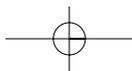
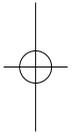
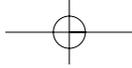




— Part I —

A Short Life



1

Origins

Thomas Aquinas was born in 1225, in the family castle at Roccasecca. Forty-nine years later on March 7, 1274, he died at Fossanova, perhaps 20 kilometers distant from his birthplace. Between those two events he had lived in Naples, Cologne, Paris, Rome, Orvieto, Viterbo, Paris again, and finally Naples. When he died, Thomas was on his way to a council that had been called in Lyon. He fell ill, was nursed by a niece in the neighborhood of whose castle he had been stricken, and then was moved to the Cistercian monastery at Fossanova where he died.

That is the first thing to know about Thomas. This scholar, this contemplative, seemed to be ever on the move. And travel was not easy. It is thought that when he went to France Thomas took a boat from Livorno and sailed to the Riviera, and then made his way up the Rhône Valley. If so, this would have spared him the hazard of Alpine passage. There is even a story that Thomas visited London, but we have no evidence of this. Not that we need another voyage to establish Thomas as a much-traveled man. If one were to trace on a map his various journeys – as those of St Paul are traced – the point would be made dramatically. In an age of planes, trains, and automobiles we must think away these alleged conveniences and imagine walking from Paris to Rome, say. In *The Path to Rome*, Hilaire Belloc writes of his own walking journey but the walk seems to have been the point, not just a means of getting somewhere. But Thomas was always hurrying to a new destination for a purpose. More likely than not on foot, perhaps on mule – he is said to have been riding a mule at the time of the accident that led to his eventual death – for portions of a journey, and, as has been mentioned, by boat.

There still is a town called Roccasecca, on the west side of the autostrada along which the latter-day countrymen of Thomas hurtle between Naples and Rome, a journey of hours now rather than days. (In Thomas's time this would still have been the *Via Latina*, the coastal road being the *Via Appia*.) On the east side of the autostrada,

A SHORT LIFE

visible to traffic for miles, is the commanding white pile of Montecassino, the great Benedictine Abbey, where Thomas received his early schooling. Actually, the present-day monastery is a facsimile of the one Thomas knew, something of a Disneyland version. Its predecessor was bombarded during World War II when Germans dug in around the monastery and prevented the movement of the Allies to Rome. In one of the tragic moments of a tragic century, the order was given to fire upon the monastery. Photographs of the result are hung in the rebuilt monastery. The whole thing raises a moral problem of a kind Thomas would have been eager to discuss.

If you went in the other direction from the autostrada, toward Roccasecca, you would come upon a modern town, the entrance to which is flanked by advertisements of car dealers, appliances, and the like. Nothing looks very old. It isn't. If you look to the north you will see a hill town, also called Roccasecca. It has been around a good while and you may think that you have found Thomas's home town. Not quite. The family castle is further up that hill from the older town; we are only halfway to it. It is a steep and rocky climb. Goats feed on it, guarded by dogs and a goatherd. At the very top are the ruins of the castle in which Thomas Aquinas was born and in which he lived the first five years of his life. Half walls, broken archways, bushes, and bramble. But the view! You can look out over the valley, and on a clear day perhaps Montecassino would be visible in the distance. Nothing brings home our littleness like the immensity of mountains. One of the stories told about Thomas is that as a young child he asked what God is. You can imagine the question forming as he looked out at the magnificent scenery.

Not that life was peaceful. Until the middle of the nineteenth century the pope was a secular prince as well as head of the church. The papal states were concentrated more or less in the middle of the peninsula. South, where Thomas was born, the Hohenstaufen emperor Frederick II held sway and he and the pope were often at war. Thomas's family were on the side of the emperor. We find all this confusing. It was pretty confusing at the time. We will come back to the significance of this for Thomas's life.

2

Montecassino (1230–1239)

When Thomas was sent to Montecassino at the age of five, he began his education in a system that had characterized medieval teaching since the Dark Ages. With the collapse of the Roman Empire and the education system it had extended across Europe, what are called the Dark Ages began. St Augustine had taught in imperial rhetorical schools, in his native Africa, in Rome, then in Milan, and as he prepared for baptism at Cassiciacum, having been swayed by the preaching of St Ambrose, he composed dialogs that give us a sense of what and how he taught. His *On Music* covers literature as well as music. His *On the Teacher* provides a sense of the presuppositions of the relationship between master and pupil. But it was a century later, when libraries were to be found for the most part in monasteries, fragments shored against the ruin of Greek culture, that the charter for monastic schools was written by Cassiodorus Senator. The *Institutions* were written for the monks at Vivarium, a monastery founded by the layman Cassiodorus, and in it he sets out the relationship between secular and sacred learning. Secular learning consists of the seven liberal arts, the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, logic) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music). These were considered propaedeutic to sacred learning which is found in the Bible.

How had Greek learning been reduced to these few arts? A contemporary of Cassiodorus, Boethius (“the last of the Romans and the first scholastic”) had undertaken to put into Latin the works of Aristotle and Plato, Greek being one of the casualties of the dimming of the lights in Europe. Boethius himself perhaps studied in Alexandria, and thus had lived experience of the last phase of the Athenian school, which was exiled there. Boethius died in AD 524 at the age of 44, having led an active political life as well as the life of a scholar. A layman and Catholic, scion of an old Roman family, he had served Theodoric the Ostrogoth who had become emperor and set up his court in Ravenna. Boethius held various offices in Rome, Theodoric wanting the vestiges of the Roman Empire to continue. The eastern

A SHORT LIFE

empire had gone its own way and was headquartered in Constantinople. Theodoric accused Boethius of plotting against him on behalf of the eastern empire and sentenced his faithful political servant to death. In Pavia, awaiting execution, Boethius wrote *The Consolation of Philosophy*, the most circulated work after the Bible in the early Middle Ages. In this magnificent work, which alternates poetry and prose, Boethius asked, in effect, how an innocent man like himself should have ended in such a plight.

