

THOUGHT, LITERATURE,

GREAT CATHOLIC
WRITINGS

SPIRITUALITY, SOCIAL ACTION

Robert Feduccia Jr., editor
with Jerry Windley-Daoust;
Michael C. Jordan, PhD; and J. D. Childs

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INTRODUCTION

Great Catholic Writings: Thought, Literature, Spirituality, Social Action

SEEING WITH GOD-SOAKED EYES

And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Catholics believe that the world – all of material reality – is absolutely soaked with the presence of God. The world is a place of infinite possibility for encountering God. This is the principle of sacramentality. Grace, or God’s presence, permeates all of reality.

The Catholic worldview lies in seeing the world sacramentally – with God-soaked eyes. A Catholic vision celebrates the fact that the world is a place of infinite possibility for encountering God. God’s presence absolutely penetrates all of reality; he has even joined our world as a human being, Jesus of Nazareth. Throughout the centuries, people who have viewed the world with eyes such as these have written, and written greatly. This book contains but a handful of such compositions – great, Catholic writings.

These writings from the Roman Catholic Tradition are essentially a dialogue; they contain the capacity for conversation. These essays, speeches, stories, reflections, and dissertations speak out to us: sometimes they whisper, sometimes they shout, but they always provoke an encounter of some sort. They place us in a vulnerable position when they speak to us. A great story, poem, or essay can capture your imagination. When a writing you encounter really speaks to you, it impacts your world. Perhaps it echoes or challenges your view of the world or your hopes for what the world could be. Such an experience can be continued as you and your friends discuss the story, poem, or essay. Something exciting is happening. Real learning is taking place. These writings are a form of art, and you learn about yourself, and your own journey, both through art that captures your imagination and in conversations with your friends. This book is different from other books you may have used in school. It contains great writings that will echo, challenge, and provide hope.

This book marks a decisive shift in the way teachers might approach religious topics with you. The new emphasis allows you an opportunity to encounter classic expressions of thought in order to form *and inform* your imagination. This approach seeks to engage you in the whole context of your life. It seeks to bridge the gap between your experiences and the weight and richness of the Catholic tradition. It is our hope to foster a Catholic imagination both in your mind and heart so that it may be enfolded in the choices you make and in the *person you become*.

Consider a 3-D movie, a special kind of film that makes images jump out at the viewers; movement and action on the screen seem to fill the theatre. Necessary for this effect, however, are the special red- and green-lensed glasses that we put on for watching. Without the glasses, we are largely incapable of receiving the effect the 3-D film provides. Similarly, if we wear the glasses when we watch a normal movie, there is no effect and our ability to see clearly is diminished (not to mention, we look foolish!). We get the full effect of the 3-D show only when we wear the glasses and are watching a movie that has been formatted for this purpose. When we come to the theatre anticipating that we will enjoy the full impact of the 3-D production, and we watch it while *engaged*, with our eyes wide open, we are in for a treat!

Grace works like that. God's world is like the screen that shows the special three-dimensionally formatted film. Our faith, our relationship with God whereby we are engaged actively with love and devotion, is how we put on the special glasses that enable us to see. With the glasses and the potential for 3-D effects, we can look at reality in a way that sees God in an infinite variety of situations. God's very Self, the dynamic life of the Holy Trinity into which we are invited through love, is the effect of the movie we participate in: God's grace *is* the special effect! For in each moment of our lives, God plants seeds in the soil of our freedom, enabling spontaneity, engagement, and love—God's very Self. We are capable of encountering God in many ways within every moment of every day of our lives, if we are looking through the right lenses. This is a sacramental worldview—to see with God-soaked eyes. It is to perceive and realize God's profound presence everywhere in everything. It is how Catholicism teaches us to see—to look and act as a saint.

PART ONE
GREAT CATHOLIC
THOUGHT



BLAISE PASCAL



POPE JOHN PAUL II



SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

GREAT CATHOLIC THOUGHT: READING I

“The Five Ways”

SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

Introduction

Saint Thomas Aquinas was so quiet and so large that his fellow university students nicknamed him the Dumb (mute) Ox. But his teacher, Albert the Great, predicted that one day the bellow of that “dumb ox” would be heard around the world. He was right.

Saint Thomas Aquinas was born in 1225 to a wealthy noble family in southern Italy. His family sent him to live with Benedictine monks so that he would eventually become the abbot at the monastery. Instead, Aquinas announced that he wanted to join the recently created Order of Preachers, the Dominicans. The Dominicans’ mission was to combat ignorance of the faith by preaching and teaching wherever they went.

