

With the publication of this sixth volume, we complete Part I and reach the halfway point in the twelve-volume series. We have now covered the first Christian millennium and moved slightly into the second, ending on the eve of the Crusades. This volume covers what will probably turn out to be the longest time span of any of them, the period from 740 to 1100—three hundred and sixty years in which four momentous developments take place.

The first is the most difficult for the modern reader to comprehend. The monk and the nun become the central figures of Christianity. The idea of giving up home, family life, all one's possessions, almost all physical comforts, and all of one's time, to the service of Jesus Christ, in common with other men or women of similar mind, will seem to many readers extreme to the point of delirium.

And yet, is it? Christians today of almost every denomination give up many of these things when they undertake foreign mission work. Others do so in undertaking work in urban ghettos. At a minimum, every Christian risks being branded a "religious kook" if he witnesses to Christ in a typical workplace. And there was a time, in the memory of many people still living, when men voluntarily gave up these same things to fight in wars from which there was every possibility they would not return. No, the depth of the commitment of the monk or nun is not entirely unknown today. Only the form of it is unusual.

But in these centuries long passed, it was not unusual. Impelled by their vision of a world to come, men and women divorced themselves from this world. Ironically, however, their effect on this one was profound and is still with us today, for they established the very foundations of our society. That is the first development covered in this volume.

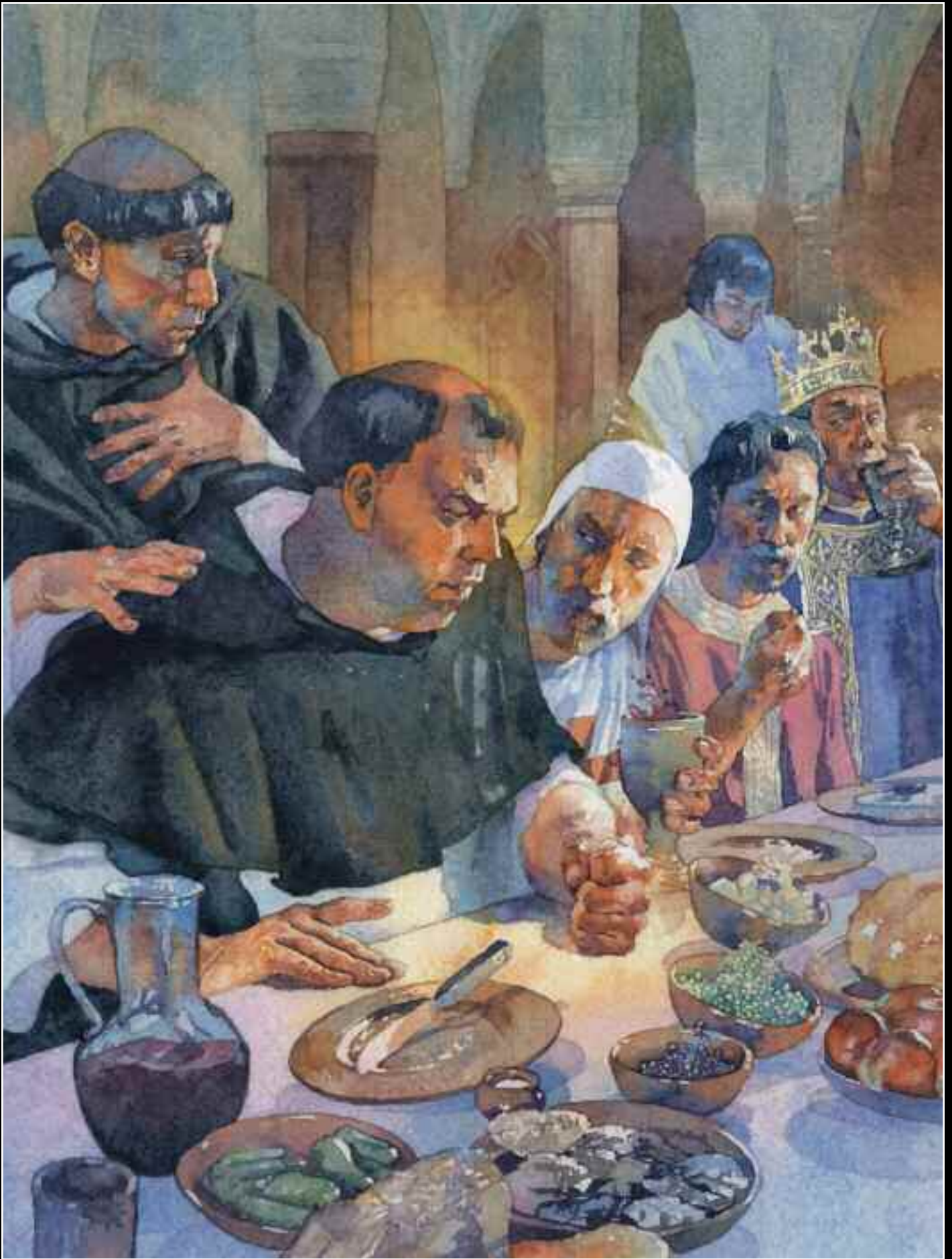
The second is a great tragedy. Eastern and Western Christianity divided, to the ultimate detriment of both. Neither wanted this to happen. When it did, neither believed the rupture would be permanent. But it would become permanent, and in no small degree because of it, in Part II of the series, we will see Eastern Christians suffer almost an entire millennium of steady oppression and persecution, unrelieved and on occasion made worse by their brothers in the West.

Offsetting this reversal, however, is the third development, a truly glorious accomplishment, namely the thorough conversion of the Slavic peoples and the establishment of Christianity right across Eastern Europe. The delightful story of its crowning achievement, the coming of “the Rus” to Christ in Prince Vladimir’s determination to win his Christian wife, is one of those strange love stories that happen also to be true. It concludes chapter 8.

Finally, we come to the fourth event, or series of events, of which Christians should be acutely aware. Much mention is made these days of the Crusades, which are usually portrayed as an unprovoked Christian attack on the peace-loving peoples of Islam. This is greatly at odds with the facts.

In the last volume, we showed how Islamic forces took over more than half the Christian world at the point of the sword. In the last two chapters of this one, we show how Muslims fought for the next three hundred years to finish off Christianity, conquering southern France, Sicily, Crete, the Aegean Islands and repeatedly attacking Rome itself, resulting finally in the Christian counterattack known as the Crusades. From the Christian perspective, the Crusades were morally doubtful. But they were not unprovoked. They were very provoked indeed.

Ted Byfield



"There!" boomed the fat man. "There is the final conclusive argument against the Manichaeian heresy!" Such an outburst at the banquet table of the king of France was outrageous. But ignoring the disruption, Louis IX had a different interest: what was this conclusive argument against the Manichaeian heresy? After all, the heresy had been around since the days of the apostles.

The fat man of Aquino who helped Christians unite reason with faith

The jovial friar they once called “Dumb Ox Thomas” set forth a case for Christian truth that was extolled and denounced in his lifetime and for centuries after

A thirteenth-century banquet, judging from the description in the *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, must have been a joyous yet semi-sacramental affair, and a banquet hosted by the king of France an occasion demanding especially strict regard for one’s conduct. How very regrettable, then, was the sudden outburst by the gigantic guest seated on a bench not far from King Louis IX himself.

This obtrusive gent wore the black-and-white garb of a Dominican friar, and a great deal of garb there was, for he was a very corpulent man. Powerful, too: his fist slamming down upon the delicacy-laden table made the dishes jump and clatter. “There!” he boomed out. “*There* is the final and conclusive argument against the Manichaeian heresy!”

A Dominican colleague tugged the man’s sleeve, whispering, “Master Thomas, Master Thomas, do be careful. You are sitting at the table of the king of France!” We do not know the big man’s response, but from his conduct on similar occasions, we can guess it. “Good heavens!” he would have said. “What have I done? What a dreadful way to behave! But I was thinking, you see. I was thinking.”

The king, who was thinking too, immediately ordered a secretary to go speak to this man. “To reprimand him, your Majesty?” “Oh no,” replied the king, “to take a note. Find out what *is* the conclusive argument against the Manichaeian heresy.”

This, King Louis knew, mattered far more than a disturbance at a royal banquet. Ancient Manichaeianism, the belief that eight centuries earlier had initially prevented the mighty Augustine from embracing Christianity and four hundred years before that had troubled Christians in apostolic times, lay at the root of the

current Cathar heresy. Spreading like an epidemic, this curious religion, much at odds with Christianity, now threatened the unity of his kingdom and all Europe.

The king also knew that if anyone could rebut it, that man was his noisy guest, Thomas of Aquino. Thomas was admittedly radical and eccentric in some of his teachings, and known for disrupting more things than a royal banquet. Nevertheless, in an age of crusaders, few doubted that Thomas was a soldier of Christ who fought with mind, not muscle.

What neither the king nor his guest could have known, incidentally, was that they would one day share a notable distinction. Both would be canonized by the church. King Louis would be credited with setting a model for Christian monarchy and justice rarely equaled in the centuries to follow (see sidebar, pages 140–145). The philosophy and theology of Thomas Aquinas would become so deeply entrenched that six hundred years later the Church of Rome would embrace it as the summation of Christian belief against which all truth claims can be measured. Whether Thomas himself would have approved quite such unequivocal recognition some of his many admirers of later years have doubted. But he strongly believed in truth, particularly scientific truth as revealed by reason, even if it appeared to conflict with some interpretations of the Bible, and he insisted that there could never be two conflicting truths.

In another view of the Manichaean incident, Aquinas (second from right) discusses his insight with a Dominican colleague while a secretary takes notes. The scene is a fifteenth-century tempera on a panel by Niklaus Manuel.

Thomas of Aquino was no stranger to distinguished company. The eighth and youngest son of Count Landulf of Aquino, he was a grandnephew of the emperor Frederick I Barbarossa (see chapter 4) and a cousin of Barbarossa's grandson the emperor Frederick II, known as *Fridericus Stupor Mundi*, "Frederick Wonder of the World" (see chapter 6). The Aquinas family estate was centered on the castle of





Roccasecca (Dry Rock), high above the main road between Naples and Rome, and it followed that the family was deeply involved in politics and war. They had joined Frederick II's army in attacking the nearby Benedictine abbey of Montecassino, which was allied to Frederick's bitter enemy the pope. When one Aquinas brother deserted and joined the papal army, he was put to death on Frederick's orders.

Count Landulf decided early that his youngest son, born about 1225, was unsuited to political or military life. At age five he was large, uncommunicative, placidly acquiescent, and seemingly dull witted. He was naturally pious, however, spontaneously distributing the castle food to local transients and poring for hours over the Bible. Clearly, he was meant to be a monk, so the count enrolled him in Montecassino, the same abbey he had helped the emperor assault. Family influence might someday make him abbot, although it seemed unlikely. His fellow students called him "Dumb Ox Thomas" because he kept asking such stupefyingly dumb questions as "What is God?" And he really wanted to know.

His father abruptly removed him from Montecassino at about age fourteen, fearing that the monastery might become further involved in the wars between pope and emperor, and sent him to study in Naples. Later on, the Aquino family would switch to the papal cause, forcing them to abandon Roccasecca and take refuge in the papal states. But meanwhile came truly devastating news from Naples: Thomas, now nearly twenty, had joined one of the new mendicant orders. That is, he had become a preaching beggar in what many regarded as a religious cult, called the "Dominicans" after their fanatic founder, Dominic (see sidebar, pages 192–193). Eventually, his family was sure, the church would condemn the whole mendicant movement, but at present this exhibition by their youngest son was an unthinkable humiliation. Something, plainly, must be done, said his mother, the countess Theodora.

The quiet joy and fascination Aquinas derived from books is reflected in his eyes and mouth in this portrayal by the fifteenth-century painter Fra Bartolomeo, who himself, like Thomas, became a Dominican.