His great translation project had hardly begun. Boethius left translations of a few works of Aristotle, as well as commentaries on them, the *Categories* and *On Interpretation*, perhaps others. He also wrote a work *On Arithmetic* and another *On Music*. These translations and independent works, closely based on Greek texts, became part of the curriculum in monastic education as outlined by Cassiodorus. Cassiodorus had also worked for Theodoric, but survived the experience, and it is thanks to him that the authenticity of Boethius's theological tractates was established. Thomas Aquinas was to write commentaries on two of those treatises. That the same man could write those treatises and end by writing the *Consolation* caused Dr Johnson to wonder how he could write as *magis philosophus quam Christianus* (as more a philosopher than a Christian). That wonderment points to the central puzzle of the Middle Ages, namely, how men of faith could feel so completely at home in classical pagan thought.

Training in the liberal arts was based on authoritative texts, authorities, and authors (*auctores*). Priscian and Donatus wrote the texts on which the study of grammar was based. Cicero was the authority for rhetoric and Aristotle for logic. These arts, along with those of the quadrivium, worthwhile in themselves, were thought to have the further advantage of facilitating an intelligent reading of Sacred Scripture. Monastic life was summed up in the Benedictine motto, work and pray, *ora et labora*. The monastery was self-sufficient, with its own farms and cattle and butteries, and serfs congregated around it. Other monastic work in addition to that of providing for the necessities of life was the copying of manuscripts.

It is important to know the chancy way in which ancient, and indeed medieval, texts have come down to us. If a monastery was to acquire a text it lacked, a copy of it would have to be made. By the copying and trading of manuscripts, libraries were enlarged. This was done in the writing room, the *scriptorium*, and we have illustrations in which a monk sits in the center of a circle of monks reading a text while those around him write down what he reads. Not surprisingly,

A SHORT LIFE

no two copies of a work would be exactly alike. Our critical editions are the painstaking result of tracing copies to the originals from which they were made, a pursuit which often ends with a number of manuscripts, no one of which is a copy of the others. The collation of these, and the selection of the best reading, issues eventually in a text which is to some degree the product of modern scholarship but which we read as presumably most akin to the lost original.

Monastic prayer consisted of the common liturgy, the Mass, and the chanting of the hours of the office which provided the schedule of the monastic day. Matins and Lauds were chanted in the early morning hours; Prime, Tierce, Sext and None marked hours on the daytime clock; and at evening Vespers was sung, followed finally by Compline. It was the choir monks, to be distinguished from those who worked in the fields, who were the recipients of the education meant to fit them for their liturgical tasks. The thirteenth-century abbey of Montecassino carried on this centuries-old tradition, and it was into it that the child Thomas was introduced.

Thomas remained at Montecassino from 1230 until 1239, when war flared up and made life in the embattled monastery unsafe. Thomas would retain warm relations with Montecassino all his life. His uncle had been abbot and, as we shall see, that post was dangled before him a few years later. But was Thomas ever a member of the Benedictine Order? He was called an oblate when he arrived, an offering, and there has been speculation that he continued on into membership in the Order, taking the vows of a monk. Since he left Montecassino at the age of 14, this is on the face of it unlikely. In the event, he would become a friar and a mendicant.

3**University of Naples (1239–1244)**

From Montecassino, Thomas was sent to Naples and the university founded there in 1224 by the emperor Frederick II. The monastic schools had been complemented later by cathedral schools, founded

A SHORT LIFE

under the aegis of Charlemagne and his mentor Alcuin. The latter schools flourished as towns and commerce grew and the rural location of most monasteries caused them gradually to lose their hegemony in education. Education was, of course, largely the training of clerics. The monastic school aimed to form members of the community; the cathedral school trained future priests for the bishop around whose chair – *cathedra* – the school formed. Until well into the twelfth century, the curriculum reflected an assumption as to the relationship between secular and sacred learning. Instruction in the rudiments of the arts by the *scholasticus* or schoolmaster, with study of the Bible, prepared the future priest for his ministerial duties.

In the twelfth century, Paris emerged as the European center of education. The left bank of the Seine came to be known as the Latin Quarter because Latin was the lingua franca of the students who came there from all over Europe to study. There was the cathedral school of Notre Dame on the Île de la Cité, an island in the Seine, and on the left bank the houses of study of Benedictines. Saint-Germain des Prés later became engulfed by the city but it was named after the meadows on which it first rose. Nowadays the abbey church stands where city streets cross, looking very urban yet still capable of eliciting from imagination the monastic community that once surrounded it. There was, too, the community of the Augustinian Canons of Saint-Victor where Hugh and Richard and others put their stamp on the thought and spirituality of the twelfth century. And of course Abelard came to Paris, drawn by the magnetism of its intellectual energies. So too John of Salisbury. John conveys something of the excitement of that time in his account of the masters under whom he studied in Paris, the *Paralogicon*. It is sometimes said that the twelfth century is not accorded the importance it deserves because it had the misfortune to be followed by the thirteenth. But this neglect has long since been remedied. As a result, the emergence of the university out of these pre-existing schools where masters plied their trade is less mysterious than it was once considered to be.