When he joined the Dominicans, Saint Thomas was sent to the University of Paris, where he received a doctorate in theology. He quickly became a popular preacher whose passionate sermons frequently moved people to tears and applause. But Saint Thomas was to become best known for his innovative theology. His groundbreaking work was made possible not only by his genius, but by the scholarly renewal that was sweeping Europe. Expanding trade, along with the Crusades, had brought western Europe into contact with Eastern Christianity and the Arab world, both of which reintroduced the West to classic texts from the early Church fathers and Greek philosophers. The work of Aristotle (384–322 BCE) especially challenged and intrigued scholars. For centuries, the great thinkers of western Europe had drawn primarily on divine revelation to answer questions about the world, but Aristotle described the world through the use of reason alone. Scholars began to use Aristotle’s logic to debate disputed questions in every field, including theology. The attempt to integrate faith with reason became known as Scholasticism, with Saint Thomas Aquinas as the greatest of the Schoolmen, as these new theologians were called.

Saint Thomas began his work with the assumption that faith cannot contradict reason when they are both properly understood. Truth’s single source is God. Saint Thomas’s attempt to explore the truths of faith resulted in his greatest work, the *Summa Theologica*. This great effort

attempted to summarize all aspects of Christian faith in an integrated, logical way. Even though he never finished it, this “summary” runs more than three thousand pages long. “The Five Ways” comes from the part of the *Summa Theologica* in which Saint Thomas responds to the question of the existence of God.

Aquinas is well known for his sharp intellect, but he was also a passionately prayerful person. During Mass on the feast of Saint Nicholas in 1273, he had an experience in which he was overwhelmed by the power and presence of God. He quit writing the *Summa Theologica* after that, saying that compared to what God had revealed to him, everything he had written was as insignificant as straw. He died a few months later, on March 7, 1274. He was canonized a saint in 1323, and declared a Doctor of the Church in 1567.

GREAT CATHOLIC THOUGHT

“The Five Ways”

The existence of God can be proved in five ways.

The first and more manifest way is the argument from motion. It is certain, and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion. Now whatever is moved is moved by another, for nothing can be moved except it is in potentiality to that towards which it is moved; whereas a thing moves inasmuch as it is in act. For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality. But nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality. Thus that which is actually hot, as fire makes wood, which is potentially hot, to be actually hot, and thereby moves and changes it. Now it is not possible that the same thing should be at once in actuality and potentiality in the same respect, but only in different respects. For what is actually hot cannot simultaneously be potentially hot; but it is simultaneously potentially cold. It is therefore impossible that in the same respect and in the same way a thing should be both mover and moved, *i.e.*, that it should move itself. Therefore, whatever is moved must be moved by another. If that by which it is moved be itself moved, then this also must needs be moved by another, and that by another again. But this cannot go on to infinity, because then there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover; seeing that subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they are moved by the first mover, as the staff moves only because it is moved by the hand. Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God.

THE CAUSES

- Efficient Cause—That which causes something else to exist. It can also be called the first cause.
- Intermediate Cause—Something used by the first cause to accomplish a particular goal.
- Ultimate Cause—The goal or destination intended by the first cause.

The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause. In the world of sensible things we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or only one. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate, cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.

The third way is taken from possibility and necessity, and runs thus. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to be corrupted, and consequently, it is possible for them to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which can not-be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything can not-be, then at one time there was nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist begins to exist only through something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence—which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary. But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes. Therefore we cannot but admit the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not

receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God.

The fourth way is taken from the gradation to be found in things. Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble, and the like. But *more* and *less* are predicated of different things according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum, as a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest; so that there is something which is truest, something best, something noblest, and, consequently, something which is most being, for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being, as it is written in *Metaph. ii*. Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus, as fire, which is the maximum of heat, is the cause of all hot things as is said in the same book. Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God.

The fifth way is taken from the governance of the world. We see that things which lack knowledge, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that they achieve their end, not fortuitously, but designedly. Now whatever lacks knowledge cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is directed by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.

Review Questions

1. How does Saint Thomas Aquinas define “motion”?
2. What does Saint Thomas Aquinas have to say about the possibility of a thing bringing itself into existence?
3. What does Saint Thomas Aquinas have to say about the possibility that nothing necessary exists?
4. What is meant by “the gradation to be found in things”?
5. How does Saint Thomas Aquinas think things without intelligence are moved?

In-depth Questions

1. Of the Five Ways, which one do you think is best proof that God exists? Please explain.
2. If you were asked to add a sixth proof to the Five Ways, what would you add?
3. What do you think this quote means: "There is a difference between belief in God and believing in God."
4. The Catholic Church has long held that faith and reason cannot contradict each other. Why do you think it is important for belief in God to be rational and logical?

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