Much as Aquinas must himself have done, a group of clergy walk beneath the arcade at the Monastery of Monte Cassino. Aquinas was sent there by his father until he was fourteen years old. Fearing the monastery's involvement in the wars between the pope and the emperor, his father removed him from the monastery and sent him to finish his studies at Naples.

According to one account, she herself hurried to Naples. However, the Dominicans, already accustomed to raids by the outraged noble families of young applicants, had dispatched Thomas to Rome. Knowing that two of his soldier-brothers were stationed near his route, the countess urged them to intercept him and bring him home until he recovered his senses. They encountered him on the road and struggled to rip the Dominican habit right off his back, but they couldn't do it; he was so very strong. Peasants used to stop and stare, it was said, when this enormous man passed by. In the words of one of the old records, "They came near to look at him, filled with admiration for a man of such compliance and beauty."

Thomas finally agreed to go home. Wrapped tightly in his shredded habit and riding a donkey, he was escorted to a nearby family castle and locked up. Soon the brothers reappeared with what the old account describes as "a young and pretty damsel, attired in all the blandishments of love." Thomas, furious, seized a brand from the fire, chased the terrified young woman from the room, slammed the door behind her, and used the brand to inscribe a charred cross on it. Then he knelt before it to pray.

This persuaded his brothers that Thomas's chosen vocation, though crazy, must be deeply sincere. They moved him to Roccasecca, where he remained for a year, with his four adoring sisters waiting on him. Countess Theodora, although beginning to yield, still opposed his vocational begging, however. She appealed to both the emperor and the pope to intervene but was thwarted by her daughters (one of whom would later become a nun). In one account, they lowered their gigantic brother by rope from the castle walls so that he could join what their mother saw



Upon discovering that her son had joined the Dominicans, who begged for their subsistence, Aquinas's mother, the Countess Theodora, sent his brothers to intercept him on the road to Rome and bring him back to the family estate, where he could be "brought to his senses." His overzealous brothers attempted to rip his habit off of his back, something that Aquinas, who was very strong, did not allow them to do. He did, however, agree to return home.

In his Temptation of St. Thomas Aquinas the seventeenth-century painter Diego Velázquez depicts angels strengthening him after he has banished “the pretty damsel, attired in all the blandishments of love” with whom his brothers had sought to ensnare him. After he drives the terrified woman from his room, the brothers become convinced that Thomas’s vocation, though crazy, must be deeply sincere.



as his fellow cultists in Rome. But Thomas also remained a devoted family member, cherished by his sisters and loyal to his brothers, and later served efficiently as executor of a family estate. But by then the family had come to see what others saw so readily. Dumb Ox Thomas was an intellectual giant as well as a physical one.

He appears at one of the great turning points in the Christian faith. During most of the early thirteenth century the mention of a single Greek term could arouse either profound respect or deep suspicion in the rapidly proliferating universities of western Europe. That term was “Aristotelian physics.” The work of Aristotle, the greatest philosopher and scientist of the ancient world, who lived in the fourth century before Christ, had been familiar to Greek-speaking eastern Christians from the earliest times, but a Latin version had been available in the West only for the past two centuries. By Thomas’s time most educated people had no trouble at all with Aristotle’s works in logic or ethics. The sticking point was Aristotelian physics because it conflicted with the biblical account of the Creation.

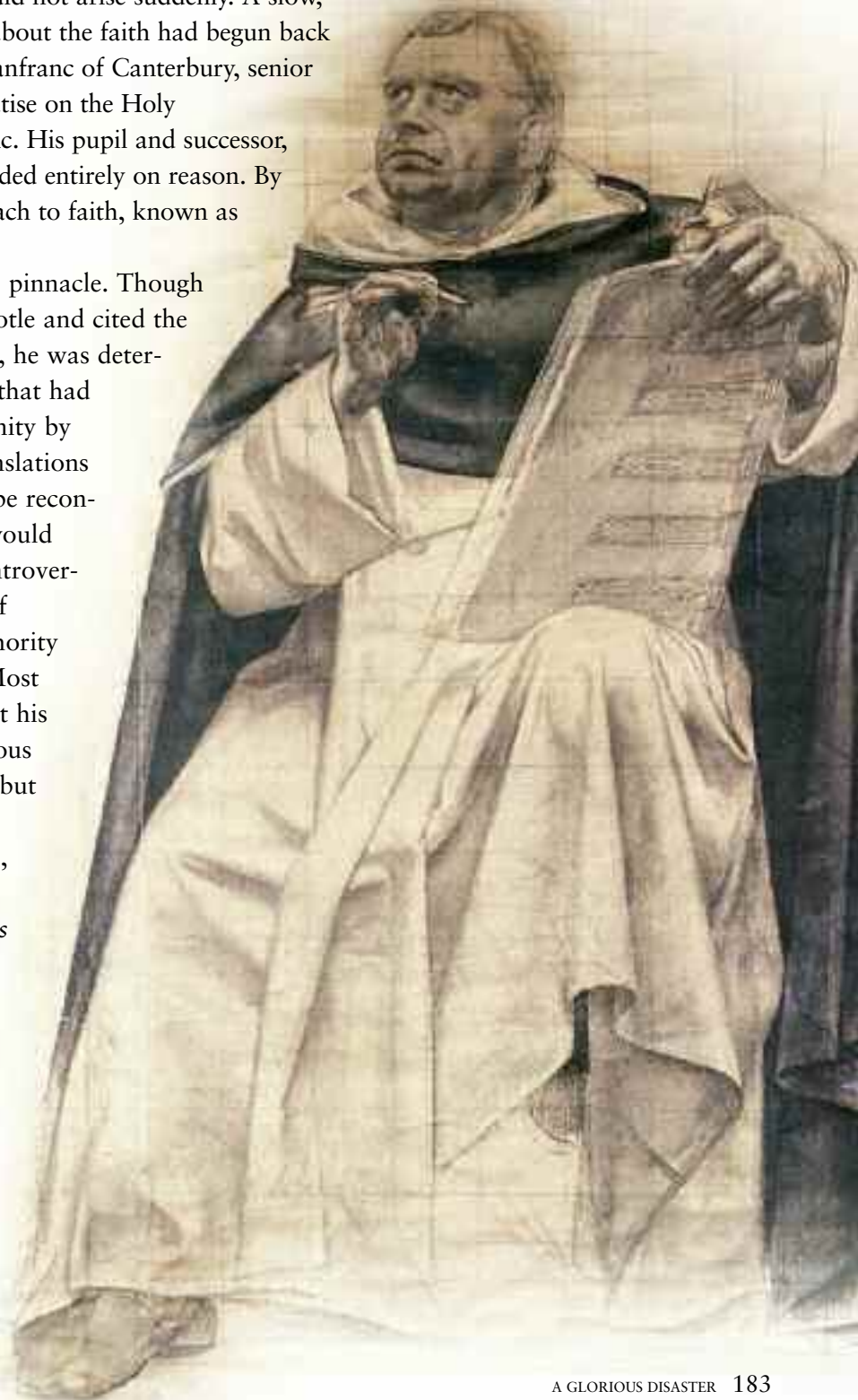
The Christian whose thought piloted western Christianity during all the dark years of semi-barbarism in devastated Europe and then through the long revival of

western civilization was Augustine of Hippo (see volume 4, chapter 5). The Greek influence on Augustine came from Plato, Aristotle's teacher. But Aristotle dwarfed Plato in range and depth, and the Nestorian Christians of Persia had passed on his work to their new Muslim rulers. They, in turn, conveyed it to Muslim scholars in Spain, so when the great libraries of Toledo fell to the Christians in 1085, Aristotle's philosophy, in Arabic, began spreading to western Europe's rising universities. The response to it was overwhelming, if divisive. To some it represented a foreign religious intrusion that in some respects threatened to return Christianity to paganism by supplanting divinely revealed truth, particularly regarding Creation, with supposed "truth" revealed through human reason.

To others, however, both Plato and Aristotle offered a new and powerful approach to Christian truth. This approach did not arise suddenly. A slow, steady growth in more methodical thinking about the faith had begun back in the 1050s with the brilliant Archbishop Lanfranc of Canterbury, senior ecclesiastic in England, whose celebrated treatise on the Holy Communion drew on both the Bible and logic. His pupil and successor, Anselm, wrote a defense of Christianity founded entirely on reason. By Thomas's time a whole new academic approach to faith, known as scholasticism, had been established.

In Thomas scholasticism would reach its pinnacle. Though he cited Augustine more than he cited Aristotle and cited the scriptures more than he cited either of them, he was determined to "baptize" those parts of Aristotle that had been considered incompatible with Christianity by rereading Aristotle in the most accurate translations and by rejecting those parts that could not be reconciled with biblical Christianity. This work would define his life—a life embroiled in bitter controversy. He would be denounced as a purveyor of paganism, threatening the integrity and authority of the Bible, a dabbler in scientific magic. Most irksome to his critics, however, he rarely lost his temper. All accounts describe him as courteous in debate—charming, clear, and unruffled—but so logically devastating that he frequently reduced opponents to helpless rage. Even so, writes his biographer Jean-Pierre Torrell (*Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work*, translated by Robert Royal), it is a mistake to conclude that Thomas was an icy, self-secretive intellectual without zeal or fervor. However dispassionate he was in debate, his writings exhibit vehemence and downright belligerence. They show him as a feisty intellectual scrapper, taking undisguised pleasure in reducing the rival case to absurdity.

Having been freed from the family's Roccasecca castle by his adoring sisters, Thomas joined his fellow Dominicans in Rome, where he began the massive volume of work that he would leave to posterity. He is shown below in a twentieth-century charcoal sketch by Pietro Annigoni.





ONE OF THOMAS'S PRAYERS—VIRTUE
WITHOUT THE ATTENDANT FLAWS

*O Lord my God, make me
submissive without protest, poor
without discouragement, chaste
without regret, patient without
complaint, humble without
posturing, cheerful without
frivolity, mature without gloom,
and quick witted without flippancy.*

Thomas's sharpest and angriest critics were known loosely as "Augustinians." (The term described a school of thought. The Augustinian order of monks, which was then being formed, was not involved in the controversy.) These critics saw Thomas's focus on Aristotle as a movement intended to supplant the teaching of the great Augustine. Although Thomas vigorously denied this, the Augustinian attack on him would go on for nearly fifty years after his death.

As Aristotle's work became better known in the West, its staggering dimensions enthralled a whole generation of Christian students in the mid-thirteenth century, for it embraced philosophy, biology, animal genealogy, astronomy, meteorology, physics, morality, and what today would be called psychology. "We are dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of the ancients as on those of giants," the twelfth-century teacher Bernard of Chartres had declared. "If we see more things than they did, it is not by perspicacity of our view, nor by our size, but because we were elevated by them and brought to a gigantic height."