But lively as the twelfth century was, in some areas it remained utterly traditional. Thus, in logic, Abelard, hardly the most conformist personality in the Middle Ages, confined his logical teaching to the works that for centuries had constituted the authorities of the discipline: Porphyry, Boethius, and Aristotle. The Problem of Universals which had been bequeathed to the medievals by Porphyry in his *Isagoge* or introduction to the *Categories* was expatiated on by every commentator, beginning with Boethius. Were genera and species

A SHORT LIFE

figments of the mind or real? If real, were they corporeal or incorporeal? If corporeal, did they nonetheless exist in bodies or elsewhere and apart? Porphyry was thinking of the different positions of Plato and Aristotle, but the medieval commentators knew Plato only later, and in a partial translation of the *Timaeus*, and Aristotle through a few logical works. For all that, these proliferating rival positions on the status of universals, spurred by the study of Augustine and his identification of Plato's Ideas with the divine Ideas, have their charm. Eventually, Abelard wrote a book, the *Dialectica*, which was meant to present logic as such and not as a commentary on authoritative books. Alas, there is little in it that is not in the commentaries and the *auctores* clearly influence the structure and arguments of the work. The transition from *auctor* (author) to *auctoritas* (authority) was an obvious one in this context.

Augustine and the Church Fathers, some Greek as well as Latin, influenced sacred learning, Augustine being accorded the enormous authority he has rightly retained ever since. At the very beginning of the twelfth century, Anselm in a monastery at Bec in Normandy composed a series of absolutely fundamental treatises: *On Truth*, *On the Fall of the Devil*, *Proslogion*, *Monologion*, etc. Augustine is the main influence on him, no doubt, but the power and originality of Anselm's mind rises from these pages. Eventually he would be named archbishop of Canterbury with not altogether happy consequences. A century that began with Anselm would see education become urban and international and competitive. Abelard is always a special case, but his exalted self-estimate was grounded in undoubted genius and a personal flair that made him the stormy petrel of his time. No need to recount his eventually tragic tutoring of Héloïse and their love affair which caused her enraged uncle to unman the tutor. He tells it all in *The Story of My Calamities* and we have as well the letters of Héloïse. After the attack in which he was castrated, Abelard left Paris for monastic life where it would be cruel to say he was a soprano in the choir. Héloïse became a nun and remained fiercely faithful to her erstwhile lover. It was her self-effacing insistence that they not marry so Abelard could continue as a cleric and teacher that led to the tragedy. A cleric was constituted by receiving the tonsure. Abelard was not a priest, however, and when he fell in love with Héloïse and consummated their love, the fruit of their union was a son for whom the wounded Abelard composed moving poems. This episode is often taken to be the emergence of personality in the Middle Ages, but no one can read Anselm without becoming acquainted with his

A SHORT LIFE

powerful personality. It was the personality asserted rather than the awareness of personality that distinguished Abelard from Anselm.

There was something chaotic as well as vibrant in the competition of twelfth-century masters, although gradually there was a movement toward organization and common standards and the emergence of the university – the *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*, community of masters and students – with a chancellor, at first a diocesan official, and the modeling of the apprenticeship of future masters on that of the guilds. This happened at the dawn of the new century, and soon universities sprang up all across the continent as well as in England, at Oxford and Cambridge. Hence the founding in Naples by Frederick II of his own university, to which the teenage Thomas came.

In Naples, Thomas came into contact with members of the Order founded by St Dominic (1170–1224), a Spaniard who insisted on the theological training of the friars so that they could better preach the word and counter the Albigensian heresy. Thomas found the new Order attractive and at the age of 19, in 1244, he became a Dominican. The presence of the friars, Dominicans and Franciscans, was to lead to controversy in the university, as the secular masters, that is, diocesan priests, resented this invasion of the mendicant friars. This was a controversy in which Thomas himself would become involved, in Paris.

But the transition to the university cannot be fully appreciated without understanding how the hegemony of the traditional liberal arts education was broken by the arrival in Latin translation of hitherto unknown, save by title, works of Aristotle, until eventually the whole Aristotelian corpus, convoyed by Arabic commentaries, altered forever the nature of higher education. The *Nicomachean Ethics*, in partial and then in full translation, became available before the twelfth century had ended, though not in time to influence the remarkable treatise of Abelard, *Know Thyself*, in which the intention with which one acts was stressed almost to the exclusion of what one actually did.

At Naples, Thomas became acquainted for the first time with the excitement generated by the realization that the liberal arts were no longer adequate to contain the scope of secular learning. The new learning was resisted, particularly at Paris, where there was a ban on basing courses on Aristotle that lasted until 1230. Aristotle, and the associated learning from Islamic circles, expanded Thomas's understanding of the range of secular learning, and he found Aristotle almost as attractive as he did the Dominicans. Naples was of course international, and Thomas had an Irish master, Peter, in logic.

A SHORT LIFE

When he joined the Dominican Order, Thomas was sent north to complete his studies, but his journey was to be dramatically interrupted.

