disputation].” Thomas’s

Striving to avoid these and other such faults, we shall try, trusting in God's help, to pursue whatever pertains to this holy teaching, as briefly and clearly as the subject matter allows.

point seems to be that in both these cases topics are taken up as they arise rather than presented in an orderly fashion, in which one question presumes and builds upon what has come before.