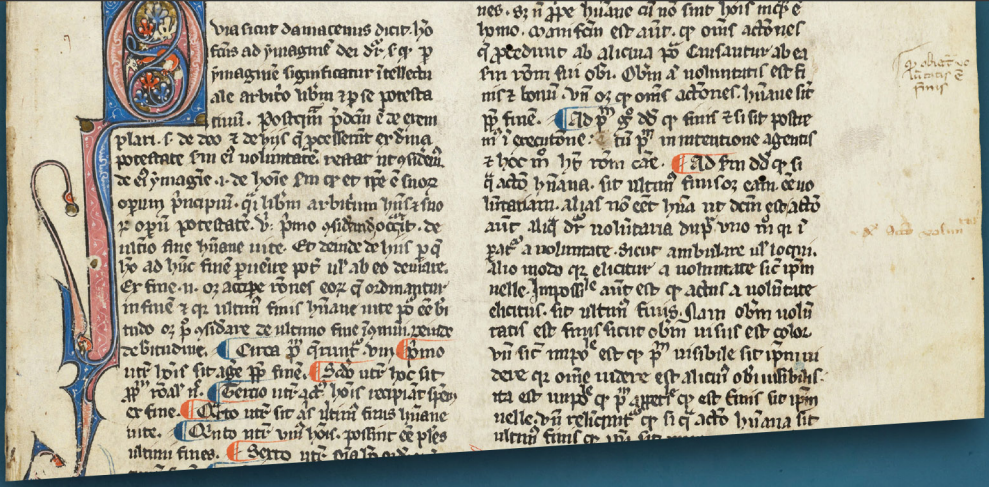

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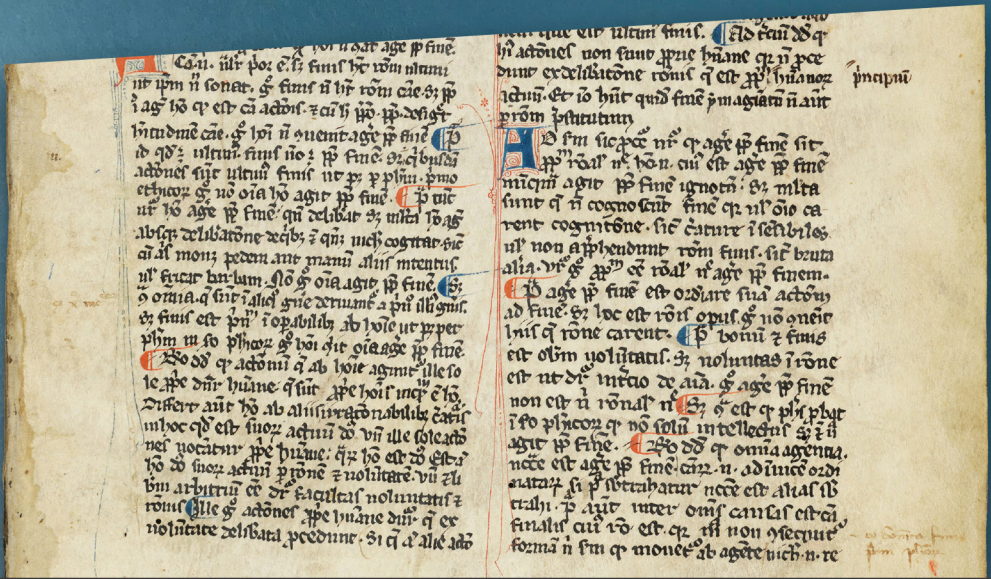
The Essential *Summa Theologiae*

A READER AND COMMENTARY

Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt



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For Stanley Hauerwas, fellow hillbilly Thomist,
and
Trent Pomplun, Texan Scotist

Contents

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 commentating 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 sententarium*—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 truth[1] 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 suggest 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.

THE FIRST PART

Question 1:

The Nature of Holy Teaching

1.1.1[1]

Is any further teaching required besides philosophical studies?

It seems that, besides philosophical studies [*philosophicas disciplinas*], there is no need to consider any further teaching [*doctrinam*].[2]

1. A human being ought not to seek to know what is above reason, for, according to Sirach (3:21), "Seek not the things that are too high for you." But what falls under reason is sufficiently treated in philosophical studies. It therefore seems superfluous to consider any other teaching besides philosophical studies.

