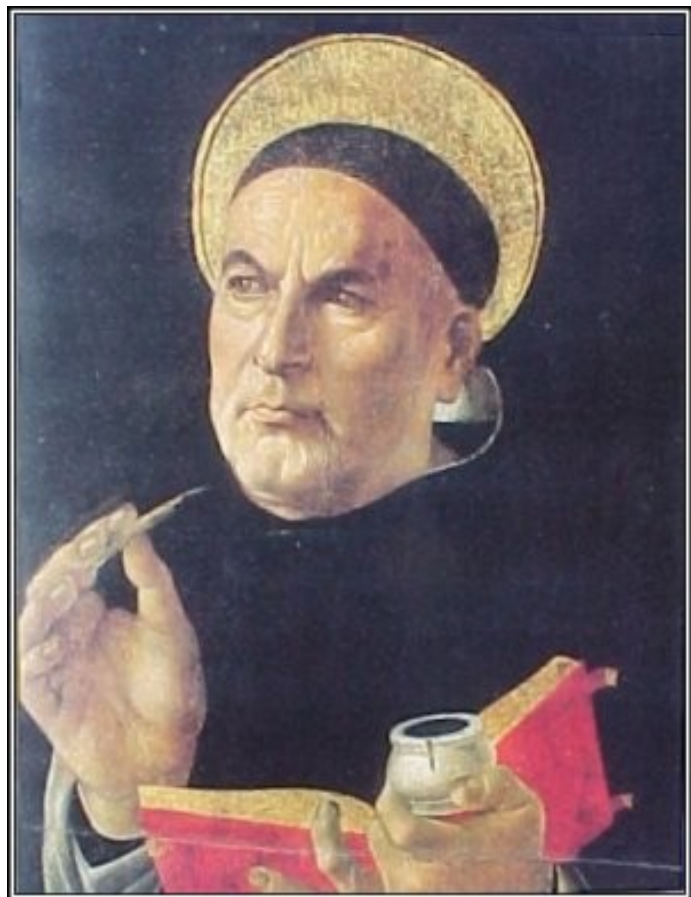


January 28

Commemoration: Thomas Aquinas, teacher, 1274



Thomas Aquinas is the greatest theologian of the high Middle Ages, and, next to Augustine, perhaps the greatest theologian in the history of Western Christianity. Born into a noble Italian family, probably in 1225, he entered the new Order of Preachers founded by Dominic (the Dominicans, or Blackfriars as they were known in England). He soon became an outstanding teacher in an age of intellectual ferment. Because of his size and slowness, Thomas was called “the Ox”. His first master, Albert the Great, is said to have prophesied that although Thomas was called “the dumb ox, his lowing would soon be heard all over the world.”

Perceiving the challenges that the recent rediscovery, through Jewish and Muslim scholars in Spain, of Aristotle’s works might entail for traditional catholic doctrine, especially in its emphasis upon empirical knowledge derived from reason and sense perception, independent of faith and revelation, Thomas asserted that reason and revelation are in basic harmony. “Grace” (revelation), he said, “is not the denial of nature” (reason), “but the perfection of it.” This synthesis Thomas accomplished in his greatest works, the *Summa Theologica* and the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, which

continue today to exercise profound influence on Christian thought and philosophy. Thomas was considered a bold thinker, even a “radical”, and certain aspects of his thought were condemned by the ecclesiastical authorities. His canonization as a Doctor (Teacher) of the Church on July 18, 1323, vindicated him.

Thomas understood God’s disclosure of his Name, in Exodus 3:14, “I AM WHO I AM”, to mean that God is Being, the Ultimate Reality from which everything else derives its being. The difference between God and the world is that God’s essence is to exist, whereas all other beings derive their being from him by the act of creation. Although, for Thomas, God and the world are distinct, there is, nevertheless, an analogy of being between God and the world, since the Creator is reflected in his creation. It is possible, therefore, to have a limited knowledge of God, by analogy from the created world. On this basis, human reason can demonstrate that God exists; that he created the world; and that he contains in himself, as their cause, all the perfections which exist in his creation. The distinctive truths of the Christian faith, however, such as the Trinity and the Incarnation, are known only by revelation.

On December 6, 1272, after being recalled to Naples as regent of studies earlier that year, Thomas experienced a revelation of God, after which he dictated to his scribe no more. Of the experience he said that all he had written in comparison to what he had then seen was like so much straw.

Thomas died in 1274, just under fifty years of age. In 1369, on January 28, his remains were transferred to Toulouse. In addition to his many theological writings, he composed several eucharistic hymns, including *Adoro te devote* (“Humbly I adore thee”) and *Pange lingua* (“Now, my tongue, the mystery telling”).