St. Thomas Aquinas Essay, Research Paper

St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas Aquinas was known as a saint, a doctor of

the church, and a man who made many contributions; not only

to Dante but to the entire period in which he lived, which

is known as the Middle Ages.

St. Thomas was born at Roccasecca, the family castle

near Naples, probably about 1225(Vann, 36). The precise

year of Thomas birth is uncertain(Waltz, 4). He was born

under the Italian sky to the county of Aquino and inherited

his distinguished name by his birthplace(Waltz, 1).

However, he later made the name more distinguished than

ever.

He was the youngest son of Landulf, Count of Aquino,

and Theodora, Countess of Teano. It was said that his

father was indeed a happy father and a valiant warrior and

also a diplomat, but above all he was the father of a fine

race (Waltz, 3). Thomas mother was known as a noblewoman

from Naples and was greatly praised for her piety(Waltz,3).

Thomas also had three known brothers; Aimo, Ronald, and

Landulf. More elders may have existed but it is hard to

distinguish those who were sons or brothers of

Landulf(Waltz, 4). Four or five sisters also existed;

Marotta, Theodora, Mary, the fourth is nameless since she

was struck by lightning as a child, and the fifth was

Adelsia(Waltz, 4).

Thomas family was related to the Emperors Henry VI and

Frederick II, and to the Kings of Aragon, Castile, and

France. Calo relates that a holy hermit foretold his career,

saying to Theodora before his birth: “He will enter the

Order of Friars Preachers, and so great will be his learning

and sanctity that in his day no one will be found to equal

him” (Prummer, op. cit., 18)-(Encyc.Brit.Online, 1).

At the age of five, Thomas went to the Abbey school of

the Benedictines of Monte Cassino. Diligent in study, he

was early noted as being meditative and devoted to

prayer, and his educator was surprised at hearing the child

ask frequently: “What is God(Encyc.Brit.Online, 1)?” This

young question of Thomas is recognized by many of modern

literature and spiritual education. It is distinctive in the

biographies and recollections of St. Thomas Aquinas.

By about 1239 Thomas attended the University of Naples

while studying his literary studies in the Faculty of Arts.

He then entered the Order of Preachers in about 1243(Walz,

262). Some time between 1240 and August, 1243, he received

the habit of the Order of St. Dominic, being attracted and

directed by John of St. Julian, a noted preacher of the

convent of Naples. The city wondered that such a noble

young man should don the garb of poor friar(Encyc. Brit.

Online, 2). His mother, with mingled feelings of joy and

sorrow, hastened to Naples to see her son. The Dominicans,

fearing she would take him away, sent him to Rome, his

ultimate destination being Paris or Cologne. At the

exemplification of Theodora, Thomas’s brothers, who were

soldiers under the Emperor Frederick, captured the novice

near the town of Aquapendente and confined him in the

fortress of San Giovanni at Rocca Secca. Here he was

confined for nearly two years(Encyc. Brit. Online, 3).

The time spent in captivity was not lost. His mother

relented somewhat, after the first burst of anger and grief;

the Dominicans were allowed to provide him with new habits,

and through the kind offices of his sister he acquired some

books — the Holy Scriptures, Aristotle’s Metaphysics, and

the “Sentences” of Peter Lombard. After eighteen months or

two years spent in prison, he was set at liberty, being

lowered in a basket into the arms of the Dominicans, who

were delighted to find that during his captivity “he had

made as much progress as if he had been in a studium

generale” (Calo, op. cit., 24). Thomas immediately

pronounced his vows, and his superiors sent him to Rome.

John the Teutonic, fourth master general of the order, took

the young student to Paris and, according to the majority of

the saint’s biographers, to Cologne, where he arrived in

1244 or 1245, and was placed under Albertus Magnus, the most

renowned professor of the order (Prummer, op. cit.,

p.25)-(Encyc. Brit. Online, 3).

Thomas then interned in the castles of Montesangiovanni

and Roccasecca, which were of his own family, for two years.

For the next few years Thomas became a student at Cologne.

Here he studied Theology under Saint Albert the Great and

showed many signs of his future greatness in the world of

Theologian studies(Walz,41). A reference that incorporates

this period of Thomas s life is found in Dante s Paradiso:

Questo che m `e a destra pi`u vicino

Frate e maestro funni; ed esso Alberto

`E di Colonia, ed io Thomas d`Aquino.

interpreted:

My brother and my master, of Cologne,

neighbours me on my right: Albert his

name,

and Thomas, called Aquinas, is my own.

Dante, Paradiso, X, 97-99 (tr. Bickersteth) (Waltz, 50).

The spirit on my right, once of

Cologne,

was my teacher and my brother. Albert

was his name,

and Thomas, of Aquinas, was my own.