2. Teaching can be concerned only with things that exist, for nothing can be known except what is true, which is convertible with what is.[3] Everything that exists is treated in philosophical disciplines, even God: thus there is a part of philosophy called "theology," or "divine science" [*scientia divina*], as is laid

1. On this article, see White (1958); Marshall (2005).

2. *Philosophicae disciplinae* might be translated as "the philosophical disciplines," referring to areas of philosophy such as logic or ethics or metaphysics. I have translated it as "philosophical studies" in order to include both the activity of accomplished philosophers and that of students of philosophy. *Doctrina* does not refer primarily to a proposition that one is expected to adhere to (what we today normally mean by a "doctrine") but to an activity: the activity of teaching. This is significant because Thomas here is not asking about the legitimacy of some set of propositions but rather about the legitimacy of a particular kind of teaching activity. Thomas's question is whether one needs to engage in teaching apart from the teaching associated with philosophy. In other words, do we need theology or, as Thomas calls it, *sacra doctrina* (holy teaching)?

3. Like virtually all medieval thinkers, Thomas presumes what in technical language is called "the convertibility of the transcendentals," which refers to those perfections that necessarily accompany existence—such as goodness, truth, and unity—and therefore transcend the genera and species that divide beings into different kinds. So inasmuch as something exists, it is good, true, and one. And the more perfectly the existence of something is realized, the better, truer, and more unified it is. The point of the objection is that because being and truth are "convertible," philosophy, which in metaphysics deals with "being," is all you need for truth.

out by the Philosopher in his *Metaphysics* (6.1, 1026[a]).[4] Therefore, beyond philosophical disciplines there is no need to consider any further teaching.

On the contrary: It is written in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All divinely inspired Scripture is useful to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in righteousness." Divinely inspired Scriptures do not pertain to the philosophical disciplines, which are acquired through human reason. It is useful, therefore, that beyond philosophical studies there should be another sort of knowing [*scientia*], which is divinely inspired.[5]

I answer: It was necessary for human well-being [*ad humanam salutem*] that there should be a divinely revealed teaching beyond the philosophical studies investigated by human reason.[6]

First, because humanity is directed to God as to an end that surpasses the grasp of its reason.[7] According to Isaiah (64:4), "Eye has not seen, O God, without you, what things you have prepared for those that love you."[8] But the end must first be known by people who are to direct their intentions and actions to that end.[9] And so it was necessary for the well-being of humanity that certain truths that exceed human reason should be made known by divine revelation.

4. The point of the objection here is that philosophers *also* inquire after God's existence and nature (Aristotle, "the Philosopher," being a prime example of this), and therefore philosophical inquiry is sufficient for understanding God.

5. On what Thomas means by *scientia*, see 1.1 note 17, below.

6. Aquinas sees the purpose of holy teaching as first and foremost soteriological—i.e., directed toward the salvation of human beings. This salvation involves both healing the effects of sin and fulfilling the potential of human nature in a way that surpasses the demands of that nature (see 3.1 note 20).

The Latin *salus* has a wider range of meanings than the English word "salvation." The root meaning of *salus* is "health" or "well-being," and although it certainly can, and in this specific case probably does, refer to the ultimate well-being of eternal life with God—i.e., salvation as we ordinarily conceive it—it is not restricted to this meaning. If one takes *salus* in the more restricted sense of eternal life with God, then Thomas can be understood to be saying that human reason is sufficient to secure this-worldly well-being, but that we need a truth beyond what reason can give us—the special teaching by God known as revelation—in order to attain eternal life. Put differently, he would be saying that reason suffices for natural fulfillment, but revelation is necessary for *super*natural fulfillment. However, if one takes *salus* in the broader sense of human well-being or flourishing, then Thomas would seem to be saying that a knowledge of divine truths beyond reason contributes to flourishing in all areas of human life, not simply in our religious or spiritual lives. Both interpretations can find support in the text of Thomas. Many debates over the proper interpretation of Thomas, especially in the last century, have revolved around this and related questions. Of particular relevance is the question of the relationship between divine grace and human nature (see note 28 in this question and all of 1–2.109.2, below).

7. This statement expresses some of the basic principles of Thomas's thought (and, indeed, of all Christian, Jewish, and Muslim theology)—namely, that God is (1) the goal or purpose (i.e., the "end") of our existence and (2) beyond our capacity to fully comprehend.

8. Thomas is here conflating Isa. 64:4, which reads "those who wait for him," with 1 Cor. 2:9, which reads "those who love him."