4**Under House Arrest (1244–1245)**

Thomas's family were appalled to find that he had joined the ragtag band of friars called Dominicans – in Latin *Dominicanes*, which was sometimes broken up into *Domini canes*, that is, dogs of the Lord – and were not disposed to acquiesce. Accordingly, while he was journeying north from Naples, he was taken from the band of friars by his brothers and sequestered in a family castle where sense could be talked to him. It was not a clerical vocation that was objected to, but joining so *infra dig* an outfit as the dogs of the Lord. If Thomas wanted a religious life, there was always Montecassino. His mother Theodora wanted Thomas to go there; after all, an uncle had been abbot, and ecclesiastical promotion of a kind that could gladden the family heart was possible there. It is said that Thomas's rejection of this suggestion because of his Dominican allegiance was countered with the proposal that he could enter Montecassino as a Dominican! That a mendicant friar should rule over a rich monastic community is a clear case of ecclesiastical oil and water. After all, the Dominicans and Franciscans were a standing rebuke to the complacency and ease that had crept into the religious life.

Thomas was adamant in his vocation, but for a long year he was kept under what amounted to house arrest during which he is said to have continued to wear the distinctive white-and-black habit of a Dominican friar. As best he could, he tried to live the life of a religious, but there were other occupations as well. His little work *On Modal Propositions* (those propositions involving “possibly” and “necessarily” which modify the way in which the predicate is said of the subject) was written at this time, but its authenticity is disputed.

A SHORT LIFE

His mother invoked allies in Rome to influence Thomas, but his brothers had recourse to cruder persuasion. They introduced a woman of easy virtue into Thomas's room, seeking to appeal to the young man's reason through his concupiscence. As the story is told, Thomas snatched a brand from the fire and drove the poor girl from the room. Then, with the charred end of the stick, he traced a cross on the wall and fell on his knees before it. He had passed what his brothers regarded as the supreme test. An angel is said to have appeared to him and tied a cincture around his waist, and from that time Thomas was untroubled by carnal temptation. This as much as his subsequent theology of the angels is the origin of his title as the angelic doctor.

Of course all these stories have been subjected to skeptical doubt by later historians and dismissed as pious myths. But they are powerfully sustained by the oral tradition and figure in the later process of Thomas's canonization. Not every fact is amenable to historical validation or refutation, needless to say, but it is not mere credulity to accept such accounts at face value, as mountains of sober research attest. Of course only Thomas could be the source for the episode with the prostitute and Thomas did not lie – in either sense of the term.

Eventually his family became convinced of Thomas's fidelity to his vocation and he was allowed to rejoin the friars and continue northward for the completion of his education.

5**Cologne and Albert the Great
(1245–1248)**

Biographers dispute whether Thomas went to Paris before going to the Dominican studium at Cologne, where he studied under a giant of the fledgling Order, the German Albert. There is no doubt that Albert himself was previously a master at Paris, where he commented

A SHORT LIFE

on works of Aristotle, and it is not impossible that Thomas first came under his tutelage there before accompanying his master to Cologne with the founding of the Dominican studium there. In any case, the two were together in Cologne and it is there, under Albert, that Thomas's remarkable grasp of the writings of Aristotle was consolidated. Albert would author a paraphrase of the complete corpus of Aristotle and at Cologne lectured on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. His commentary would be edited by his pupil, Thomas, and it is interesting to compare Albert's commentary with the much later one Thomas himself would compose at Paris. Thomas found his mentor too heavily indebted to the Arabic commentators and his own exposition is aimed at releasing Aristotle from distorting interpretations.

It was at Cologne that Thomas's taciturnity was noted, leading his fellow students to dub him the Dumb Ox, the latter part of the epithet referring perhaps to the young friar's avoirdupois. Thomas's girth seems solidly attested to, unaffected by the meager diet of a friar and the many taxing journeys that he took. And it was Albert who retorted to Thomas's nickname with his fellow students by predicting that the bellowing of this ox would be heard all over Europe. Bellowing does not seem the apt adjective for the chaste and calm style of Thomas's writings, but the foretelling of his influence was borne out.

6

Student at Paris (1252–1256)

Albert founded a faculty of theology at Cologne in 1245, where Thomas studied under him, then became his assistant. But in 1252 he was sent to Paris, it being the most distinguished center of university education in Christendom. The friars had a house there, the Convent of St James, named after the street on which it stood, which in turn was named for the route to the great shrine of the apostle James at Compostela in Spain. We must now get a sense of the structure of university education at Paris.

A SHORT LIFE

The university was composed of faculties, masters and their students, and there were four such faculties. The faculty of arts was the point of entry, where the students began at the age that Thomas had gone to Naples, in their early teens. When the Master of Arts was gained, the student became eligible for one of the advanced faculties, theology, medicine, or law. The name of the Faculty of Arts indicates that it was originally seen as a continuation of the liberal arts tradition, but the influx of Aristotle in Latin translations required an expansion of the concept of secular learning. After all, where among the traditional arts was one to locate such a work as Aristotle's *Physics*, or his *Metaphysics*, *Politics*, and *Ethics*? It couldn't be done. But if Aristotle was resisted, this was not simply because his writings made untenable the notion that the seven liberal arts were an adequate summation of secular leaning. The far more important question turned on the compatibility of Aristotle with Christian faith.

Universities were, after all, Catholic institutions. The University of Paris had received its charter from the pope. Masters and students were all clerics, believing Christians, whose attitude toward an author whose doctrines might seem to conflict with the truths of faith could scarcely be nonchalant. As $\neg x = x$ is false, if the faith taught X and the philosopher (Aristotle became the eponymous philosopher in the thirteenth century) taught $\neg X$, clearly the philosopher was in error if the faith was true. The other possibility, that the philosopher teaching something in conflict with the faith was right and the faith false would not of course have been a live option.