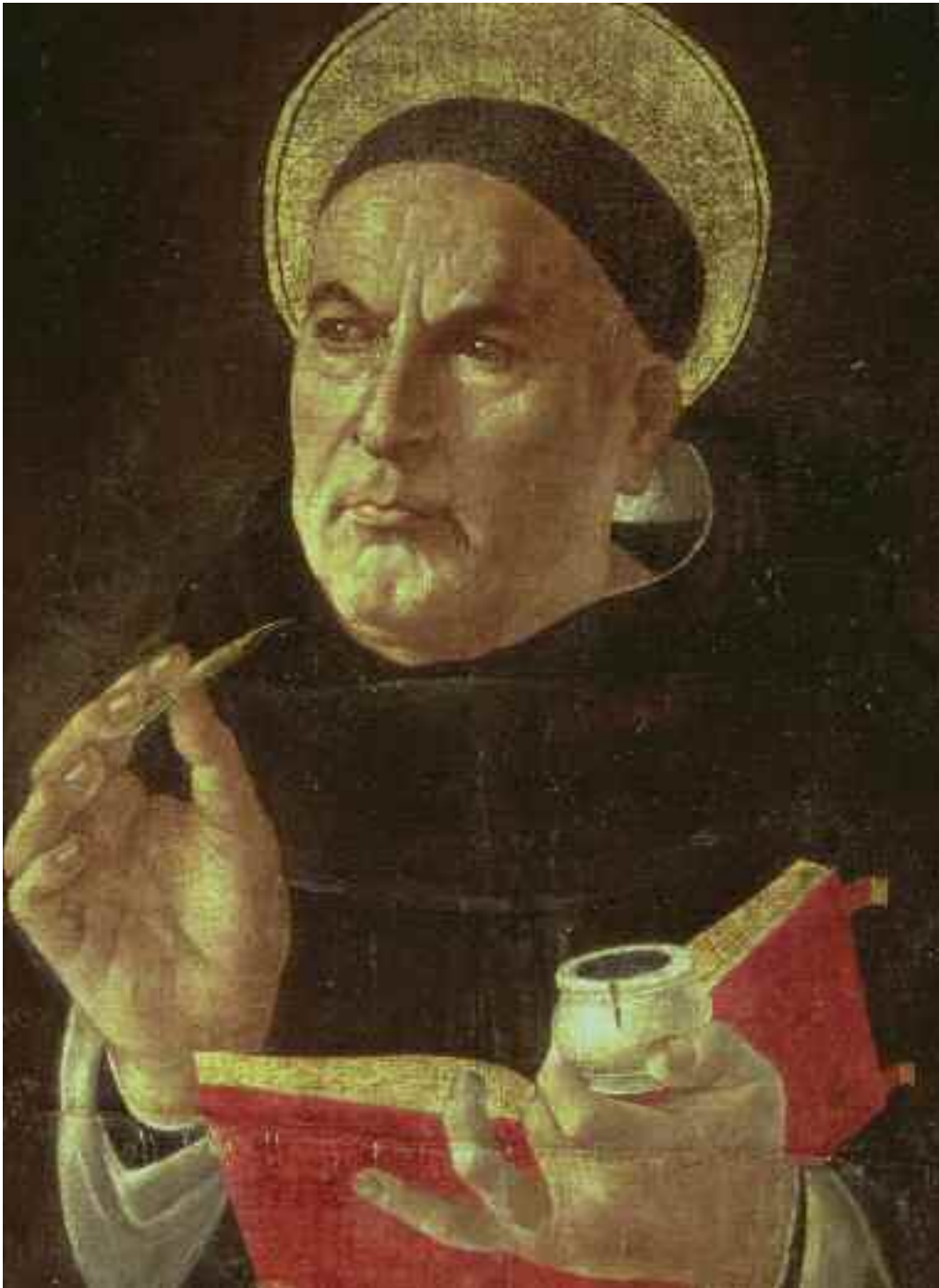
By Aquinas's time, noted the twentieth-century Christian historian and theologian Jacques Maritain, Aristotelian thought had been making "fearful inroads" into Christianity for half a century. "It was not merely that he brought in his train a crowd of Jews and Arabs whose commentaries [on Aristotle] were fraught with danger: the noble treasure of natural wisdom which he imported was full of

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taking overt pleasure in reducing a rival case to ashes.*

pagan poisons, and the mere dazzling glitter of the promises of pure reason was sufficient to bewilder an ingenuous and inquisitive world."

The "pagan poisons" were things like the denial of human free will, the denial of the Creation, and the eternity of matter. As Aristotle's opponents well knew, such Aristotelian assertions were plainly heretical. He taught, for instance, that the world had always existed, the human soul did not survive death, and God has left the world to run itself. To Christians, the universe had a beginning, the individual soul survives death, and God definitely intervenes in the affairs of men. How, they asked, could Christian teaching be grounded in Aristotle?

Thomas countered these objections. Christian teaching must be grounded in revelation, in Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament and in the Hebrew law and prophets, he said. But Aristotle provided a foundation for how to think about these things. Moreover, some things, like the concept of a purely autonomous universe and the denial of the individual soul's survival, he argued, did not come from Aristotle; they had been interpolated into his writings by the Muslim scholar Ibn Rushd, known to the Christians as Averroes, called "the Commentator." As for the contention that there was no "beginning," Aristotle was simply wrong. If the world was to have an end, as Aristotle himself believed, then it must also have had a beginning. But was this sole error adequate grounds for disqualifying the whole rational approach? Was this a reason to deny Christian teachers the boundless potential of reasoned argument in defense of the faith?



Convinced that the Aristotelian approach offered a persuasive new way to convert literate people to Christianity, Thomas (shown at left in a fifteenth-century painting by Sandro Botticelli) had first to refute the Aristotelian interpretation of the Muslim scholar Averroes (pictured above in a statue located in Cordoba, Spain).

The whole Aristotelian approach, Thomas insisted, offered a new and convincing way to present Christianity to literate and thinking people. To Thomas, notes his biographer Ralph McInerny (*Aquinas*), it presented a kind of “clinical specimen” of what the world would look like to a thoughtful man uninfluenced by the Christian religion. This opened a door, as it were, to the non-Christian mind, providing an access for the Gospel.

For Thomas there could be no true conflict between conclusions reached by human reason validly employed and those conveyed by the scriptures and creeds. Reason, like the five human senses, was given to us by God. So were the scriptures. So were the creeds. Just as there could be only one God, not several, there could be only one truth, not several. Therefore, what our senses tell us—what we see, hear, smell, touch, taste, and otherwise observe—unless perverted by sin,



A fifteenth-century portrait by Joos van Gent and P. Berruguete of Albert the Swabian, who would later be known as Albert the Great. Albert taught Thomas in Cologne for several years and was one of the first people to correctly predict that Aquinas's teachings would one day "fill the world."

must be taken as true and real. The world we behold is not merely a transient sensation of the mind, as Plato contended. It is really there.

The twentieth-century Christian essayist and poet G. K. Chesterton saw this assertion of the ultimate credibility of our senses and, therefore, of the reality of nature as Thomas's greatest contribution to the Christian faith. This is how Chesterton paraphrased what Thomas was saying to Aristotle's critics:

I am not ashamed to say that I find my reason fed by my senses; that I owe a great deal of what I think to what I see and smell and taste and handle; and that so far as my reason is concerned, I feel obliged to treat all this reality as real. To be brief, in all humility, I do not believe that God meant man to exercise only that peculiar, uplifted and abstracted sort of intellect which you are so fortunate as to possess: but I believe that there is a middle field of facts, which are given by the senses to be the subject matter of the reason; and that in that field the reason has a right to rule, as the representative of God and man. It is true that all this is lower than the angels; but it is higher than the animals and all the material objects man finds around him. True, man can also be an object; and even a deplorable object. But what man has done man may do; and if an antiquated old heathen called Aristotle can help me to do it, I will thank him in all humility. (*St. Thomas Aquinas*, published posthumously in 1943)

Thomas, concluded Chesterton, was "more of a theologian, more of an orthodox theologian, more of a dogmatist, in having recovered through Aristotle the most defiant of all dogmas, the wedding of God with man and therefore with matter." He had provided, that is, a philosophical rationale for the incarnation of the Word of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Thomas had done something else as well, although probably unintentionally. He had contributed significantly to the philosophical foundation of modern science. If

conclusions reached through empirical observation (i.e., through our senses) could be taken as credible, it followed that thought, discussion, and eventually experimentation with physical nature could be considered a valid exercise for Christian universities. He was encouraged in this line of thought by his first teacher among the Dominicans, who focused particular attention on Aristotle's "natural philosophy," the study of nature, soon to be known as "science."

This man, some twenty years older than Thomas, was Albert the German, who came from Swabia and who taught Thomas for at least three years (and perhaps as many as five) at Cologne. Even within his lifetime Albert would become known as Albertus Magnus (Albert the Great), and the heavy emphasis he laid on “the evidence of the senses,” along with his early experiments with siphons and vacuums, cause some to regard him as a father of modern science. Albert himself saw Thomas as a far greater figure. “You call him a dumb ox,” said Albert. “I tell you this dumb ox shall bellow so loud that his bellowings will fill the world.”

Albert and Thomas were in total agreement, however, about avoiding the “theologization” of natural philosophy because, as Albert wrote,

Anything that is taken on the evidence of the senses is superior to that which is opposed to sense observations; a conclusion which is inconsistent with the evidence of the senses is not to be believed; and a principle that does not accord with the experimental knowledge of the senses is not a principle but rather its opposite. (William A. Wallace, *Causality and Scientific Explanation*)

As Aristotle’s (and Thomas’s) critics pointed out, a dangerous principle was being asserted here. What would happen if human reasoning, now so sanctified, were to be applied to the scriptures and the Christian creeds? If the latter were found to be irrational, which view would prevail?

At the University of Paris,¹ where Thomas taught after he left Cologne, work on “natural philosophy” was at first forbidden. Later it was authorized but only if those studying it stayed away from theology. This was a fortuitous decision, observes Edward Grant in his comprehensive study *God and Reason in the Middle Ages*, since its effect was to liberate the study of natural philosophy (i.e., science) from the vigilance of ecclesiastical critics. The Aristotelian avalanche soon created such a rapidly rising interest in the physical sciences that it would be more true to say that the scientific revolution began in the thirteenth century, not the sixteenth or seventeenth, the centuries usually assigned to it.

By Thomas’s time Europe’s universities were at work on geology, oceanography, meteorology, physics, and mathematics. And yet, notes Grant, medieval scholars were not scientists in the modern sense. They speculated, but they did not experiment. They were absorbed, for instance, by the question of whether anything is ever at rest. Throw a ball up in the air, and it will go up and come down. Is there an instant between its ascent and descent when it is not moving either way? Or watch a sphere rotate. A location on its widest circumference (its “equator”) will travel a considerable distance with each rotation. One close to its “pole” will hardly move at all. The closer you come to the axis, the slower a particular spot on the surface will move. Is there a point, its real axis, which is motionless? All fascinating, but the idea of setting up an experiment and observing actual results hardly ever occurred to them.

This reliance upon reason was by no means confined to the students of natural philosophy. Theology also quickly became rationally focused. “Reason in the university context of the [Middle Ages] was not intended for the acquisition of power over others, or to improve the well-being of the general populace,” writes Grant. “Its primary purpose was to elucidate the natural and supernatural worlds . . . [They became] a society obsessed with reason . . . Nothing like it had ever been seen.

1. The name “Sorbonne,” commonly used to refer to the University of Paris, is derived from the college founded in 1257 by Robert of Sorbon, a significant addition to the University of Paris, which predated the college by roughly a century. Sorbonne College was shut down during the French Revolution, reopened by Napoleon in 1808, and closed for good seventy-four years later. Meanwhile “Sorbonne” became a colloquial term for the entire university.

The costly pride of Peter Abelard

The brilliant prof who dazzled the young meets catastrophe in a tragic love affair; then, amid failures, he resigns the struggle to find peace and, in posterity, fame

Whether Peter Abelard was the most brilliant man of his times or a failed saint or an exhibitionist nuisance, all three views were held by his critics and admirers in the twelfth century, as they would be held by his critics and admirers in all the centuries that followed.

That his life was a tragedy, however—embracing, as it does, a tragic love affair, his repeated failure in monastic life, and the condemnation of his teaching by a church council—has been universally acknowledged. But he died at peace with God and his enemies, it is said, so perhaps his real story, if it ever be known, will not turn out to be a tragedy after all.

It begins at the little village of Palet, near Nantes in Brittany. The eldest son of a minor noble, Abelard early evidenced an extraordinary ability in dialectic (rational argument). He elected an academic career at age fifteen and entered the famed cathedral school of Notre Dame in Paris, where he became so adept at the argumentative put-down that he humiliated the school's leading philosophical authority and was asked to leave. Undiscouraged, he established his own competing school near Paris (first at Melun, then at Corbeil), where he attracted the adulation of the youngest and brightest scholars.