9. You cannot be said to be acting to obtain a particular goal unless you have at least *some* knowledge of the goal. If I went to college but did not know that the college awarded degrees upon successful

And even regarding those truths about God that human reason *could* have discovered, it was necessary that human beings should be taught by a divine revelation. For the truth about God discovered by reason would be available only to a few, and even then after a long time, and with the mixing in of many errors.[10] But humanity's whole well-being, which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of this truth. Therefore, in order that the salvation of human beings might be brought about more fittingly and more surely [*convenientius et certius*], it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation.[11]

It was therefore necessary to have, beyond philosophical studies investigated through reason, a holy teaching learned through revelation.[12]

Reply to 1: Even if things too lofty for human knowledge may not be sought by someone through reason, nevertheless, once they are revealed by God, they must be accepted through faith.[13] Therefore the text continues, "For many things are shown to you above human understanding" (Sir. 3:23). And in this holy teaching consists.

Reply to 2: Disciplines are differentiated by the various aspects under which things are known. The astronomer and the physicist may both prove the same conclusion—for instance, that the earth is round[14]—but the astronomer does

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completion of the course of study, then one would not normally say that obtaining a degree was the goal of my going to college. For more on what Thomas means by acting for a goal or end, see 1–2.1.1, below.

10. Thomas does believe that we can know *some* things about God simply by using our human reason, but he also thinks that such knowledge is quite minimal and that it can be had only by very smart people who have a lot of time for thinking about such things. And even when they have arrived at some genuine truths about God (e.g., that God exists), they will still be wrong about many other things about God (e.g., that he requires human sacrifices or that he has no knowledge of the world). Thomas seems to derive this particular way of putting things from the twelfth-century Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides (see *Guide of the Perplexed* 1.1.34).

11. Some manuscripts read "more widely and securely" (*communis et securius*). It is also worth noting here that when Thomas says revelation is "necessary," he does not mean that God is in any way obliged to reveal himself to human beings. Rather, he means that given the divine purpose of saving humanity—not only the clever and leisured but also the dull and busy—it was fitting that God teach human beings. On this use of "necessary," see Thomas's discussion in 3.46.1, below.

12. Thomas's view, therefore, is that divinely revealed teaching is necessary both (1) because some mysteries of faith are beyond human discovery and also (2) because some things about God could only be discovered with great difficulty. This view is articulated centuries earlier by Augustine in his *Confessions* (6.5.7), where he speaks of his discovery of the need to believe what cannot be demonstrated, "whether this was because a demonstration existed but could not be understood by all or whether the matter was not one open to rational proof."

13. In response to the first objection, Thomas points out that the discipline of theology is not simply a matter of human seeking, because it is based not on what *we* think about God but on what God has revealed about himself. At the same time, the human response of faith is a human intellectual act and is therefore subject to further intellectual exploration or, as St. Anselm (ca. 1033–1109) put it in his *Proslogion*, "*fides quaerens intellectum*" (faith seeking understanding).

14. Contrary to current popular opinion, educated medieval people knew that the world was round. As early as the sixth century BC the Greek philosopher Pythagoras argued for a round earth, and almost

this by means of mathematics (i.e., leaving aside matter), while the physicist does this by means that take matter into account. In this way, nothing prevents those things that may be learned from philosophical studies, insofar as they can be known by natural reason, from also being taught to us by another discipline, insofar as they are known by the light of revelation. Therefore the theology that pertains to holy teaching is of a different kind than that which is considered as a part of philosophy.[15]

1.1.2[16]
Is holy teaching *scientia*?[17]

It seems that holy teaching is not *scientia*.

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no educated person after this thought that the earth was flat. The widespread belief that Christopher Columbus was the first to "prove" the roundness of the earth apparently originated with the novelist Washington Irving in the nineteenth century.

15. Sometimes what makes one kind of knowledge different from another is not so much the knowledge itself as it is the *means* by which the knowledge is obtained. Thomas's point is that philosophy and theology might lead us to the same bit of knowledge (e.g., that there exists a first mover of the universe), but they are still distinct ways of pursuing knowledge, since in the case of philosophy we believe something because human reason tells us, whereas in the case of theology we believe something because God tells us.

16. On this article, see White (1958); Marshall (2005).

17. Medieval debates over the "scientific" status of theology took on a particular urgency in the thirteenth century as the Latin West began to assimilate the writings of Aristotle, who, in his *Posterior Analytics*, mapped the terrain of *epistēmē* (translated in medieval Latin as *scientia*) as the highest and most certain form of knowledge. There was a wide diversity of views on the place of theology in relation to *scientia*, and Thomas's view was by no means normative.