If, from the beginning of the university, Aristotle represented at least a possible problem, this problem was to be exacerbated by the rise of so-called Latin Averroism (discussed on pages 20–3), since it flared up just before Thomas's second stint as a regent master at Paris and he was in the center of the fray.

The master of arts was earned at about the age of 19 or 20 and then, for such a one as Thomas, the long training in theology began. There were, in effect, two tracks. First, the biblical. The fledgling theologian listened to lectures on books of the Old and New Testament for some years and then became an assistant to the master, giving a cursory reading of the text before the master settled down to his magisterial exposition. By stages, the student was advanced into ever more responsible involvement in the teaching of neophytes until he became himself a master of Sacred Scripture. The second track was based on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, a twelfth-century master who became eventually bishop of Paris. In four large books, Peter had

A SHORT LIFE

offered a summary of Christian doctrine which turned on St Augustine's distinction between *res* and *signum*. The divisions of the work were called distinctions. Those of Book One consisted of: the mystery of the Trinity (distinctions 1 and 2); God's knowledge of creatures, whether God is cause of himself, and allied questions of generation within the Trinity (distinctions 5–7); on such attributes of God as truth, unchangeableness, and simplicity (8); the distinction between the persons of the Trinity (9–10); the Holy Spirit (10–18); equality in the Trinity (19–20); the names of the persons (21); how God can be named (22); the meaning of person (23); and of such terms as one, three, many, as applied to persons of the Trinity (24–25); what is proper to each person (26–28); things said relatively of God (29); and temporally (30); how is the Son equal to the Father (31); the Father and Son vis-à-vis the Holy Spirit (32); things said of the divine essence and of the divine persons (33–34); God's foreknowledge, and so on, there being 48 distinctions in the first book. Mastery of the *Sentences* was exhibited by a commentary on those four books, so that among the writings of a master will always be found his commentary on the *Sentences*, and so it is with Thomas.

Thomas's method was to begin with an outline of the distinction which was followed by the treatment of questions raised by it, questions often divided into sub-questions. A question was handled by mimicking, in effect, the procedure in public disputations. A suggested answer to the question posed was confronted with a number of objections, followed by the solution, usually a defense of the proposed answer and then a response to the objections to that answer. This is the method Thomas would follow in the questions of the *Summa Theologiae*.

This demanding course of study took the student into his early thirties when he would be formally recognized as a master of theology. After that, in the case of a mendicant, he might go off to some other university or to a house of studies of his Order, and function as a master. The Dominican Order had two chairs in theology at Paris, and Thomas was appointed to a three-year term in one of them after he became a master.

There are several works of Thomas which date from his student years, including *On Being and Essence* and *On the Principles of Nature*. His *Commentary on the Sentences* is placed in 1252–1254.

7

First Paris Professorship (1256–1259)

Bonaventure, the great Franciscan, completed his work for the master of theology at the same time as Thomas, but because of the opposition of the secular masters the two men were not welcomed into the magisterial body until a papal intervention forced their acceptance. The tasks of the master of theology were summed up in three Latin infinitives, *legere*, *disputare*, *praedicare*: to lecture, to dispute, to preach. Thomas had been ordained a priest in 1250 or 1251 in Cologne. His lectures were given in the Dominican Convent and his sermons were university sermons, learned discourses, not unlike his inaugural lecture when he was installed as a master, in which he spoke of the relationships between the various books of the Bible. (Late in his life, in Naples, he preached popular sermons on the Commandments, on the Lord's Prayer, and the Ave Maria.) Disputations were of two kinds, Disputed Questions and Quodlibetal Questions. In Thomas's time, such disputes were dominated by the masters; later the Quodlibetals became more student affairs.

The master posted a thesis he was prepared to defend some days before the event, then the other masters and students came ready with objections to the thesis. An assistant would give an initial response – part of the apprenticeship – and then came the magisterial response. Afterward, the master was required to deliver a written version to the university stationery so that copies could be ordered by those able to afford the vellum and copying fees. We have an enormous number of disputed questions of Thomas, two large volumes in modern printed editions, the one *On Truth* comprising some 29 constituent questions which make up the first of the volumes. Scholars dispute whether these represent 29 different occasions, unlikely since disputations were held twice in the liturgical year and Thomas was a reigning master at Paris for only six years in all. As it happens, some disputed questions were held during the decade-long Italian period between Thomas's two magisterial stints at Paris. Others of his disputed questions are *On the Power of God*, *On the Soul*, *On*

A SHORT LIFE

Spiritual Creatures, On the Union of the Incarnate Word, On Evil, On Virtue in General, On Charity, On Fraternal Correction, On Hope, and On the Cardinal Virtues.

In their written form, the question is posed and an answer suggested, followed by numerous objections to it, then appeals to authority on behalf of the proposed answer, followed by argument(s) in favor of the answer and then a response to each of the objections raised. In their written form, the disputed question is not a transcript of the occasion, but it captures the dialectic of the event. Such disputes complemented the close textual expositions of the lectures on Scripture and on Peter Lombard.

Quodlibetal questions were free-for-alls where the master made himself available to discuss anything that might be thrown at him. Written versions of these were distributed, and the volume of Thomas's *Quodlibetal Questions* conveys the range and variety of such occasions, very picayune points jostling with more substantive issues.