Within a few years he moved his school to the top of Mount Saint Genevieve, today considered more of a hill than a mountain but nevertheless symbolically looking down on the old Notre Dame. (Construction of the present cathedral did not begin for another fifty years.) By now he had switched to theology and was soon besting his own teachers in this field as well. Inevitably, he came down from the mountain in 1115 to head up the theology faculty at the cathedral school.

He was now enormously popular, his lectures attracting huge crowds, and by his own later admission he became vainer, more arrogant, and cordially detested by fellow academics. One fervent admirer, however, was a certain Heloise, niece of Canon Fulbert of the cathedral faculty. She was beautiful and rendered more attractive still, Abelard writes, by her wide knowledge of Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and classical letters. Abelard became her tutor, then her lover.

When she became pregnant, he sent her to Brittany, where their son was born. Then, over Heloise's objections (she did not want to destroy his clerical career) they were secretly married, and to escape the rage of her uncle, she took refuge in a convent.¹ Canon Fulbert, believing Abelard intent on abandoning her, broke into his bedchamber one night with several companions and castrated him, thus barring him from the priesthood and episcopal office. Heloise, at Peter's bidding, then became a nun. Their secret love letters, discovered in the fif-

teenth century, have since become classics.

From there, though he was still idolized by thousands, the path of the brilliant dialectician led irreversibly downward. With his position at the cathedral school already lost, he decided to become a monk at the royal Abbey of St-Denis, where he loftily informed his new colleagues that the St. Denis they revered was actually three different men conflated into one (see page 42). The monks in their fury seized on one of his scholarly papers and charged him with heresy; a provincial synod forced him to burn that paper and transferred him to an abbey at Soissons. But there, too, he took particular delight in teasing the other monks with erudite exposures of their primitive beliefs until, as he perhaps had hoped, they demanded he be sent somewhere else.

Adopting the life of a hermit, Abelard then built himself a cabin of reeds near Nogent-sur-Seine, naming the place the Oratory of the Paraclete (Holy Spirit), and students began flocking from Paris and beyond to hear him teach. However, his enemies, who were many, also discovered his whereabouts, and fearing for his safety, he asked to be sent to another monastery. He accepted the post of abbot in a wild and lawless coastal region of Brittany, where even the monks were undisciplined and uncontrollable.

In one of the rewarding triumphs of his life, however, he was then able to establish a Convent of the Paraclete on the site of his oratory and have Heloise installed as abbess. During those trying years, he also wrote his autobiography, *The Story of My Calamities*, attributing his downfall entirely to his pride. He describes his love life with Heloise in graphic language, but by now their relationship had become like that of a brother and sister.

But Abelard had not yet confronted his greatest challenge. This would be posed by Bernard of Clairvaux, who, though an admirer of Abelard, was persuaded to bring his writings before a church council at Sens and with telling eloquence accused him of teaching "error." Surprisingly, Abelard did not contest the charge but instead appealed to Rome. The council, meanwhile, condemned his writings. En route to Rome to defend his case, Abelard collapsed at the abbey of Cluny, where his friend (and Bernard's) the abbot Peter the Venerable persuaded him to quit fighting and make his peace with God and with Bernard.

This Abelard did. With death close approaching, he was moved for his comfort to the Priory of Chalon-sur-Saone and died there in 1142, at the age of sixty-three. Soon afterward his remains were removed to the Oratory of the Paraclete, where Heloise was buried beside him when she died twenty-one years later.



Abelard and Heloise, two iconic lovers seen together in this nineteenth-century painting by Edmund Blair Leighton. After spending an early life at odds with authority, Abelard surrenders and repents, meanwhile establishing Heloise as abbess of a convent. Their letters, now as between brother and sister, survive. In the century after his death his writings strongly influenced a new generation of Christian scholars.

His influence, notes the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, was far greater in the thirteenth century than it was in his own, the twelfth, when the church's rejection of some of his works and the fierce animosities inspired by the haughty sarcasm of his days of triumph still inhibited support for him. But as the years passed and the young people who thronged to read and hear him became the dominant generation, many came to emulate his approach to theology and philosophy, overlooking the fact that his vast array of scholarly work sometimes "savored" of Arianism, Pelagianism, and Nestorianism. Later admirers would hail him as the "first modern man" and as "founder" of the University of Paris—opinions that should be discounted, says the *Encyclopedia*.

"His intellectual independence and dialectical methods," says the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, "naturally aroused the opposition of authoritarian mystics like St. Bernard. But his influence, through his lectures, was enormous. His success came rather through the brilliance and

freshness with which he handled particular problems than in the propagation of an elaborate system." It concludes cryptically: "His distrust of authority, where it was genuinely traditional, must not be exaggerated."

Perhaps Abelard himself best summed up his position. "I would not be a philosopher," he wrote to Heloise, "if it implies disobedience to Paul. I would not be an Aristotle and separated from Christ. For there is none other name under heaven wherein I must be saved." ■

1. Nothing definite is known of Abelard's son, Astrolabe (named for an astronomical instrument), who, says historian Betty Radice, "played so small a part in his parents' lives." It seems he led a monastic life and eventually had a stipend at a cathedral secured for him by Peter the Venerable after Heloise urged the abbot to assist him.



Thomas became fast friends with the Franciscan Bonaventure, shown above in a sixteenth-century Renaissance painting by Alessandro Bonvicino. The fact that they represented two mendicant orders that would long tend toward rivalry does not appear to have eroded their friendship.

2. The term “secular clergy” originated in the twelfth century to distinguish the priests living in the world and serving parishes from those who belonged to religious orders (called “regular clergy” because they lived by a rule, in Latin “*regula*”). Members of the former were bound only by vows of chastity and could own property but were subject to the authority of their bishops. A “secular” priest took precedence over a “regular” priest of equal rank.

Indeed, reason played a greater role in theology than in the more secular subjects. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it was viewed as a tool to reinforce faith. Not until the seventeenth century was it adopted as a weapon to attack faith.”

The “schoolmen,” as scholasticism’s practitioners came to be called, ferociously applied the laws of logic to debate such questions as the proofs for the existence of God, the implications of man’s fall from grace, the inevitability of human sin, the atonement, the factor of “personhood” in the Trinity, and the value of faith as against good works. What was the nature of the Eucharist, or Lord’s Supper? Could the saints answer prayer? What was the role of the Virgin Mary in salvation? In the eighteenth century, Grant observes, when reason was invoked to discredit faith, such unbelievers became known as “rationalists,” but if reliance on reason denotes a rationalist, “then you could equally say that Thomas Aquinas was a rationalist.”

Thomas did not much engage in natural philosophy, however. “What is God?” he had asked as a child, and he spent most of his life providing an answer. And however skilled as a controversialist, he was primarily a writer and teacher. Torrell calculates that he produced 4,061 handwritten pages of work at Paris between October 1268 and April 1272, the equivalent of nearly thirteen close-typed pages daily. This included massive work on his primary project, a summation of Christian teaching known as the *Summa Theologica* (still being drawn on by Catholic thinkers in the third Christian millennium as one of the credible sources of church teaching), plus 331 other articles. A twentieth-century study of Thomas’s thinking by the German philosopher Martin Grabmann (*Thomas Aquinas: His Personality and Thought*, translated by Virgil Michel) assessing the whole corpus of Thomas’s work counts twenty-two “philosophical writings,” three major works “chiefly theological,” thirteen books on various theological questions, twelve on “points of dogma,” three on apologetics, six on “practical theology,” eleven on “religious life,” and ten scriptural commentaries.

He reputedly began each day before dawn by saying one Mass and hearing another, then worked straight through to the service of compline, around nine in the evening. He is said to have toiled on as many as five projects at a time, dictating to as many secretaries. He began each undertaking with a prayer and when confronted with an intractable problem would drop to his knees and seek divine help. His abstractions were legendary. His meals were brought to him, but he seemed scarcely conscious that he was eating them. His dress was slovenly, and caustic remarks about his appearance amused him. Comments on his great girth he found extremely funny, especially references to the crescent-shaped cut that had to be made in his desk to accommodate his stomach. Though he could deal with the most abstruse questions of Christian theology, he repeatedly warned future teachers to “keep it simple” and strove mightily to do so himself. He endeared himself to many; Albertus Magnus reportedly missed him so much after Thomas moved to Paris that he would weep at the mention of his name.

Thomas’s skill as a debater could extend well beyond theology and philosophy into church politics. In 1229, when Thomas was about four, the mendicant orders, the Dominicans and Franciscans, had set up schools at the University of Paris. Their welcome had been anything but hospitable. The students and secular clergy² teaching at the university had rioted; several students had been killed in the resulting

crackdown, and the students had just gone on strike to protest such heavy-handedness. So the mendicants had unexpectedly found themselves cast in the role of strikebreakers. The resulting conflict would rage for the next thirty years, sometimes violently, with the friars occasionally beaten up on the streets or teaching under armed guard. Thomas arrived from Cologne in 1252. He was chosen at the unusually young age of thirty to deliver the inaugural lecture two years later, at a time when another student-faculty strike had been called to protest the mendicants' getting too many appointments. Thomas delivered the lecture while the king's archers protected the building and a student mob blocked many from hearing him.

So persistent was the mendicant-secular conflict that Rome repeatedly intervened to make peace, one pope deciding for the seculars, his successor for the mendicants. Finally, a formal hearing was called. The mendicants had two advocates: Thomas represented the Dominicans while John of Fidanza became the Franciscan representative. John was another distinguished academic, one day to be canonized as St. Bonaventure. (Though divided on a number of theological issues, the two would become fast friends.) The seculars were represented by the fevered William of Saint-Amour, described by one of the twentieth century's senior historians of this affair as "irascible, violent and obstinate" (Marie-Michel Dufeil, *William of Saint-Amour and the University of Paris Polemic, 1250–1259*).

Many major background issues were involved. First, it was widely believed that monks should remain in monasteries, not wander about preaching and begging. Second, it was argued that Christians living in community should hold all property in common as in the apostolic age (Acts 4:32). The mendicants, having no property, could not do so. Third, the rule of Benedict, which had established the basic requirements for monastic life seven hundred years earlier, required that monks *work*, and begging didn't qualify. Therefore, it was argued, these mendicants should be dispatched into monasteries, put to work, and ordered to stay there.



Thomas was not the dispassionate and humorless scholar that his writings portray. He seemed to find his great girth comical, for instance. This was especially true of his custom-made desk with a crescent-shaped cut in it to accommodate his paunch so that he could bring his arms close enough to write. When anyone would mention this, he would laugh uproariously.

Born of the battle they lost

Dominic's Order of Preachers failed to convert by preaching the Cathar heretics, but the letters OP would follow the names of distinguished Christians to this day

With a sparkling academic record, disciplined habits, a stubborn but generous nature, a strong faith, and a proven ability to resolve intractable problems, Dominic de Guzman Garces had every reason to be confident about his mission in the south of France in 1206. Yet nothing, it seems, could have adequately prepared this accomplished and dedicated man for what he would find there. For the first time in his life, he would suffer a major defeat.

He was sent to Toulouse to thwart the seemingly irresistible advance of the Cathar heresy. The challenge was not to persecute the *Cathari* but to restore them to the Christian fold. A contingent of Cistercian teachers sent by Pope Innocent III to do so was failing miserably and wanted to leave. The regular clergy of Toulouse, accustomed to soft living and unable to match the zeal and magnetism of their chief heretical adversary, the abstemious and energetic Cathars, could make no gains either. "Our watchdogs," Innocent bitterly commented, "have lost their bark."

Dominic soon concluded that the Cathars could only be reached intellectually. They specialized in what they advanced as reasoned theology. In argument they could triumphantly make fools of any Christian adversaries they encountered. This, along with their austere and outwardly holy lives, was winning them converts everywhere. What was needed, Dominic reasoned, was a team of men grounded theologically, convincing rhetorically, and sharp in argument but living lives every bit as abstemious as those of the Cathars.