I have chosen to leave the word *scientia* untranslated in order to remind readers that in Aristotelian and medieval usage *epistēmē*/*scientia* meant something quite different from its modern English cognate "science." Loosely translated, it simply means "knowledge," in contrast to "opinion" or "faith," and could include a wide range of inquiries. More precisely, however, *scientia* names the result of a process by which unknown things are deduced from known things; as Thomas says, "The meaning of *scientia* consists in this: that from things known, necessary conclusions about other things are drawn" (*Commentary on Boethius's "De Trinitate"* 2.2 [my trans.]). Normally *scientia* proceeds from premises or "first principles" to certain conclusions; we might think of how a proof in geometry works (see note 18, below). *Scientia* therefore differs from our modern notion of science, in which knowledge is based on experimentation and the gathering of evidence, not on deduction from things already in evidence.

It is also important to note that, in order to have true *scientia* of something, it is not enough to accept it as true; one must also grasp *why* it is true. Thus, to use an example from geometry, in order to have *scientia* of the Pythagorean theorem it is not enough to memorize $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$; one must also grasp how the proof works. Thomas contrasts *scientia* in its normal sense with both faith and opinion. Unlike opinion, it is certain of what it holds true (because its conclusions "follow of necessity"); and unlike faith, it involves a process in which reason gives assent to something that it "sees"—as when, after struggling to understand the Pythagorean theorem, one says, "Ah, *now* I see!"—whereas faith involves assent to what is not seen.

In addition to referring to the knowledge that one possesses, *scientia* can also have the sense of a body of knowledge, or what we today might call a "discipline." This is the primary meaning it has in 1.1.8, below.

1. Every *scientia* proceeds from self-evident premises.[18] Holy teaching, however, proceeds from articles of faith that are not self-evident, since they are not accepted by all, "for not all have faith," as it says in 2 Thessalonians (3:2). So holy teaching is not *scientia*.

2. *Scientia* is not about particular things.[19] But holy teaching discusses particular things, such as the deeds of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the like. Therefore, holy teaching is not *scientia*.

On the contrary: Augustine says in *De Trinitate* (14.1.3), "To this *scientia* alone belongs that by which saving faith is brought forth, nourished, protected, and strengthened." This pertains to no *scientia* except holy teaching. Therefore, holy teaching is *scientia*.

I answer: Holy teaching is *scientia*. But we must bear in mind that there are two kinds of *scientiae*.[20] There are some that proceed from premises known by the natural light of intelligence, such as arithmetic and geometry and the like; there are some, however, that proceed from premises known by the light of a higher *scientia*, the way that optics proceeds from premises known through geometry, and music from premises known through arithmetic. It is in this second way that holy teaching is *scientia*, because it proceeds from premises known by the light of a higher *scientia*—namely, the *scientia* of God and the blessed.[21] Therefore, just as the musician trusts in the premises handed on by the mathematician, so holy teaching trusts in premises revealed by God.

18. The objection is that, if *scientia* is to be taken as certain knowledge, it must begin from truths that no one could deny (what Thomas calls premises or "first principles"). Thus, in geometry we might begin from the truth that a whole is always bigger than its part (which is self-evident to anyone who knows the meaning of "whole" and "part"); and in philosophy we might begin with the truth that a statement cannot at the same time be both true and not true (which is self-evident to anyone who knows the meaning of "true" and "false"). If someone will not grant these premises, then they have no access to geometric or philosophical truth. The objection here is that in theology there are no premises that everyone accepts, as is evidenced by the fact that not everyone has faith.

19. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (7.15, 1039^{b}). The objection expresses the common medieval view that genuine knowledge is first and foremost a knowledge of universals (such as "humanity" or "triangularity") and not of concrete particulars ("this human being" or "this triangle"). This is in part because *scientia* is about conclusions following of necessity from a set of premises, and contingent particulars are by nature nonnecessary. The difference between "opinion" and *scientia* is the difference between knowing the ratio of sides to hypotenuse in a right triangle because you measured them and knowing it because you grasp the Pythagorean theorem.

20. Here Thomas makes a move that we see him make again and again: he points out that we use the word *scientia* in at least two ways and that the answer to this question lies in properly distinguishing them. Thomas pays close attention to our use of language and frequently resolves questions by sorting out linguistic confusions. For example, he distinguishes various ways in which we use terms like "necessity," "comprehension," and "temptation."