If the demands on the student of theology were onerous, those on the regent master were even more so. Nor was Thomas's production limited to writings that arose more or less directly out of his magisterial functions. Thomas's expositions of Boethius's *De Hebdomadibus* and *On the Trinity* (the commentary breaks off in chapter 2 of the work but is by no means negligible, as we shall see in Part II, page 67ff.) date from this period. In 1259 he began what would be his only completed summary of theology, the *Summa contra Gentiles* (it was not finished until 1265). This work is noteworthy because it devotes so much space to what we can know of God by reason alone.

8

Italian Interlude (1259–1268)

It was the Dominican practice to have one of the masters of the Order teach for three years at Paris, thereby acquiring the *éclat* of the premier university, and then going off to houses of study of the

A SHORT LIFE

Order to teach those not fortunate enough to study at Paris itself, though perhaps that lay in the future for some of the young friars. Thus it was that Thomas, in 1259, returned to Italy where for nearly a decade he taught in a variety of places: in Naples; then, from 1261, in Orvieto where the court of Pope Urban IV was located; and, from 1265, in Rome at Santa Sabina, as well as in Viterbo where Pope Clement IV had his court.

One of the achievements of this period was the completion of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, of which Thomas's own manuscript has been preserved. The third book is in the Ambrosiana in Milan, and the day that Father Angelo Paredi put those precious pages into my hands is among the memorable events of my life. A feature of Thomas's manuscripts is the obvious haste with which they were written, in shorthand Latin, in a scrawl which led to calling a text of Thomas's *litera inintelligibilis*, unreadable writing. Eventually he would be assigned secretaries, among them Reginald of Piperno, who took down Thomas's dictation, a process which doubtless increased his productivity. (Reginald is the source of much of our knowledge of Thomas the man.) Weisheipl points out that Thomas was the first member of the Roman Province of the Dominican Order to become a master of theology in Paris, and this undoubted prestige led to his appointment as preacher general of his province. We must not forget that Thomas was an active member of his Order, attending all the annual provincial meetings held during his sojourn in Italy, listed and dated as follows by Weisheipl: Orvieto (1261), Perugia (1262), Rome (1263), Viterbo (1264), Anagni (1265), Todi (1266), Lucca (1267), and Viterbo again (1268). Attendance involved a good deal of traveling around the peninsula. It was in 1261 that Thomas was assigned as lecturer at the convent at Orvieto, and during his four years there he formed a close friendship with Urban IV.

During his stay in Italy, Thomas became aware of the new translations and revisions of Aristotle made by his fellow Dominican, William of Moerbeke. The study of Aristotle is an unbroken feature of Thomas's intellectual life, a study only tangentially connected with his duties as a master of theology. The nomadic papal court is an indication that hostilities with Frederick, and later Manfred, made Rome less than safe for the pontiff, so that the presence of the papal court in towns north of Rome may be seen as a kind of exile. One of the most impressive and self-effacing works of Thomas is the *Catena Aurea* he composed at the behest of Urban IV. This is a commentary on the four Gospels, which strings together in a golden chain expo-

A SHORT LIFE

sitions drawn from the great teachers of Christendom, the Church Fathers, both Greek and Latin.

Early in the Italian period Thomas commented on a work of an enigmatic figure who styled himself Denis the Areopagite, a convert of St Paul's. Since Denis lived in the sixth century, either he was very long-lived or he was employing a nom de plume. He was a Neoplatonist and Thomas's interest in him attests to the fact that Thomas's Aristotelianism was assimilative rather than exclusive. Thomas himself did not realize that he was dealing with an author who came to be known as "Pseudo-Dionysius," but that is by the by. His commentary on the work called *On the Divine Names* is one of several in which Thomas moved with great sympathy into an approach which might seem to be antithetical to his own Aristotelian convictions. His reading of the text is at once sympathetic and such that it is seen as complementary rather than in opposition to what he had learned from Aristotle. Thomas's commentary on the work known as *The Book on the Causes*, based on the Neoplatonist Proclus's *Elements of Theology* – a provenance Thomas was the first to see – is also indicative of the assimilative rather than confrontational nature of Thomas's mind.

It has been mentioned that Thomas throughout his career steeped himself in the writings of Aristotle. When he went to Rome in 1265 to teach at the Dominican studium at Santa Sabina, his Aristotelianism was to manifest itself in a remarkable new way. Probably in 1268, in Rome, he began the series of close commentaries on the Aristotelian treatises which was to occupy him for the rest of his short life. His commentary on Aristotle's *On the Soul* was at least begun in Rome, and perhaps completed when he returned to Paris into a tumultuous situation during which, as we will see, there was an urgent need for the kind of close reading of Aristotle that Thomas's commentaries on the Stagirite exhibit.

It was also in Rome that he began what would be his theological masterpiece in three parts, the *Summa Theologiae*, the first part of which was completed before 1268. Another aspect of Thomas's genius was exhibited in the Office he composed for the newly instituted feast of Corpus Christi. The Eucharistic hymns he wrote for this Office continue to be sung throughout the world.

9

Second Paris Period (1269–1272)

It was highly unusual, indeed unprecedented at the time, for anyone to be appointed a second time as a Dominican regent master in Paris, but doubtless Thomas's presence was wanted because of the controversy that had flared up around what is called variously Latin Averroism or Heterodox Aristotelianism. This was a controversy over the relationship of Aristotle to the faith. We have seen that there were misgivings about the compatibility of Aristotelian philosophy and Christian faith from the earliest years of the university. Thomas's writings during his first stint as regent master and since displayed his confidence that Aristotle was more an ally than an enemy to Christian theology. Others were not so sure. Thomas's great contemporary, Bonaventure, who was elected master general of the Franciscan Order, became increasingly wary of Aristotle's influence and with the rise of Latin Averroism this hardened into hostility. The problem can be summarized in the so-called errors of Aristotle.