So he went among them, not as a well-fed missionary from the affluent church, nor as a polished academic from one of the respected universities, but as a beggar. The scorn they poured on the clergy couldn't be applied to him. He had nothing. But neither, he found, could he convince them. For two years he tried, and but for a few converts he failed. His failure was wholly underlined in 1209 when the pope declared a holy crusade against the Cathars (see sidebar, pages 230–233).

However, in one other respect he succeeded magnificently. Perhaps even to his own astonishment, others began joining him, most of them men of high intellectual capability. They agreed with and shared in his commitment to total poverty. They begged and they studied and they honed their skill with words, and they became known as the "Dominicans," after Dominic de Guzman Garces.

The de Guzmans were an unusually devout family. Dominic's mother, Juana, was said to have dreamed before his birth of a dog carrying a torch that set fire to the world.¹ Juana would be beatified, as would Dominic's elder brother, renowned as a savior of souls; another brother was much admired for his work among the poor. But it was Dominic himself, the

youngest, who would leave the strongest imprint on Christian history, and this began when he was sent to Toulouse to contend with the Cathars.

Dominic had certainly heard about these people (variously known in France as the Albigensians, in Italy as the Patarini, and in eastern Europe as the Bogomils) and about their extreme dualistic beliefs and their penchant for suicide and, occasionally, murder or assassination. Still, nothing in his background had particularly fitted him to deal with them. The Cathars reveled in theological argument, for example, whereas Dominic had never considered himself a theologian, having dropped out of the University of Palencia for a time when famine struck that city. He could not stand idly by while famished parents watched their children starve, he protested; he sold all his possessions, even his precious book collection, to help them. "Would you have had me study off these dead skins," he would demand, flipping through the parchment pages of a book, "when men are dying of hunger?"

Neither, for that matter, would his subsequent work at Osma, near Spain's northeast corner, seem of much application. Before he was twenty-five Dominic had been summoned there by its bishop to reform the priests of the cathedral chapter, who had become corrupt, unproductive, and lazy, and he succeeded well enough to become superior of the chapter. But how would these experiences help him deal with the quick-tongued, sharp-witted Cathari? They were not starving, and, heaven knows, not lazy. In fact, they were bursting with energy. That, indeed, was part of the problem.

An insurmountable problem, as he and his Dominicans found, and they discovered something else. They found that they could not define the purpose of their growing community as one of refutation. They could not become specialists in disproof, denial, contravention, and contradiction. They could not build on negatives. They must focus on what's true rather than what's false. They had their own message to deliver. In short, they must advance the Gospel of Christ; they must preach the Word. They must become an order of preachers. And when in 1216 they took their case to be recognized as an order to Pope Honorius III, that is what he called them. They became *Ordo Praedicatorum*, the Order of Preachers.² And who taught them to preach? Jesus Christ, they would say, Jesus Christ and the Cathars.

Over the ensuing centuries, tens of thousands of men all over the world would carry the letters OP after their names, signifying that they were Dominicans, successors in the work of Dominic de Guzman Garces. Pope Honorius offered them Rome's Church of St. Sixtus as a home base, and before long preachers in the Dominican order, living as beggars and known as friars—as distinct from monks—had

spread through western Europe, expounding the Gospel and establishing schools. The black robe they wore over their white habit made them known as the “Blackfriars,” the name of their college at Oxford.

They also began serving in senior ecclesiastical positions; within a century 450 Dominicans had been appointed to the high offices of the Church, a total that included two popes and some dozen cardinals. Furthermore, the two most brilliant medieval scholars—Thomas Aquinas and Albert Magnus (see foregoing chapter)—both carried the letters OP after their names, as did Meister Eckhart of Hochheim, known widely as the father of German mysticism.

Dominican literary output included theological treatises, biblical translation, poetry, and the largest medieval encyclopedia, while artistic Dominicans exerted a profound influence on late medieval painting and on the development of Gothic architecture. Finally, they also served the monarchies of Europe as confessors, advisers, and ambassadors, often negotiating treaties between hostile Christian nations.

Especially in view of their origins as combatants against heresy, they inevitably played a role in the medieval Inquisition. Indeed, Dominic’s later critics would accuse him of launching it, but Henry Charles Lea in his *History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages* asserts that this is not true. Though Dominic might “stand by the pyre” to see a stubborn heretic burned, it was not until more than ten years after his death in 1221 that such an institution as the papal Inquisition can be said to have existed. Even so, counters the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, there can be little doubt that inquisitors were disproportionately drawn from the Dominican order.

By the fifteenth century there was a world of Dominicans to draw from—Persian Dominicans, Dominicans in Africa, Dominicans on the Indian subcontinent. The friars would be somewhat eclipsed in the dazzling light of the Renaissance but would recov-

er with the discovery of the New World; in the seventeenth century their numbers would peak and their missions reach from Japan to Cuba. The order would decline once again during the anti-Christian violence of the French Revolution, then revive to produce a nineteenth-century Dominican renaissance that would do much to restore Christianity in continental Europe.

In short, like all genuinely Christian initiatives, and indeed like Christianity itself, Dominican vigor rises and wanes. So, too, does their love-hate relationship with their nearest Christian cousins, the Franciscans, the other order of friars founded in the same era and likewise mendicant servants of Christ (see chapter 10). Though Francis and Dominic saw eye to eye, often their disciples have not, and their chronic feuds have been far from edifying. “Too many obvious grounds for jealousy” observes historian R. F. Bennett (*The Early Dominicans*). “Nothing could prevent petty irritation and minor feuds in the lower ranks.”

Still, the Dominicans continue their original mission as effective preachers who, in obedience to their rule, must “go forth and behave everywhere as men seeking their own salvation and that of their neighbors, in all perfection and with a truly religious spirit, as evangelical men, that is, men following in the footsteps of their Savior.” ■

1. The word “Dominicans” later became a Latin pun—*Domini canes*, “dogs of the Lord”—which also took into account the dream of Dominic’s mother. This metaphorical dog arguably did set his world on fire in a real sense.

2. More than a decade before Pope Honorius officially recognized the Order of Preachers, Dominic had already begun establishing the Dominican Sisters. The Monastery of Prouille, in the Diocese of Toulouse, was founded for the women whom he and the other missionaries converted from heresy. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Dominic used this establishment as “the center of union of his missions and of his apostolic works.” The ascetic life of the sisters is the same as that of the friars. They celebrated their eight hundredth anniversary in 2006.



Pope Honorius III approving the rule of the Dominican order in 1216, as envisioned by Leandro Bassano in the sixteenth century. These men, whose name later became a pun—*Domini canes*, or “God’s dogs”—would be used widely by the popes to fight heresy. Though skilled in logic and debate, their forte lay in their eloquence, and therefore they still carry the designation OP, for *Ordo Praedicatorum* (Order of Preachers), behind their names.



THOMAS ON MAN'S THREE NECESSITIES FOR SALVATION:

Three things are necessary for the salvation of man: to know what he ought to believe, to know what he ought to desire, and to know what he ought to do.

Deftly, gently, and devastatingly, Thomas tore William's case to shreds so thoroughly that the pope vindicated the mendicants and asked King Louis IX to banish William and his three chief supporters from France. Louis declined, perhaps considering such a penalty too severe. Later, however, William published a paper portraying the mendicants as the false preachers who would appear before the coming of the Antichrist (1 John 2:18). When the church condemned this document, Louis relented, and William departed from France.

Thomas's next confrontation was even more formidable, as was the challenger. The Englishman John Peckham, regent of the Franciscans in Paris and a future archbishop of Canterbury, destined to work sweeping reforms within the church in England, was probably the most vigorous foe Thomas ever faced. The issue was now Aristotle. Should study of his work be banned in Christian universities? Many thought so; indeed, it seemed at one point that nearly everybody thought so. Thomas found himself heatedly opposed by the Augustinians, many Dominicans, most Franciscans, the bishop of Paris, and nearly all the masters at the University of Paris. Peckham, arguing that Thomas's work should be condemned as heretical and burned, castigated him personally in a long and violent harangue. Thomas responded courteously and logically, thus further enraging Peckham. The issue finally came before a church court presided over by the firmly anti-Aristotelian bishop of Paris, where all hope for Thomas must have seemed lost. Chesterton describes what happened:

The prospects of any Aristotelian culture in Christendom looked very dark indeed. Anathema after anathema was thundered from high places; and under the shadow of the persecution, as so often happens, it seemed for a moment that barely one or two figures stood alone in the storm-swept area. They were both in the black and white of the Dominicans; for Albertus and Aquinas stood firm.

In that sort of combat there is always confusion; and majorities change into minorities and back again, as if by magic. It is always difficult to date the turn of a tide, which seems to be a welter of eddies; the very dates seeming to overlap and confuse the crisis. But the change, from the moment when the two Dominicans stood alone to the moment when the whole Church at last wheeled into line with them, may perhaps be found when they were practically brought before a hostile but a not unjust judge.

Stephen Tempier, the Bishop of Paris, was apparently a rather fine specimen of the old fanatical churchman, who thought that admiring Aristotle was a weakness likely to be followed by adoring Apollo. He was also, by a piece of bad luck, one of the old conservatives who intensely resented the popular revolution of the Preaching Friars. But he was an honest man; and Thomas Aquinas never asked for anything but permission to address honest men.

It would seem that the triumph of Thomas was really a personal triumph. He withdrew not a single one of his propositions; though the reactionary bishop did condemn some of them after his death. On the whole, we may say that [with the Tempier decision] the great Greek philosopher entered finally into the system of Christendom. The process has half humorously been described as the Baptism of Aristotle.

3. In his biography *Saint Thomas Aquinas* historian Jean-Pierre Torrell vigorously defends Siger of Brabant. Thomas's ideas of what the Averroists were saying came, he said, not from Siger, nor from Averroes's own writings, but from the attacks on them being made by anti-Aristotelians at the University of Paris. Averroism, in other words, was a theology invented by its detractors. Siger was not an Averroist at all, says Torrell. Indeed, he had read Thomas's works assiduously and as he grew older became a dedicated Thomist.

4. Despite Thomas's best efforts, missionaries to Muslims, both Protestant and Catholic, report that reasoned argument and rational presentations rarely persuade Muslims of Christian truth. They are far more likely to be impressed by the spirit of Christ they see reflected in the lives of the missionaries and other Christians.

But Thomas's wars were not yet over. He had one more to fight, one he did not expect. As noted above, the versions of Aristotle reaching western Christendom in the thirteenth century came largely from Muslim Spain in the form of commentaries by Averroes. Indeed, many Aristotelians at Paris called themselves "Averroists." Their chief spokesman, Siger of Brabant, now hailed Thomas's victory as a victory for Averroism and triumphantly produced a paper to this effect. Thomas was appalled. Fundamental to his defense of Aristotle was his insistence that Averroism was a perversion of what Aristotle actually taught. His enemies had warned that if Aristotle were approved, the Averroists would claim their beliefs ratified. Now it was happening.

Armed with new translations of Aristotle by one of his fellow Dominicans, Thomas produced a refutation of what he established as the two chief errors of Averroism. The first error was that reason is a collective entity shared by the soul of mankind as a species. No, Thomas contended, there is no collective human soul; each of us has his own and through it is endowed individually with the power to think, to know right from wrong, and—up to a point, anyhow—to exercise a free will. The second Averroist error concerned him even more, namely the claim that there could be two kinds of truth, that a man could believe one thing theologically yet base his daily life on something quite incompatible with it. Philosopher McNerny sums up Thomas's objection to this idea in twenty words: "It would be impious to suggest that God presents for our acceptance as true something we know to be false." The bishop of Paris again came down on Thomas's side. The Averroist propositions were condemned.³

There yet remained another adversary, one that Christians had been opposing for six centuries: Islam. For more than 175 years men had been dying in the Crusades to reverse its spread. But even if such offensives succeeded, which by the year 1259 was looking less and less likely, what would really be accomplished? Although stopping the Muslims might be necessary, the clear Christian duty was not to kill them but to bring them to Christ. So Thomas produced his second-greatest work, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, a manual for missionaries to Islamic peoples.⁴

His masterpiece remained uncompleted, however. He knew that Aristotle and Aristotelian methods could be an effective new means of preaching and teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ but would first require a whole new presentation of what Christians believe. This was the role of the *Summa Theologica* (properly the *Summa Theologiae*, though the other title is popularly used). By the 1270s two of its three parts were finished. The first is a reasoned explication of the essential



The Triumph of St. Thomas Aquinas, by fifteenth-century artist Benozzo Gozzoli. The uppermost inscription ascribes a quotation to Christ that translates, "You have written well about me, Thomas." Aquinas himself is shown seated, holding his works, between the philosophers Aristotle and Plato, while the Muslim scholar Averroes lies beaten at his feet. The image along the bottom appears to be a discussion of scripture at a church council.