Dante, Paradiso, X, 97-99 (tr. Ciardi)

During his stay in Cologne, probably in 1250, he was

raised to the priesthood by Conrad of Hochstaden, archbishop

of that city. Throughout his busy life, he frequently

preached the Word of God, in Germany, France, and Italy. His

sermons were forceful, redolent of sanctity, full of solid

instruction, abounding in inclined citations from the

Scriptures(Encyc. Brit. Online, 5). In the year 1251 or 1252

the master general of the order, by the advice of Albertus

Magnus and Hugo a S. Charo (Hugh of St. Cher), sent Thomas

to fill the office of Bachelor (sub-regent) in the Dominican

studium at Paris. This appointment may be regarded as the

beginning of his public career, for his teaching soon

attracted the attention both of the professors and of the

students. He taught under the master Elias Brunet, who was

at the head of the school for externs form 1248-1256(Walz,

65). His duties consisted principally in explaining the

“Sentences” of Peter Lombard, and lecturing on books of

Scripture. The Great Commentary on the Sentences is the

youthful work of Thomas and was a result of his lectures as

a bachelor at the University of Paris(Walz, 66). His

commentaries on that text-book of theology furnished the

materials and, in great part, the plan for his chief work,

the “Summa theologica”. He received his degree to teach in

public, to preach, and to exercise the functions of a master

and was to be considered a graduate.

Thomas had not yet reached the age of thirty-five, as

prescribed by university regulations(Walz, 70). In that

case, conferring the degree was postponed, due to a dispute

between the university and the friars. However, after

delivering his principium, he received a professorial chair

as doctor and master in Theology, and became a regent of the

regular school(Walz, 71). From that point on, Thomas

devoted himself to his duties of a master and continued

lecturing and preaching.

In 1259 Thomas returned to Italy and became appointed a

preacher-general by the provincial chapter at Naples. He

continued his passionate lectures and sermons, and began

writing books and holding disputations. He wrote

theological works along with philosophical writings as well.

He wrote with the theory that God had chosen him to

investigate every truth, and gave him a clearer

understanding than any other man (Waltz, 103). He continued

teaching and spreading his view through his writing his

entire lifetime.

St. Thomas Aquinas died in 1274 at the castle of Maenza

where he fell ill while off for the Council of Lyons. His

journey fell short due to the illness which overtook him.

Many remarkable things happened upon Thomas death, it is

said that a blind man touched his lifeless body and regained

his sight. In addition, a holy hermit saw two blazing stars

overpass and take a single star with them to Heaven(Waltz,

167). Albert the Great is believed to have experienced

great revelations at the passing of St. Thomas,also. These

are mere examples of the power that Thomas d Aquino had

over patrons of the thirteenth century and the spirituality

that he symbolized. A passage from John Donne reads, And

therefore St. Thomas, a man neither of unholy thoughts, nor

of bold or irreligious or scandalous phrase or elocution(yet

I adventure nor so farre in his behalfe as Sylvestor doth),

that it is impossible that hee should have spoken any thing

against faith or good manners, forbeares not so say, that

Christ was so much the cause of his death, as he is of his

wetting which might and would not shut the windowe, when the

raine beats in(Ryan, 13).

It is shown how many felt about Thomas through

literature that has carried through until today. Dante

expresssed his admiration and spiritual loyalty in his

Paradiso, which clearly elaborates on St. Thomas Aquinas and

his reflection on Dante. Cantos X-XIII involve Aquinas and

his guidance. Dante portrays Thomas as the Dominican with

insight of God as the source of his wisdom. He speaks as

though God is speaking through him, and in Dante s paradise

he is greatly influenced by the wise words of St. Thomas

Aquinas. This is the case of many, today and long ago.

Thomas wrote on many subjects, one being free choice of man.

He writes, Without a doubt it must be said that man has

free choice. Faith demands that we hold this position,

since without free choice one could not merit or demerit, or

be justly rewarded or punished. There are clear indications

of this if one considers the occasions when man appears to

choose one thing freely and reject another. Finally,

reason, too, demands that we hold this position, and

following its dictates we examine the origin of free choice,

proceeding in the following manner(tr. Goodwin, 121).

With this as just an example of the work of Thomas

Aquinas, it is believed that his teachings were those from

above, and his insight on many subjects of life have come to

shape the views and reason of many men.

Since the days of Aristotle, probably no one man has

exercised such a powerful influence on the thinking world as

did St. Thomas. His authority was very great during his

lifetime. The popes, the universities, the studia of his

order were anxious to profit by his learning and prudence.

Several of his important works were written at the request

of others, and his opinion was sought by all classes. On

several occasions the doctors of Paris referred their

disputes to him and gratefully abided by his decision

(Vaughan, op. cit., II, 1 p. 544)-(Encyc.Brit.Online, 14).

His principles, made known by his writings, have continued

to influence men even to this day. The whole life of St.

Thomas was spent in a so noble and so spiritual way that

already many of his contemporaries had conceived the

greatest admiration and veneration for him. It was natural

that after his death his cult should begin(Walz, 186).

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