

Reflection Saturday Week 3 St Thomas Aquinas 2023

St Thomas Aquinas (1225 - 1274) was born of a noble family in southern Italy and educated by the Benedictines. Normally he would have joined them taking a position suitable to his rank; but he decided to become a Dominican. His family, scandalised by this decision, kidnapped him and kept him prisoner for over a year. Being more obstinate than they were, he eventually had his way.

He studied in Paris and Cologne under the great philosopher St Albert the Great. It was a time of great philosophical ferment. The writings of Aristotle had been newly rediscovered and available to people in the West for the first time in a thousand years. Many feared Aristotelianism was contradictory to Christianity, and the teaching of Aristotle was banned in many universities at this time – however Aristotle's works were coming to the West from Muslim sources.

Into this chaos Thomas brought simple, straightforward sense. Truth cannot contradict truth: if Aristotle (the great, infallible pagan philosopher) appears to contradict Christianity (which we know by faith to be true), then either Aristotle is wrong or the contradiction is in fact illusory. So, Thomas studied, taught, argued, and eventually the simple, common-sense philosophy that he worked out brought an end to the controversy. He wrote much on philosophy and theology, including the *Summa Theologiae*, a standard textbook for many centuries and still an irreplaceable resource today. He also produced dazzling poetry as in the liturgy for Corpus Christi. Then one day while celebrating Mass, he had a vision that, he said, made all his writings seem like so much straw; and he wrote no more.

Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will inspire us, like St Thomas, to love God with our hearts, minds and souls. Let us investigate anything that stands in contradiction to our faith knowing that the truth can never contradict the truth that is God.

Thomas Aquinas: *To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible.*

What do you call a monk with a philosophy degree? A deep friar!