A page from an original copy of Thomas's Summa Theologica, his life's work. These tomes were so all encompassing that centuries later they would still be used as one of the fundamental bases for Catholic theological teaching throughout the world.

concepts of Christian belief based on scripture: the unity of God, the Holy Trinity, the creation of the universe, the distinction between good and evil, angels, the dual nature of man (physical and spiritual), and the laws that make it possible for men to live with one another. The second deals with Christian morality: God's plan for man, how what we believe and do determines our destiny, our passions and habits, the law, and the grace of God. It then focuses on the seven Christian virtues: fortitude, justice, temperance, prudence, faith, hope, and love (see subchapter, page 202). The third part, opening with the Incarnation, Thomas had to leave unfinished.⁵

He had labored on the *Summa* at all the schools to which the Dominicans assigned him—at Paris, Rome, Orvieto in Italy, back to Rome, and then back to Paris. He traveled frequently (some nine thousand miles, Torrell estimates), nearly all of it on foot. In 1272 he returned for a further term at Naples, and there, in December 1273, he underwent a profound transformation that shocked everyone who knew him and has puzzled historians ever since. It seems to have occurred

when he was celebrating Mass in the Chapel of St. Nicholas. The closest friend of his later years, the Dominican Reginald of Piperno, noticed the change immediately and asked him what happened. "I cannot do any more," was Thomas's inexplicable reply. He began disposing of his writing materials, and again Reginald, now "stupefied," asked him why. "I cannot do any more," Thomas repeated. "Everything I have written seems to me as straw in comparison to what I have seen."

His strength, hitherto so robust, now rapidly failed. He was taken to the home of his sister the countess Theodora, near Naples, but when summoned to a church council at Lyon, where Pope Gregory X was seeking reunion with the Orthodox Church, Thomas responded. Now frail and faltering, he tripped and fell on the road but assured his companions that he was fine.

As they passed Montecassino, the monastery of his childhood, the abbot asked him to visit and help resolve a problem the monks there were pondering. Thomas agreed even to this, though it meant a steep six-mile detour. He heard their question and noted down the answer—the last thing he would ever write.⁶ Laboring onward, he stopped at the Benedictine Abbey of Fossanova, where he lay for several weeks, becoming gradually weaker. On March 4 or 5, 1274, Reginald heard his final confession. It was, he wrote, “like the confession of a five-year-old child.” Three days later Thomas of Aquino died.

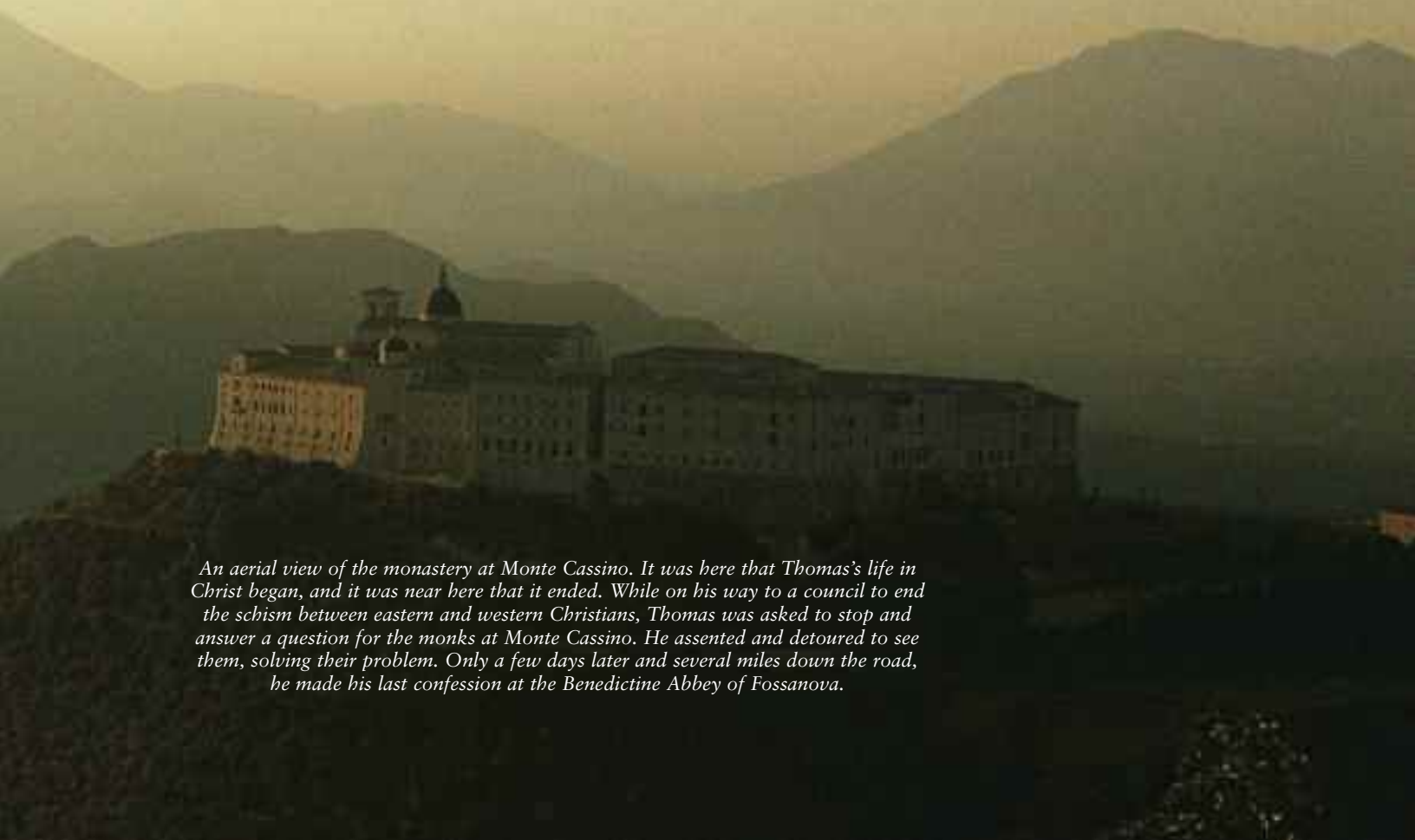
Death did not resolve the controversies that swirled around him. By then Frederick II also had died (some twenty years before), and the church, turning to the French as a relief from the Germans, had placed its confidence in Charles of Anjou. For the Aquino family, already refugees in the papal states, this was not good news. When Charles chased them out of there, they claimed that their celebrated son, Thomas, had actually been murdered by imperial agents. This allegation long persisted, affirmed by Dante Alighieri, preeminent poet of the late Middle Ages who was eight years old when Thomas died. Twentieth-century historians, says Torrell, give it no credence whatsoever.

Much more interesting is the question surrounding Thomas’s strange transformation of December 1273. Did a mystical experience occur at that Mass? Did his long habit of abstraction turn into anorexia, so that in effect he was starving himself to death? Was it a cerebral stroke? Was it a physical and mental breakdown from overwork? “We must have the honesty to recognize that none of these explanations seems convincing,” Torrell concludes, adding that if he had to choose, nervous exhaustion coupled with a mystical experience seems most plausible.

Where Thomas Aquinas should be buried remained controversial for centuries. The monks of Fossanova first buried him near their main altar. Then, lest Dominicans demand the body or relic-seeking grave robbers steal it, they secreted it within their cloister. When a monk particularly friendly to Thomas said he had

5. Thomas did not live long enough to complete the *Summa*. The third part was finished for him by his Dominican successors. It deals with the Incarnation, the sacraments, and the Resurrection.

6. The monks’ problem was one that has dogged Christians down through the ages: How can a man sin unless his will is free? But if God already knows the future, how can man’s will be free? Thomas’s answer, recorded in the margin of a text by Reginald, in effect points out that all time is spread out before God. He is outside time, so all is (so to speak) the present with him. In one glance he sees what you are doing now, what you did twenty years ago, and what you will be doing twenty years from now. Yet at every point on that time line, your will is free, just as it is right now.



An aerial view of the monastery at Monte Cassino. It was here that Thomas’s life in Christ began, and it was near here that it ended. While on his way to a council to end the schism between eastern and western Christians, Thomas was asked to stop and answer a question for the monks at Monte Cassino. He assented and detoured to see them, solving their problem. Only a few days later and several miles down the road, he made his last confession at the Benedictine Abbey of Fossanova.



The room at Fossanova where Aquinas died has been turned into a chapel and has become such a popular place of pilgrimage that the adjoining room has been enlarged to accommodate the steady influx of pilgrims. This bas-relief, situated above the altar, envisions Thomas's deathbed. His last confession, said the priest-friend who heard it, was like that of a little child.

7. This hasty decision by Pope John XXI has been subject to question and criticism ever since. Torrell lists eight twentieth-century historians who have “returned to it to evaluate its bearing and consequences.”

appeared to him in a dream, they moved him back to the main altar. Ninety-five years later, despite urgent pleas from the University of Paris, the Dominicans prevailed after all, and Thomas's remains were moved to their church at Toulouse. In 1791, during the turmoil of the French Revolution, they were transferred to the Basilica of St. Sernin, where they remained until 1974, when they were returned to the Church of the Jacobins in Toulouse.

The fiercest fight of all, however, broke out within weeks of his death between the old Augustinian conservatives in the theology faculty and the new Aristotelians in the arts faculty. In this collision of extremists, both sides were notably anti-Thomas. The theology faculty objected to him as too Aristotelian, the arts faculty because he wasn't Aristotelian (meaning Averroist) enough. Finally, the new pope, John XXI, asked the elderly archbishop of Paris, the same man who had favored Thomas back in 1270, to adjudicate. This time Stephen

Tempier went the other way. It took him less than a month to conclude that 219 propositions favored by Aquinas should be condemned.

The pope acquiesced and urged the archbishop to “cleanse” the arts faculty.⁷ While the Augustinians joyously noted that a great many of these men had been taught by Thomas, his old enemies eagerly moved in for the kill, the Franciscan John Peckham pressing to have the condemnation of Aquinas made specific. This controversy is usually portrayed as a battle between the two mendicant orders, but some notable Dominicans were actively anti-Thomas, prominent among them Robert Kilwardby, the archbishop of Canterbury, and others in the order's Oxford chapter. Most Dominicans soon rose to Thomas's defense, however. The Oxford chapter came under severe criticism from the rest of the order, and with the new century, the fourteenth, the attacks on him waned. On July 18, 1323, he was canonized as St. Thomas Aquinas, and in 1568 Pope St. Pius V named him a doctor of the church, Catholicism's highest theological distinction.

Even so, he remained a storm center. After his death scholasticism swiftly began to atrophy and broke into competitive factions. The Franciscans came to be represented by Duns Scotus and, from the mid-fourteenth century, by the nom-

inalist William of Ockham. The Dominicans were divided into Albertists and Thomists, though Albert and Thomas had never been divided. Thomism itself, now squarely backed by the church, became a closed system, shutting out new ideas and always answering challenging questions with pat quotations from the *Summa*. “Those who followed his methods degenerated with a great rapidity,” writes Chesterton (though not all Catholic historians would agree with him). “Of some scholastics we can only say that they took everything that was worst in

The foundations for science are laid

By insisting that all truth must be one, Thomas paved the way for scientific advance

Professor X teaches biology at a top-ranked American university and worships devoutly at a local church. How does he reconcile his scientific beliefs with his religious ones? “Very simply,” he would explain. “Scientific truths are one thing, Christian truths quite different things.” Yet Thomas Aquinas would say that Professor X is wrong. There cannot be two truths, he insisted, but only one—though finite human minds can never knit that infinite truth into a single formula.