21. Thomas points out that not all forms of inquiry proceed from self-evident premises. Some forms (like geometry and mathematics) do, but others (such as optics and music) begin from premises established by a "higher" (i.e., logically prior) *scientia* (cf. the reply to obj. 1). Thomas calls the latter forms of inquiry

Reply to 1: The premises of any *scientia* either are self-evident or can be traced back to what is known by a higher *scientia*, and the latter, as we have said, are the premises of holy teaching.

Reply to 2: Particular things are discussed in holy teaching not because it is concerned with them principally, but rather they are introduced both as examples for our lives, as in moral *scientiae*, and in order to establish the authority of the men through whom divine revelation, on which Holy Scripture or teaching is based, has come down to us.[22]

1.1.8[23]

Does this teaching prove anything through argumentation?[24]

It seems this teaching does not prove anything through argumentation.

1. Ambrose says in his book *On the Catholic Faith* (1.13.84), "Away with arguments where faith is sought." But in this teaching especially faith is sought, for it is said in John (20:31), "These things are written that you may believe." Therefore holy teaching does not prove anything through argumentation.

2. If it is a matter of argument, the argument is either from authority or from reason. If it is from authority, it does not seem to fit with the dignity of this teaching, since according to Boethius a proof from authority is the weakest sort of proof.[25] But if it is from reason, this does not seem to fit with the goal of this teaching, since, according to Gregory (*Sermon 26*, in *Homilies on*

"subaltern" *scientiae*. So, for example, although music is based on premises derived from mathematics, a musician may be a perfectly fine musician without having a firm grasp (i.e., *scientia*) of the premises of mathematics. What Thomas is saying is that theology is based on premises that are self-evident only to God and the blessed (those who behold God face-to-face in heaven). Just as the subaltern *scientia* of music must "borrow" knowledge from mathematics, so too the *scientia* of theology "borrows" knowledge from God's own self-knowledge, which is revealed in sacred Scripture. One point to note here is that the higher *scientia* acts as an "authority" for the lower.

Thus from the perspective of God and the blessed, *sacra doctrina* is *scientia* in the normal sense (see note 17, above); for human beings in this life it is *scientia* only in the sense of a subaltern *scientia*.

22. Here Thomas accepts the objection's presumption that *scientia* is concerned with the eternal and unchanging, not the contingent and historical. The *scientia* of holy teaching is primarily concerned with God, who is eternal and unchanging. However, in a secondary sense the *scientia* of holy teaching *also* knows those historical events by which the identity of God has been revealed in the world—such as the deeds of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As Thomas goes on to argue in 1.1.4, theology is a practical inquiry (i.e., one concerned with human action) as well as a speculative inquiry (i.e., one concerned with truth).

23. On this article, see White (1958); Marshall (2005).

24. Thomas here asks a question that echoes questions asked in our own day: Isn't it pointless to argue about theological questions? Don't different people simply have different beliefs? Is there any way to decide between conflicting claims about the nature of God? Isn't it all a matter of opinion? As we shall see, Thomas's answer to the last question, in particular, is an emphatic "no." In saying that *sacra doctrina* is "argumentative" he is saying that it uses its own sorts of evidence in order to arrive at truths about God.

25. See Boethius, *In Ciceronis Topica* 1 and *De topicis differentiis* 3.

the Gospels), "Faith has no merit where human reason offers proof from experience." So holy teaching does not prove anything through argumentation.[26]

On the contrary: It says in Titus (1:9) that a bishop should "embrace that faithful word that is in accord with our teaching, that he may be able to exhort in sound teaching and to convince the unbelievers."

I answer: In the same way that other *scientiae* do not argue in proof of their premises but argue from these premises to demonstrate other truths in these *scientiae*,[27] so too this teaching does not argue in proof of its premises, which are the articles of faith, but rather from them it goes on to prove something else. In this way the Apostle in 1 Corinthians (15:12) argues from the resurrection of Christ to prove the general resurrection.[28]

Keep in mind, regarding philosophical *scientiae*, that lower *scientiae* neither prove their premises nor debate with those who deny them, but leave this to a higher *scientia*. The highest of them, metaphysics, can debate with one who denies its premises only if the opponent will concede *something*. But if he concede nothing, it is impossible to have a debate with him, though one can answer his objections.[29]

26. The objection states that arguments are based either on (1) authority ("you should have open-heart surgery because your cardiologist recommends it") or (2) reason ("if all human beings are mortal and Socrates is a human being, then Socrates is mortal"). Since arguments from authority are generally taken to be fairly weak (they work only if the person accepts the authority invoked), and since theology deals with things that surpass human reason, theology should not proceed by way of argumentation.

