

Lecture 29- The Angelic Doctor: Thomas Aquinas

History is the only science enjoying the ambiguous fortune of being required to be at the same time an art.

Johann Gustav Droysen

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

I Corinthians 13: 13

Assigned Reading

The Story of Christianity—No reading assignment for this lecture

Key Terms

Summa Contra Gentiles, Summa Theologiae

Objectives

- Discuss the life of Thomas Aquinas
- List the five ways Aquinas says we can know God

Class Prayer

“Grant me grace, O merciful God, to desire ardently all that is pleasing to Thee, to examine it prudently, to acknowledge it truthfully, and to accomplish it perfectly, for the praise and glory of Thy name. Amen.”

Thomas Aquinas

The Angelic Doctor: Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274)

I. “The Dumb Ox”

II. The Dominican Scholar

A. The Dominican Order

B. Albert the Great (1200-1280)

III. The Systematic Theologian

A. His writing in general

B. *Summa Contra Gentiles* (the five ways)

1. Things experience a mover: God
2. Effects have a cause: God
3. Contingent beings depend on a necessary being: God
4. The truth comes from the true: God
5. The world has a designer: God

Philosopher Alvin Plantinga’s use of the argument from design: “The fundamental constants of physics—the speed of light, the gravitational constant, the strength of the weak and strong nuclear forces—must apparently have values that fall within an extremely narrow range for life to be so much as possible... This suggests or makes plausible the thought that the world was designed or created by a designer who intended the existence of living creatures and eventually rational, intelligent, morally significant creatures.”

C. *Summa Theologiae* (1272)

1. Theology and philosophy (faith and reason are independent but complementary)
2. The principle of analogy (God is revealed in our terms without being reduced to our level)

3. Precise definitions

IV. The Christian

- A. "Give me, O Lord, a steadfast heart, which no unworthy affection may drag downwards; give me an unconquered heart, which no tribulation can wear out; give me an upright heart, which no unworthy purpose may tempt aside."
- B. "Only yourself, Lord."
- C. "I can do no more. For all I have written seems to me like straw."

V. Catholic Evaluations

- A. Flannery O'Connor

VI. Protestant Evaluations

- A. Luther and Calvin
- B. Francis Schaeffer
- C. John Gerstner and R. C. Sproul

For Further Study

Aquinas, Thomas. *Light of Faith: The Compendium of Theology*.

Two years before he died, Thomas Aquinas was asked by his assistant, Brother Reginald, to write a simple summary of theology for those who find his massive *Summa Theologiae* intimidating (which, no doubt, includes all of us). This book, the result of that request, begins: "To restore man, who had been laid low by sin, to the heights of divine glory, the Word of the eternal Father, though containing all things within His immensity, willed to become small. This He did, not by putting aside His greatness, but by taking to Himself our littleness."

Chesterton, G. K. *Saint Thomas Aquinas*.

Only Chesterton could write a book like this.

Vos, Arvin. *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought: A Critique of Protestant Views on the Thought of Thomas Aquinas*.

An interesting account of (those Protestant theologians called by Vos) "peeping Thomists."

Read "Selling and Lending" which is taken from Thomas's famous *Summa Theologica*. This great work contains not only large and small matters of philosophical and theological issues but also topics of practical importance such as this one. Who is the "Philosopher" that Thomas frequently refers to? How does Thomas actually answer the two questions that he poses?

Read the two short sermons by Thomas Aquinas. How would you describe his preaching style? In the second sermon ("The Fever of Sin, and its Cure"), what does he say that a person has to do to be cured of sin?