

Thomas Aquinas (1225- 1275)

An analysis of his *principia*

Brief Biography

- Jean-Pierre Torrell O.P., “Life and Works,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleanore Stump, (Oxford University Press, USA, 2012), 15-32.

The End

- “On 6 December, 1273, he laid aside his pen and would write no more. That day he experienced an unusually long ecstasy during Mass; what was revealed to him we can only surmise from his reply to Father Reginald, who urged him to continue his writings: ‘I can do no more. Such secrets have been revealed to me that all I have written now appears to be of little value.’”
 - Kennedy, "Thomas Aquinas," at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14663b.htm>.

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- “In the Encyclical "Aeterni Patris", of 4 August, 1879, on the restoration of Christian philosophy, Leo XIII declared him "the prince and master of all Scholastic doctors." The same illustrious pontiff, by a Brief dated 4 August, 1880, designated him patron of all Catholic universities, academies, colleges, and schools throughout the world.”

- “Facts narrated by persons who either knew St. Thomas in life or wrote at about the time of his canonization prove that he received assistance from heaven. To Father Reginald he declared that he had learned more in prayer and contemplation than he had acquired from men or books. These same authors tell of mysterious visitors who came to encourage and enlighten him. The Blessed Virgin appeared, to assure him that his life and his writings were acceptable to God, and that he would persevere in his holy vocation. Sts. Peter and Paul came to aid him in interpreting an obscure passage in Isaias. When humility caused him to consider himself unworthy of the doctorate, a venerable religious of his order (supposed to be St. Dominic) appeared to encourage him and suggested the text for his opening discourse.”

The Principium Cognoscendi (Foundation of Knowledge)

● Reason and Revelation

- Now in those things which we hold about God there is truth in two ways (*duplex veritatis modus*). For certain things that are true about God wholly surpass the capability of human reason, for instance that God is three and one: while there are certain things to which even natural reason can attain, for instance that God is, that God is one, and others like these, which even the philosophers proved demonstratively of God, being guided by the light of natural reason.

- While then the truth of the intelligible things of God is twofold, one to which the inquiry of reason can attain, the other which surpasses the whole range of human reason, both are fittingly proposed by God to man as an object of belief

Thomas on Romans 1

- It is written (Rom. 1:19), *That which is known of God, namely, what can be known of God by natural reason, is manifest in them.*
 - Aquinas, ST, I q.12 a.12 s.c.

- Our natural knowledge begins from sense. Hence our natural knowledge can go as far as it can be led by sensible things. But our mind cannot be led by sense so far as to see the essence of God; because the sensible effects of God do not equal the power of God as their cause. Hence from the knowledge of sensible things the whole power of God cannot be known; nor therefore can His essence be seen. But because they are His effects and depend on their cause, we can be led from them so far as to know of God *whether He exists*, and to know of Him what must necessarily belong to Him, as the first cause of all things, exceeding all things caused by Him.

Again on Romans 1

- Three things lead us to believe in Christ. First of all, natural reason: “Since the creation of the world the invisible things of God are clearly known by the things that have been made” (Rom 1:20)...

Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John: Chapters 1-21*, trans. Fabian Larcher and James A. Weishiepl (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 2010), 241.

Quoting Theophylact

- The intellect which is given in us for our direction, and which is called natural reason, is said here to be a light given us by God.

- However, if we bear in mind these distinctions and take “world” from the standpoint of its creation, and “enlighten” as referring to the light of natural reason, the statement of the Evangelist is beyond reproach. For all men coming into this visible world are enlightened by the light of natural knowledge through participating in this true light, which is the source of all the light of natural knowledge participated in by men.

A Third Kind of Knowledge

- Now there is a threefold knowledge of God. One knowledge is that by which he is known only in his effects, as if, insofar as someone knows being or something created, he has some sort of knowledge of God the creator and his creation of it, [namely an implicit knowledge]; and this knowledge is in all men naturally and from the beginning. Another knowledge is that by which God is considered in himself yet nevertheless is known through his effects, insofar as someone proceeds from the knowledge of his effects to the knowledge of God himself. And this can be had through the inquiry of natural reason, although not immediately. And it was thus that the philosophers and other wise men arrived at knowledge of God, to the extent that it is possible to attain it. The third knowledge is that by which he is known in himself and in those things that exceed all proportion to his effects. And this knowledge is neither naturally in men, nor had through the inquiry of natural reason, but had through an infused supernatural light. According to this threefold knowledge, a threefold love is found. One is that by which God is loved in his effects, insofar as when I love a creature I am said to love God. Another love is that by which God himself is loved on the basis of his effects, and this love is had through inquiry, as when someone knowing God from his effects loves him.

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● For man knows God naturally in the same way as he desires Him naturally. Now man desires Him naturally in so far as he naturally desires happiness, which is a likeness of the divine goodness. *Hence it does not follow that God considered in Himself is naturally known to man*, but that His likeness is. Wherefore man must needs come by reasoning to know God in the likenesses to Him which he discovers in God's effects.

- Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, 1.21, my emphasis.

Three “Kinds” of Knowledge

- (1). The first is obscure and indirect.
- (2). The second, more prominent, mode of creaturely knowledge is that which is gained through demonstration by way of our "natural reason."
- (3). Third, there is knowledge that comes by revelation.