27. Note that in most of this article *scientia* has the sense of what we today would call a "discipline"—a body of knowledge that is arrived at by starting from certain presuppositions and proceeding from them in certain ways in order to reach new conclusions.

28. As we have seen in the previous article, Thomas says that every *scientia* presumes certain premises or "first principles," which it does not seek to prove, but which it uses to prove other things. So, for example, physics presumes certain mathematical laws that it does not attempt to prove. We do not generally think that this makes physics a doubtful matter. Similarly, theology presumes certain premises, which Thomas calls "the articles of faith" (more or less equivalent to the statements found in the creed, understood as summarizing the essential teachings of Scripture). It does not attempt to prove these articles of faith but uses them to prove other things, as Paul uses the resurrection of Christ to prove our resurrection from the dead ("Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?" [1 Cor. 15:12]).

29. "Lower" or "subaltern" *scientiae* can appeal to a "higher" or "prior" *scientia* to prove their premises (e.g., physics can appeal to mathematics), but the highest *scientiae* cannot prove their starting premises. For example, how could one "prove" that a whole is always bigger than one of its parts? Such premises have a compelling obviousness about them that makes proof unnecessary—indeed, attempts to prove them only engender a debilitating skepticism. Thus in the case of metaphysics, which Thomas takes to be the highest of the philosophical disciplines, one cannot even get started on a metaphysical argument (such as "what is the nature of reality?") if one is arguing with a person who will not grant such basic premises as the difference between "true" and "false." In other words, there are some people who are so stubborn or obtuse (Aristotle compared them to vegetables; see *Metaphysics* 4.4, 1006[a]) that you will not only never convince them, but you cannot even really engage them. We typically call this "arguing in bad faith," meaning that one is not really interested in seeking the truth of the matter under discussion. If an

Therefore Holy Scripture, having no *scientia* above it,[30] debates with one who denies its premises by using arguments, so long as the opponent admits at least some of what is obtained through divine revelation. In this way we argue with heretics from the authoritative sources of holy teaching, and by one article of faith we can argue against those who deny another.[31] To be sure, if our opponent believes nothing of what is divinely revealed, there is no longer any way of proving the articles of faith by reasoning, but only of answering his objections, if he has any, against faith.[32] Since faith rests upon infallible truth, and it is impossible to demonstrate what is contrary to truth, it is clear that the proofs produced against faith are not demonstrations, but are arguments that can be answered.[33]

Reply to 1: Although arguments from human reason cannot serve to prove what is held on faith, nevertheless, this teaching argues from articles of faith to other truths, as has been said.

Reply to 2: It belongs especially to this teaching to argue from authority, since the premises of this teaching are obtained through revelation. So we should believe on the authority of those to whom the revelation was made. Nor does this take away from the dignity of this teaching, for although the argument from authority based on human reason is the weakest, yet the argument from authority based on divine revelation is the most effective.

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intellectual opponent rises above the vegetative level and will grant the law of noncontradiction, even if they do not grant other premises, one can argue with such a person on an ad hoc basis—refuting the specific objections that they raise.

30. Here Thomas is using "Holy Scripture" interchangeably with "holy teaching" (*sacra doctrina*), as a way of naming that authoritative body of knowledge that God shares with humanity through divine revelation to prophets and apostles.

31. If someone acknowledges at least some of the premises of *sacra doctrina* (i.e., the "articles of faith") then one can argue with them in order to reasonably prove another article. For example, since both Jews and Christians accept the prophetic writings in Scripture as divine revelation, a Christian might reasonably argue with a Jew over the question of whether Jesus was the Messiah whose coming was foretold in the Prophets. Likewise, one can debate with Christian heretics who accept some Christian beliefs but reject others. Thus in the debates over the doctrine of the Trinity in the fourth century, the argument between St. Athanasius and his opponent Arius took the form of a debate over which view fit better with other Christian beliefs.

32. In the case of those who completely reject the premises of *sacra doctrina*, the options for reasoned argument are more limited, though not as limited as with someone who rejects the principle of noncontradiction. If someone rejects the divine revelation contained in Scripture entirely, then you are not going to get far in a theological argument with them. What Thomas thinks you *can* do, as long as they are arguing in good faith, is to answer their objections on an ad hoc basis—that is, show them how their objections do not disprove Christian claims about God.