- 1 Aristotle taught that the world had always existed, that it was in that sense eternal, a teaching clearly contradictory to the Christian belief, based on Genesis, that "in the beginning" God created heaven and earth. Either the world had a beginning or it did not. It is a matter of Christian faith that it had a beginning. Therefore the philosophical teaching that the world is eternal is false.
- 2 Aristotle was said to deny personal immortality, his proof of the separability of intellect from matter in *On the Soul* taken to be that there is an incorruptible intellect that is the cause of the thinking of human beings but is not a capacity of their souls. But Christianity is unintelligible without the belief in the soul's continued existence after death, your soul and mine. Once more, a contradiction.
- 3 Aristotle seems to teach that it would be demeaning for God to have knowledge of the world. But for the Christian, God's

A SHORT LIFE

eye is on the sparrow and he knows the number of hairs on our heads. Either God knows the world or he does not. One of these views must be false.

The second “error” is due to Averroes’s reading of *On the Soul*. The Latin Averroists or Heterodox Aristotelians were masters in the faculty of arts to whom the infamous “two truth” theory is attributed. That is, what they seemed to be saying is that something can be true in philosophy and false in theology, and vice versa. As Aristotelians, as philosophers, they accepted the cogency of positions which were in conflict with their presumed Christian beliefs. No matter. The eternity of the world is a philosophical truth, its non-eternity is a truth of faith.

Thomas’s response to this was twofold. First, he simply rejects as absurd and incoherent the view that both sides of a contradiction can be true. This is to violate the most fundamental law of thinking, the principle of contradiction, $\neg(p \text{ -- } p)$. Moreover, it is impious to suggest that God presents for our acceptance as true something we know to be false.

Second, he insists that Aristotle did not teach 2 and 3, as a close reading of his texts shows, and, while he taught 1, which is false, its falsity could not have been known by Aristotle or anyone else on the basis of natural reasoning but is only established as false on the basis of revelation. Thomas wrote a little book, *On the Eternity of the World*, to make this point. He dealt with the second supposed error in another little work, *On There Being Only One Intellect*, in which he argues that the Averroistic interpretation of *On the Soul* cannot be reconciled with the text. So too he holds that God’s supposed non-knowing of the world is a bad reading of the *Metaphysics*.

Thomas’s position was complicated by the fact that anti-Aristotelians tended to lump him together with the Latin Averroists, finding Thomas’s own predilection for Aristotle suspicious. In 1270, a condemnation of a number of theses of an Aristotelian provenance created an official hostility to Aristotle. (In 1277, after the death of Thomas, another condemnation of 219 theses contained several taught by Thomas.) The urgency of the situation cannot be overstated. If the spirit of the condemnations had prevailed, the university would have turned its back on the enormous philosophical achievement of Aristotle and even more seriously called into question the assumption that faith and reason are complementary, not inimical, to one another. What Aristotle taught was not true because

A SHORT LIFE

he taught it but represented what the human mind, unaided by faith, could know. That Thomas understood what was at stake is clear from the short works just cited and even more by the sequence of commentaries on the Aristotelian treatises he produced, some dozen in the course of perhaps five years, and at a time when he was fulfilling the onerous duties of a regent master as well as continuing work on his *Summa Theologiae*. When we realize that the Aristotelian commentaries were a species of moonlighting, not part of Thomas's task as a master of theology, their very existence is a testimony to how concerned Thomas was to protect the range of reason.

In them, Thomas may be seen as doing the work of a master in the arts faculty as it should be done. Thomas, like many others, learned much from the commentaries of Averroes and Avicenna, which were translated along with the texts of Aristotle. But we see, in his earliest writings, a wariness about the Arabic readings of Aristotle; this increases during his career, so that the severe treatment of Averroes during this second Parisian period does not surprise. It has often been noted that in his commentary on Aristotle's *On the Soul*, the first of his commentaries, Thomas shows no sign of responding to a contemporary problem. The criticisms of the Avicennian and Averroistic interpretations of certain texts are familiar ones, often encountered in Thomas's earlier writings. The crisis of Latin Averroism upped the ante, as it were. No longer was it a simple question of a dubious reading of a text, to be confronted as such. Now the young men whom Ferdinand Van Steenberghen preferred to call heterodox Aristotelians were undermining the most fundamental assumption of the university, that what can be known and what is believed can never really contradict one another. In all periods of the history of philosophy there have been those who say blithely that they are willing to accept incoherence and to live with contradictory beliefs. But even the statement of this willingness becomes mere gibberish if its contradictory has equal status. Thomas was coming to the defense of the reasonableness of the faith, but equally he was coming to the defense of reason and saving philosophy from the philosophers.

A word more about what Thomas said about the eternity of the world. Of course, either the world is eternal or it is not. And of course the believer believes that it was created in time, in the beginning. It is false to hold that the world is eternal. Thus far, this is simply an application of the principle of contradiction. A proposition and its contradictory cannot be simultaneously true. Christians *believe* that one of the contradictories is true and so the other is false. But could

A SHORT LIFE

one in this case settle the matter on the basis of reason? Can we know one way or the other if the world is eternal? Thomas maintains that this is undecidable on the basis of reason alone. This means that Aristotle could not have known the truth that the world is not eternal. But didn't Aristotle think he knew the world is eternal? Thomas finds his arguments only probable, but of course if Aristotle thought they were apodictic, he was wrong.