Professor X is fictitious, but his position—that there is more than one kind of truth—is not fictitious at all. It has been held by many Christians, not all of them scientists. However, in the thirteenth century Christians found themselves particularly divided, with some advocating a distinction between scientific truth and religious truth, others holding that only divine revelation can disclose what’s true. Thomas offered a way of resolving the controversy. He united what we can learn from thought (i.e., reason) with what God has revealed to us directly (i.e., revelation). But they must both be considered truth, he said, because there can be only one truth.

It wasn’t a popular answer. Both sides accused him of compromise, but it gradually became the accepted view, and thus the Christians set the stage for a truly progressive, modern science. But neither was it an altogether new answer. As far back as the sixth century the Christian philosopher Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius had insisted, “*Fidem rationemque coniunge*”—“Join faith and reason.”

Yet even in Boethius’s day, it had been a departure from the human norm. Nearly all civilizations have implicitly divided themselves into “two truths”—with the learned holding an elite philosophy and everyone else a folk myth. But Christians have tended to resist this division. If God created the material world and nature “proclaims his glory,” they say, then Christianity should nurture science. While physical science must progress by its own rules, they regard dogmatically atheistic science as unscientific. It has moved out of the scientific field into the theological to voice a plainly unscientific antagonism toward faith.

What raised the issue in the thirteenth century was the rediscovery in the West of Aristotle’s “natural philosophy.” In the fourth century BC, the great philosopher had developed a philosophy of nature, based on the

reproduction of species: trees reproducing trees, dogs reproducing dogs, and rational human beings reproducing rational humans. All these, he said, expressed the “*logos*,” or “reason,” of nature. This eternal *logos* of the material world, he concluded, requires that there exist an eternal Mind, or Divine Reason. Though not the loving Creator of later Christian revelation, here lay that which was ultimately responsible for the order, beauty, and permanence of nature.

However, Aristotle’s teaching reached the West via Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd—Latinized into “Averroes”—who had died about a quarter century before Thomas was born. To Averroes, divine revelation was merely a poetic popularization of natural reason. True human bliss lay in philosophic contemplation, but this was reserved for the wise. The populace needs myths like personal immortality, heaven, and hell to make them live moral lives in decent societies. So religion is simply the poetic expression of abstract philosophic truths. Theologians must learn from philosophers the truths of nature and translate them into divine myths—but otherwise leave philosophers alone in their contemplation.

When western followers of Averroes made the same claims for natural science within Christendom, the knee-jerk reaction of many Christians was to ban Aristotle altogether. After all, had not the great Augustine himself stressed the total dependence of creation on its Creator? But Thomas realized that God has granted creation a qualified independence, governed by natural laws and discoverable by natural reason. He saw that when focused within the limits of nature, Aristotle’s natural philosophy could become a most useful tool.

Even so, many theologians resisted Thomas’s effort to “baptize” Aristotle, lest science come to erode the authority of revelation. To them, it didn’t matter what a man thinks about creation, so long as he has the correct opinion about God. But Thomas objected. An error about creation ends as false thinking about God, he maintained, because there can only be one truth. Eventually, his teaching prevailed and Thomas thus endowed western civilization with a solid faith in the intelligibility and benignity of the natural order, the cultural precondition out of which natural science arose in the western world. ■



Even death could not keep the tireless Thomas Aquinas from traveling. Originally interred in an unornamented tomb at Fossanova's abbey church, his relics were shipped to Toulouse on the orders of Pope Urban V in 1368. There they were placed in the Dominican Church of the Jacobins, which crosses the background, its three spires at the right of the picture. The violence of the French Revolution necessitated another move, this one to Toulouse's Basilica of St. Sernin, whose spire can be seen in the foreground. In 1974, the seventh centenary of his death, Thomas was returned to the Jacobin church, where he remains.

8. Twentieth-century historian Michael Root notes that Luther later came to give “grudging” recognition to Thomas, and some later Lutherans, in fact, became Thomists. The turning point came in the early seventeenth century, says Root, when Johann Gerhard, “the greatest of the Lutheran scholastics,” often quoted Thomas to clarify or illustrate a point (*Aquinas in Dialogue: Thomas for the Twenty-First Century*).

scholasticism and made it even worse. They continued to count the steps of logic, but every step took them farther from common sense. They forgot how Thomas had started almost as an agnostic, and they seemed resolved to have nothing in heaven or earth about which anybody could be agnostic. They were sort of rabid rationalists who would have left no mysteries in the faith at all.”

By the Renaissance, scholasticism was widely viewed as an entrenched establishment that in the name of reason forbade most reasoned argument. The sixteenth-century humanist Desiderius Erasmus, an unabashed foe of scholasticism, vented fury upon it: “They set up as the world’s censors,” he stormed. “They demand recantation of anything that doesn’t exactly square with their conclusions . . . As a result, neither Paul, Peter, St. Jerome, Augustine, or even Thomas, the greatest of the Aristotelians, can make a man Christian unless these learned bachelors have given their approval.” Meanwhile, one Augustinian monk focused his attention not on the scholasticism but on Thomas himself, castigating him as “the fountain and foundation of all heresy, error and obliteration of the Gospel.” That monk was Martin Luther, though in later life he softened his opinion.⁸

For much-debated reasons, Thomism (see sidebar, page 199) enjoyed a startling revival in the nineteenth century, first in the Catholic Church and then beyond it. Some see this as a response to the general slide of modern philosophy into nihilism (the belief that an objective truth or existence is impossible). Having long ago parted company, that is, with the Thomistic insistence that the evidence of sense perceptions must be taken as real, philosophy was left with the pertinent question: then what *can* be believed? The response—nothing—did not seem entirely satisfactory, causing some to begin reexamining both Aristotle and Aquinas.

Thus, Chesterton, in the twentieth century, saw the renaissance of Thomism as a return to reality. The great philosophers almost all agree that we cannot accept as real that which we can see, feel, hear, taste, and smell, Chesterton noted. But in order to see a car bearing down on them or kiss their beloved or follow a delicious smell to the roast beef, they still must act as if such things are real after all. Thomas merely faced that fact.

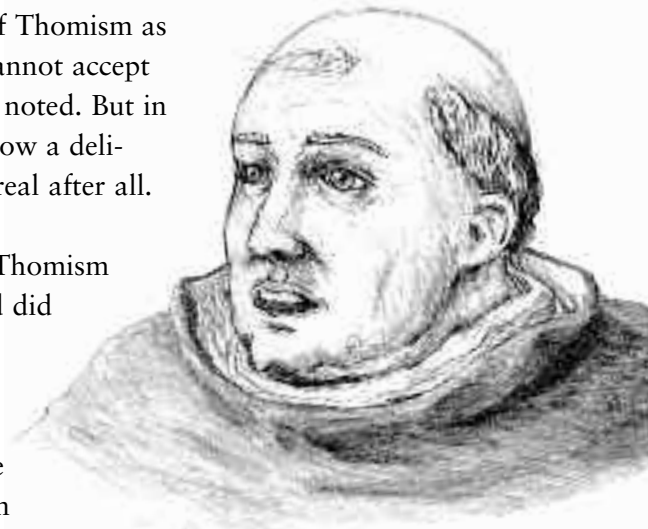
In an encyclical issued in 1879, Pope Leo XIII formally adopted Thomism as a means of clarifying Catholic teaching. The entire Catholic world did not immediately follow the pope's wishes, but gradually Catholic schools began basing their curriculum on Thomism. One product of this was the Institute of Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto, Canada. Modern Thomists, McInerney writes, come in three types: transcendental Thomists, existential Thomists, and Aristotelian Thomists. They vary from the erudite Jesuit Karl Rahner to the earthy novelist Flannery O'Connor, who called herself a "hillbilly" Thomist.

As in his lifetime, however, Thomas's teachings continued to arouse significant wrath. For example, the introduction to a collection of essays by Mortimer Adler, a twentieth-century Jewish scholar sympathetic to Thomism, recounts in *What Man Has Made of Man* the typically dismissive definition offered him by one colleague: "Scholasticism, a sterile form of deductive thinking, developed as a harmless outlet for the reasoning powers of man in a period of intellectual servitude when man could not observe the world around himself, lest any observation come in contradiction with prevailing dogma."

Thomism's detractors, observes Adler, are rarely responding to what Thomas actually wrote. "They have not read him, nor tried to understand him; they are prevented from doing so by an evil rumor of what Thomism is, spread by the malicious, or caused by our own poor rhetoric."

Thomas himself might have had another response. He knew well how speaking the truth can attract condemnation, ridicule, scorn, and hatred. The best response is prayer. In fact, he himself had written such a prayer that closes the greatest of his hymns:

*The heavenly Word proceeding forth,
 Yet leaving not the Father's side,
 Accomplishing His work on earth
 Had reached at length life's eventide.
 By false disciple to be given
 To foemen for His life athirst
 Himself, the very Bread of Heav'n,
 He gave to His disciples first.
 He gave Himself in either kind,
 His precious flesh, His precious blood,
 In love's own fullness thus designed
 Of the whole man to be the Food.
 O saving victim, opening wide
 The gate of Heav'n to men below,
 Our foes press on from every side,
 Thy grace supply, Thy strength bestow.*



THOMAS ON THE DILEMMA
 ALWAYS POSED BY FAITH:

To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible.

The seven virtues and the seven sins

As the Christians came to see that what Christ wanted was not obedience to a set of rules but people of godly qualities, they set forth the desirable and undesirable in Christian life

1. Psalm 15 reads in part:

Who shall sojourn in Thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell upon Thy holy mountain? / He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh truth in his heart / That hath no slander upon his tongue, nor doeth evil to his fellow, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor.

A further verse adds,

He that sweareth [i.e., makes a promise] unto his neighbor / and disappointeth him not, though it were to his own hindrance.

The seven virtues as portrayed on these pages were conceived by fourteenth-century artist Bondone di Giotto and are taken from the Cappella Scrovegni (Arena Chapel) in Padua. The seven deadly sins are portrayed by the sixteenth-century painter Jacob de Backer.

Christians through twenty centuries and more have sought to explain just how Jesus Christ wants them to behave. Jesus had as his background Moses' Ten Commandments, the writings of the Hebrew prophets, and "the Law," or the Torah, the myriad regulations of the Jewish tradition, from many of which Gentile Christians were exempted. Instead, the Christians had the Jewish scriptures, the Christian scriptures as they came into being, and preeminently Jesus' own example: what he himself called "the Way."

But the Way was difficult to teach, they soon realized, because what Jesus plainly wanted was not simply adherence to a set of rules so much as people of distinct qualities and character that would dispose them to adhere to such rules. As the Christians began to describe these qualities in letters ("epistles") addressed to the churches and later collected in the

New Testament, they increasingly found that many of the behavioral traits they strove to produce were already revered by the best of the pagan society around them. The pagans called them "virtues" (in Latin *virtus*, in Greek *arete*) and considered four to be "cardinal," or pivotal: justice, courage, temperance, and prudence.

Justice encompassed the concept of "fair play" and honest dealing. The just man would tell the truth even to his own disadvantage, for instance, and keep his promises. Justice required people to follow the rules of



Fortitude

the game, the whole game of life. And Christians rapidly realized that the Jews' fifteenth Psalm was also written to extol what pagans recognized as the virtue of justice.¹

Courage, or fortitude, meant two things. It meant facing danger—standing by your post when you're terrified or standing by your convictions with a whole crowd laughing at you—but it also means sticking to the task, not giving up when everything in you seems to be urging you to quit. Obviously, a serious attempt to practice any virtue would also involve this one.