33. A Christian should be confident that even if it is not possible to rationally convince someone of the truth of Christianity, he or she can reasonably answer any objections that are raised, since it is *impossible* to offer a genuine demonstration of something untrue, and Christian revelation is based on the highest truth, God.

Nevertheless, holy teaching makes use even of human reason, not of course to prove faith, since this would take away the merit of faith, but to make clear other things that are handed on in this teaching. Since therefore grace does not take away nature but perfects it, natural reason should serve faith in the way that the natural inclination of the will aids charity. Thus the Apostle speaks in 2 Corinthians (10:5) of "bringing every understanding into captivity to the obedience of Christ."[34] And so holy teaching makes use also of the authority of philosophers in matters where they were able to know the truth through natural reason,[35] in the way that Paul quotes a saying of Aratus in Acts (17:28), "As some also of your own poets said, 'we are God's offspring.'"[36]

Nevertheless, holy teaching makes use of these authorities only as inessential and probable arguments. But it properly uses the authority of the canonical Scriptures in making necessary arguments. The authority of other church teachers [*doctorum ecclesiae*] may properly be used in arguing, though only as probable. For our faith rests upon the revelation made to the apostles and prophets who wrote the canonical books, and not on the revelations—if there are any—made to other teachers.[37] Therefore Augustine says in a letter

34. In replying to the objection about the inadequacy of human reason to argue about divine things, Thomas states what is often taken to be one of the key premises of his thought: "Grace does not take away nature but perfects it." In addition to the natural capacities with which God endows us, God also acts graciously in ways that go beyond our natural capacities—in miraculous acts, in taking flesh in Christ, in the gifts of faith, hope, and love, etc. But according to Thomas, this acting in excess of our natural capacities does not override those capacities but fulfills them in the very act of exceeding them. Thus, to use Thomas's example, our will desires certain things by nature—food, sex, and so on—and grace does not destroy our willing but perfects it by making us desire God with the love that Christians call *caritas* (charity), which allows us to orient our other desires toward the attainment of what we ultimately desire. Likewise, we know certain things by the exercise of our natural capacity for knowing (i.e., reason). We can also know things through God's revelation, which does not contradict human reason but brings it to a fulfillment beyond itself by orienting all knowledge toward the end of knowing God (i.e., "taking every thought captive"). So what we know through faith does not contradict what we know through reason, but goes beyond it. One might even say that in the act of faith we do not become *un*reasonable, but in fact become *more* reasonable, through coming to know truths that exceed our reason.

35. Thomas reserves the term "philosophers" exclusively for pagan thinkers.

36. Aratus was a Greek poet from the third century BC. In the book of Acts, Paul is depicted quoting from his astronomical treatise *Phenomena*.

37. In ranking authorities, Thomas grants the views of pagan thinkers a certain authority, but of the lowest sort. Having Aristotle on your side adds rhetorical force to your argument. But as Thomas sees things, it does not prove anything (though the rational cogency of one of Aristotle's arguments might). Next would come the views of the "doctors"—those Christian teachers (*doctores*) whose views have been widely accepted by the church. But their authority can establish only the *probability* of something being true, and, like the views of the philosophers, they are not of final authority. Finally comes the authority of Scripture, which is supreme—resting, as it does, on the revelation given to the prophets and apostles. Arguments based on the authority of Scripture can attain a certainty that arguments based on the authority of philosophers and theologians cannot.

The reference to "the revelations—if there are any—made to other teachers" points to the distinction between what would come later to be called "public revelation" and "private revelation." When Thomas

to Jerome (*Epistle 82*, 1), "I have learned to hold only those books of Scripture that are called canonical in such honor as to believe their authors have not erred in any way in writing them. . . . But other authors, whatever may have been their holiness and learning, I read in such a way as not to deem everything in their works to be true merely on account of their having thought or written it."

1.1.10[38]
Can one word in Holy Scripture have several senses?

It seems that in Holy Scripture one word cannot have several senses: historical or literal, allegorical, tropological or moral, and anagogical.[39]

1. A multiplicity of senses in one scriptural text gives birth to confusion and deception and detracts from an argument's strength. A multiplicity of propositions produces no good arguments, but only leads to a number of fallacies.

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speaks of "revelation," he generally does not mean personal insight granted by God but, rather, the truth that God has communicated through the prophets and apostles, and which is now contained in the canonical Scriptures.