This may give some indication of the subtlety and care with which Thomas approached discussions of the relationship between faith and reason, and of course it indicates his conviction that Aristotle is the best guide to philosophical truth, deserving the benefit of the doubt when difficulties arise. Here is the list of the Aristotelian works on which he commented: *On the Soul*; *On Sense and the Sensed Object*; *Physics*; *Meteorology*; *On Interpretation* (incomplete); *Posterior Analytics*; *Nicomachean Ethics*; *Politics* (incomplete); *Metaphysics*; *On the Heavens* (incomplete); *On Generation and Corruption* (incomplete). That's eleven. He also composed the *Tabula Ethicorum*, an ethical dictionary based on Aristotle.

Work on the *Summa Theologiae* continued during this tumultuous time. Thomas moved on to the Second Part, the moral part, which he subdivided, treating the more general moral principles in the First Part of the Second Part – *Prima Secundae* – and then the virtues in the Second Part of the Second Part, *Secunda Secundae* (theological, cardinal, acquired and infused, the gifts, etc.). It is an astonishing synthesis of the whole patristic tradition and the philosophical. The Third Part is devoted to Christ, the Incarnate Word, and the sacraments. Question 90 is the last Thomas wrote, but it does not complete the plan of the *Summa* as Thomas had conceived it. Because the work was well planned, others later cannibalized Thomas's commentary on Peter Lombard, cast it into the form of the later work, and completed the *Summa* in what is called the Supplement.

Some of Thomas's disputed questions date from this second Parisian period, as do some of the quodlibetal questions, proof enough that Thomas was fulfilling the ordinary tasks of a master of theology despite the distraction of the Latin Averroist controversy. He lectured on Matthew's Gospel, and a written version has come down to us. We also have his commentary on John which dates from this period.

On the Perfection of the Spiritual Life and *Against Those Opposing Joining Religious Orders* date from this same period, attesting to the fact that the animosity which had delayed Thomas's reception into the faculty of theology had not gone away. Thomas was ever a stout

A SHORT LIFE

defender of his vocation and of the fittingness for a friar to teach. He also wrote *On Separate Substances* at this time. And there are responses to requests that came from all over, on subjects as diverse as taking interest on money lent to the treatment of Jews. Correspondents would send him lists of questions, 6, 30, 36, 43, and Thomas would discuss them one by one.

Thomas's output during these three years in Paris seems scarcely credible. Of course he wrote by dictation but that is far from explaining the quantity, the range, and the depth of his writings at this time. He was at his zenith, no doubt, at the height of his powers and indefatigable. As for the great crisis of the time, one might say that Thomas established the complementarity of faith and reason as much by example as by explicit argument. Chesterton was right to see Thomas's defense of reason as a watershed of European history.

Not that Thomas's views triumphed in the short term. As has been mentioned, he was tarred in the minds of some with the same brush as the Latin Averroists, his inordinate love of Aristotle being to the detriment – so went the charge – of the faith. In the short term, Thomas's opponents won, most of them Franciscans. The condemnation of 1277 clearly put Thomas in the target area. This was after his death, of course. Then Franciscans began to make compilations of what they took to be Thomas's distortions. Dominicans responded. The two mendicant Orders who did so much to reform the Church throughout the thirteenth century ended it as intellectual opponents.

10**Naples (1272–1274)**

Thomas could have been forgiven if he was glad to get out of Paris and return to Italy. He went by way of Florence to Naples, the origin of his Dominican vocation, to teach in the Dominican house there. Within a year something strange occurred. On December 6, 1273, Thomas decided to stop writing. Some biographers conjecture that he had a kind of mental breakdown. But it was a mystical experience

A SHORT LIFE

that silenced Thomas. After what he had seen, he told Reginald, everything he had written seemed mere straw. He could not bring himself to complete the *Summa*. Nonetheless, when he was asked to attend a council called at Lyon, he set off on December 6, 1273. He was not to reach his destination; he was not to get out of Italy. He was injured in an accident on the way, a branch overhanging the road banging his head and knocking him to the ground, perhaps from the back of a donkey he was riding. Weisheipl conjectures that a clot on the brain formed as the result of this and grew larger every day. Thomas could not go on and stopped at Maenza, at the castle of a niece, Francesca. The Cistercian abbey of Fossanova was in the vicinity and when Thomas's condition worsened, he was transferred to the monastery. It was there, on March 7, 1274, that he died.

Dante gave credence to the story that Thomas was assassinated by Charles of Anjou, fearing that at the council Thomas would be named cardinal and as a future pope would be a formidable enemy. Here in Dorothy Sayers's translation are the lines.

Charles came to Italy; to make amends
 He slaughtered Conradin; and after this
 Packed Thomas off to heaven, to make amends.
Purgatorio, xx, 57–69

False, of course, so why mention it? The *Divine Comedy* is set in the year 1300, a quarter-century after the death of Thomas and Bonaventure. That these and other Parisian masters figure prominently in Dante's great poem attests to the influence of that university and the lasting impact of the outcome of its quarrels. Bonaventure was created cardinal. Reginald of Piperno, Thomas's companion, predicted this, and that Thomas too would get a red hat. Given Thomas's rejection of ecclesiastical promotion, one wonders if he would have accepted. A future pope? Who knows? In any case, it is mere conjecture. Thomas assured Reginald he would go on exactly as he was. And so he did. He died a simple friar, in a Cistercian monastery, in the fifth decade of his life.

In Part III something of what happened next is described.

A SHORT LIFE: FURTHER READING

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