Temperance meant going the right length and no farther. For example, overindulgence in liquor or food constitutes "intemperance," but you can also be intemperate in work or in play. Golf or bridge may be as spiritually dangerous to one person as whiskey or cigarettes to another. The effects might not show on



Justice

the outside; golf won't slur the speech or cards damage the lungs, but for anyone captive to them, they can just as surely corrupt the soul.

Temperance was not the same as abstinence, however. A good man may abstain from something because he can't do it at all without overdoing it or because he wants to save money for some other purpose or because he believes it is jeopardizing his whole society, without believing the thing itself—in moderation—to be wrong.

Prudence essentially meant using the brains God gave you. A virtuous man does not hide from the facts but contends with them. He does not pretend that something (or some person or some cause) is good when it is quite obviously bad. He considers thinking things through, especially in religion, to be a definite responsibility since religious belief should not entail shutting one's eyes to obvious fact. Nor would he "take a positive attitude" toward something that plainly called for a negative one.²

The greatest factor in the conversion of the pagan world to Christianity was the way in which Christians themselves, both under fearful persecution and in their own community life, exemplified these much admired pagan virtues. Conversely, as



Temperance

Christians such as Justin and Clement (volume 2), Ambrose and Augustine, Chrysostom and the Cappadocians (volume 4) came to see these parallels in the pagan culture, they gradually absorbed the four pagan virtues into Christian teaching, a process that was completed by Aquinas in the thirteenth century.

But they discerned something else as well. The four cardinal virtues, admirable though they are, do not embrace some of the key traits needed in a Christian life. They saw that there must be three more that the pagans did not recognize but which were identified by St. Paul in the most quoted of all his letters: "And now abideth faith, hope and charity, these three. But the greatest of these is charity" (1 Corinthians 13:13). So to the four "cardinal" virtues the Christians added three "theological" virtues, for a total of seven. They also noticed that these three all led to and reinforced the first four. For Christians, that is, the theological virtues lay behind the cardinal virtues. "The theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity," says a Christian catechism. "They animate it and give it its special character. They inform and give life to all moral virtues."

Charity commonly came to be translated as "love" because the meaning of the term "charity" gradually narrowed down to what the Bible calls "alms," that is, giving to the poor, and nothing else. However, the English word "love" poses still another problem since it is used to designate four quite different forms of behavior.³

The essence of charity for a Christian is what theologians like Aquinas and many of his forerunners defined as the love of God; to love God is a state of mind, just as loving ourselves is a state of mind. It is wishing our own good. If we learn how to



Prudence

2. As C. S. Lewis put it, "[God] has room for people with very little sense, but He wants everyone to use what sense they have. The proper motto is not 'Be good, sweet maid and let who can be clever;' but 'Be good, sweet maid, and don't forget that this involves being as clever as you can'."

3. In *The Four Loves* C. S. Lewis defines four different categories of love: affection (*storge*), fondness such as family members feel toward one another; friendship (*philia*), the bond shared by people with similar interests; romantic love (*eros*), which he distinguishes from purely sexual desire (*venus*); and charity in the Christian and biblical sense (*caritas* or *agape*), unconditional love of one human being for another or of a human being for God.



Faith

love our neighbors as ourselves, in the sense of wishing good for them too, then we are learning how to love God and are thus practicing the greatest virtue.

They emphasized, however, that “loving” someone in the Christian sense does not necessarily mean “liking” him. It does not mean trying to believe his conduct “good” when it is plainly “bad,” or trying to persuade yourself he is “likeable” when his conduct is obviously detestable. Rather, it means hoping the best for him, wishing his good. Some Christian teachers even have a kind of test

for this. If you discover that a person you dislike has done something that demonstrates him not quite as bad as you had thought, do you sense a certain disappointment? This would indicate you are not loving him. But if you are gratified to discover this, that probably means you are.

It is also true, they found, that sometimes by actively pretending to like someone we dislike, we can begin to genuinely like them after all and, more astonishing still, *they* may come to like *us*. The pretense, in other words, has become a reality. Conversely, when we hurt someone we dislike, we usually discover ourselves disliking him more. The same goes for our love for God. We may not feel it is possible to love God, but if we behave as if we love him, we may be surprised to discover that genuine love for him follows.

The theological virtue of hope is learning to live with the idea of eternal life, usually thought of as heaven, or paradise. Aquinas called it the contemplation of the perfect Good. It represents a



Hope

deep human need, and just as food satisfies our hunger and copulation satisfies our sexual desire, the future life satisfies our yearning for permanence that earthly life cannot provide. Thus hope, for Christians, means striving for confidence in God’s ultimate and everlasting mercy. Not that they despise the earthly pleasures he provides, but they realize that these are the foreshadowing of better things to come, to be enjoyed as such—like an appetizer preceding the heavenly feast. If one accepts the pleasures of this world as a gift of God, one must also recognize the longings they trigger as coming from the same source.

As a virtue faith seems a bit of a stretch. Taken at face value, it may appear to be something that one either has or doesn’t have, based on the weighing of the evidence. Where is the virtue in that? But if you have weighed the evidence and conclusively decided that Christianity is true, there will still be moments when you doubt your conviction. You may also be drawn away from it by circumstances if, for instance, you have an opportunity to make some money by slightly shady means or feel that it is in your best interests to tell a lie. When it becomes temptingly convenient



Charity



Gluttony

to forget that Christianity is true, then faith, derived through prayer and other spiritual means, must come into play.

A second and even more important aspect of faith involves entrusting one's entire life to Christ. This happens when we realize that we can never on our own reach the moral perfection that Jesus epitomized, or even sometimes meet the bare standard of conduct we expect of other people. We discover, that is, our own moral bankruptcy. Only then does the endlessly repeated Christian prayer "Lord, have mercy" begin to have meaning for us. We have discovered that if we are ever to get to heaven, the grace of God will have to figure centrally in our getting there.

Pagan culture, of course, dealt with bad behavior as well as good, recognizing seven major flaws in human conduct that the Christians, in turn, would recognize as the "Seven Deadly Sins." The seven—gluttony, lust, wrath, greed, envy, sloth, and pride—were adopted by Christian teachers in the West at the time of Pope Gregory the Great in the sixth century. They have been part of a Christian's moral education ever since and are usually subdivided into three so-called warm-blooded sins and four cold-blooded.

Gluttony (Latin "*gula*"), the first of the warm-blooded sins, is an exaggeration of

the natural human capacity for enjoying life's pleasures, but it is not the act of eating or owning a house or wearing good clothes that constitutes gluttony; it is doing these things to excess. We seldom really need to eat until we can hold no more, after all, or to acquire a ten-thousand-square-foot house. Gluttony is the perversion of that free, careless, and generous mood that wants enjoyment from life for us and for others. And the perversion kills the good, for it is a vain effort to satisfy the above-mentioned longing, which should be directed toward the hereafter and not the here and now.

Similarly, lust (*luxuria*) is the exaggeration of the natural desire to procreate and the natural pleasure that comes from sex. Aquinas taught that God gave us the ability to procreate and to enjoy the process. But it is by its nature designed to regenerate the species and must therefore be practiced only within the bonds of marriage. "Chastity is the most unpopular of the Christian virtues," observed the twentieth-century Christian writer C. S. Lewis in his *Mere Christianity*. "There's no getting away from it; the Christian rule is, 'Either marriage, with complete faithfulness to your partner, or else total abstinence.' Now this is so difficult and so contrary to our instincts that obviously either Christianity is wrong or our sexual instinct, as it now is, has gone wrong. One or the other. Of course, being a Christian, I think it is the instinct."

Wrath (*ira*) is anger and hate taken to damaging levels. It is right and just to hate



Lust



Wrath



Greed

evil, to become angry at those who practice evil, and even to punish evil through violent means, including war. The problem begins when we enjoy the hating and take pleasure in the punishment and pain it inflicts out of a sense of vengeance. Vengeance is not justice; it is the sin of wrath.

Nevertheless, the four cold-blooded sins are considered far more serious because of their origin. Where the warm-blooded sins are perversions of some good, the cold-blooded are considered “sins of the spirit.” They do not originate in

the natural world, the Christians say—they are purely diabolical.

Greed (*avaritia*) is the first one. Also known as covetousness or avarice, it is an unhealthy preoccupation with possessions, often money or the things money can buy.⁴ In mild form it might be referred to as thrift or niggardliness, but while the village miser is guilty of this sin, far more is the rather more attractive, swashbuckling billionaire who ultimately measures everything and everybody only in dollars and cents. For avarice is driven by competition and pride: the greedy man wants more, not because it increases his pleasure but because he needs to prove himself smarter, richer, and generally superior to anyone else, and to preserve that status.

Envy (*invidia*) is the sin that wants us all miserable together and resents anyone being happier. “If avarice is the sin of the haves against the have-nots, envy is the sin of the have-nots against the haves,” writes mid-twentieth-century Christian essayist Dorothy L. Sayers in an essay entitled “The Other Six Deadly Sins.” In its lesser form, envy can inspire social climbing or snobism, but the envious can also be destroyers. The trade unionist who would rather that the company go broke than that he forego a salary increase or ease a clause in



Envy

the collective agreement might well be acting out of envy. The wife who cannot abide her husband’s success and nags a marriage to its death commits the same sin.

Sloth (*acedia*), which in most ages was simply condemned as laziness, would gain sympathy and even respectability in the late twentieth century, when apathy and indifference to life’s problems would come to be rather admired or else diagnosed as depression in need of drug therapy. The pagans called it “sadness” and the romanticists “melancholy,” but they nonetheless thought it sinful. For sloth is the sin that rejects God’s creation, the sin, says essayist Sayers, that “believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for.”

But perhaps the greatest surprise in secularist eyes is the first-place ranking that both pagan society and the Christians assigned to pride (*superbia*), which C. S. Lewis describes as “the one vice of which no man is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and which hardly any people except Christians ever imagine they are guilty of themselves . . . There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular and no

4. Avarice has often been cited as the root sin, as in the famous passage from the apostle Paul’s letter to Timothy: “The love of money is the root of all evil.” But note that it is not the money that is at issue but the love of it.



Sloth



Pride

fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others.”

But surely, a man might object, there’s nothing sinful about being proud of my country, or my family, or my golf club. This depends, however, upon what he means by “being proud of.” If he means he admires his country, loves his family, and revels in the camaraderie and skill of the golf course, this is not “pride” as Christians use the word. But if he tends to look down on other, “inferior” countries or to put on airs because of his family lineage or because he belongs to the “right” golf club, this would be a very different matter. It would be pride.

Pride, like sloth, would gain some respectability in the late twentieth century, when “looking out for number one” began to be seen as virtuous, along with the quest for “self-fulfillment” and the seeking for “empowerment.” But the old realities would remain, of course, as people would discover whenever they actually needed help from someone who was looking out for number one and saw them as number two or three or possibly fifty. Marry someone forever searching for self-fulfillment or hire someone intent on “seeking empowerment,” and the diabolical origins become evident as ever.

The outstanding twentieth-century entertainer Frank Sinatra won accolades for a captivating song, written by Paul Anka, in which he looked back on his life and declared, “I did it my way.” Few of his admirers stopped to think that every marital breakup, every family feud, and much other human misery come about because somebody is determined to “do it my way.”

The sin of pride comes when you don’t care what others think because you consider yourself above them. It is the most competitive of sins, getting no pleasure out of having something, only of having more of it than the next man. The proud person, more than any other, hates to be snubbed or ignored or outshone. Thus, Christians believe pride to have been the main source of woe in every nation and every family since time began.

Pride is pure antagonism, both between human creatures and between humans and God. For when a man looks down on everyone, he cannot see something that is above him. Pride, through which the devil became the devil, comes straight from hell. Therefore, observes Lewis, the proud, self-righteous prig who sits in the front pew of the church every Sunday may be closer to hell than a prostitute. However, he concludes, “it is better to be neither.” ■