38. On this article, see Baglow (2004); Prügl (2005).

39. Having discussed theological authority, Thomas now turns to consider the highest authority: Holy Scripture. During the Middle Ages, Christians generally thought of Scripture as having a fourfold meaning or "sense." A word or sentence or story has its literal or historical sense, which is simply what the words mean; it might also have a spiritual sense. This spiritual sense can be subdivided into three: the typological or allegorical sense, which refers to how things in the Old Testament point forward to their fulfillment in the New Testament and, by extension, the church; the tropological or moral sense, which refers to what a passage might teach us about our spiritual lives; and the anagogical sense, which refers to what a passage has to say about our ultimate destiny.

To clarify the matter, we might consider the word "Jerusalem." Its fourfold sense could be taken to be as follows:

literal:	a city in Palestine
typological / allegorical:	the church
tropological / moral:	the soul
anagogical:	heaven

Imagine that you are Thomas Aquinas, sitting in church with your fellow Dominicans and chanting the Psalms. You sing Ps. 137:5: "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!" You know that on a literal level "Jerusalem" refers to the city in Palestine and that for the writer of the psalm it was imperative to remember that city because it was the political and religious center of Israelite identity, where sacrifice was offered to God in the temple. But for you as a Christian it might not seem imperative to remember that city, because Jesus's offering of himself on the cross has made the sacrifice of animals unnecessary. Yet you are praying this psalm, so presumably it means something that you would actually want to say to God. And so, on the spiritual level, you can take "Jerusalem" to mean the church, the living temple in which God is worshiped through the Eucharist; or you can take it as a reference to your soul, which you must remember and care for, lest you wither and die spiritually; or you can let the word direct your mind to heaven—the eternal vision of God—which must be the constant goal of your life. This range of meaning makes it possible for a Christian like Thomas to give voice to his prayer through the words of the psalm.

Holy Scripture, however, ought to be effective in showing the truth without any fallacy. Therefore, in Scripture one word should not convey several senses.

2. Augustine says in *On the Usefulness of Believing* (3.5) that "the writing called the Old Testament has been handed on to us with a fourfold meaning: namely, according to history, according to etiology, according to analogy, and according to allegory." Now these four seem completely different from the four mentioned above, so it does not seem fitting to explain the same word of Holy Scripture according to the four senses spoken of above.

3. Besides these senses, there is the parabolical, which is not included among these four.[40]

On the contrary: Gregory says in his *Moral Reflections on the Book of Job* (20.1.1), "Holy Scripture, by the manner of its speech, transcends every *scientia*, because in one and the same sentence, while it describes a fact, it reveals a mystery."

I answer: The author of Holy Scripture is God, in whose power it is to signify not only by words (as a person also can do) but also by things themselves.[41] So while in every other *scientia* words refer to things, this *scientia* is distinctive in that the things referred to by words also themselves refer to things.

The first kind of referring, in which words refer to things, pertains to the first sense: which is the historical or literal. The kind of referring, however, in which things referred to by words also signify other things, is called the spiritual sense, which is based on and presupposes the literal sense.[42]

This spiritual sense has a threefold division. As the Apostle says in Hebrews (10:1), the Old Law is a prefiguration of the New Law, and the New Law itself, as Dionysius says in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (5.2), "is a figure of future glory."[43] Further, in the New Law, whatever deeds are done by [Christ] our head are signs of what we should do. Accordingly, insofar as things of the Old Law signify things of the New Law, there is the allegorical sense. Insofar as the things done in Christ, or in the things [in the Old Law] that prefigure Christ, are signs of what we should do, there is the moral sense.

40. By "parabolical" Thomas seems to mean the same thing as "metaphorical" (see the example given in the reply to this objection).

41. God speaks to us not simply through words but through things and events. Thus, for example, through King David and the events surrounding him God speaks to us of Christ. One might say that historical events have God as their "author" and so are a form of divine speech.

42. Here Thomas clarifies the rationale for the distinction between literal and spiritual meanings. The "literal sense" is how *words* refer to *things* (e.g., how the word "Jerusalem" is a "sign" pointing to the city in Palestine). The "spiritual sense" is how *things* refer to *other things* (e.g., how the city of Jerusalem is a "sign" pointing to the church or the soul or heaven).

43. When Thomas speaks of things being "figures" of other things, he means something like "foreshadowing." In this way, the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant are "figures" of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.