

Thomas Aquina

The son of Landulph, count of Aquino, St. Thomas Aquinas was born circa 1225 in Roccasecca, Italy, near Aquino, Terra di Lavoro, in the Kingdom of Sicily. Thomas had eight siblings, and was the youngest child. His mother, Theodora, was countess of Teano.¹

At age 5, the boy was sent to the school at the nearby monastery of Monte Cassino (a community founded by Benedict seven centuries earlier). At age 14, Thomas went to the University of Naples, where his Dominican teacher so impressed him that Thomas decided he, too, would join the new, study-oriented Dominican order.²

In 1243, he secretly joined an order of Dominican monks, receiving the habit in 1244. When his family found out, they felt so betrayed that he had turned his back on the principles to which they subscribed that they decided to kidnap him. Thomas's family held him captive for an entire year, imprisoned in the fortress of San Giovanni at Rocca Secca. During this time, they attempted to deprogram Thomas of his new beliefs. Thomas held fast to the ideas he had learned at university, however, and went back to the Dominican order following his release in 1245.¹

From 1245 to 1252, St. Thomas Aquinas continued to pursue his studies with the Dominicans in Naples, Paris and Cologne. He was ordained in Cologne, Germany, in 1250, and went on to teach theology at the University of Paris.²

At the forefront of medieval thought was a struggle to reconcile the relationship between theology (faith) and philosophy (reason). People were at odds as to how to unite the knowledge they obtained through revelation with the information they observed naturally using their mind and their senses. Based on Averroes's "theory of the double truth," the two types of knowledge were in direct opposition to each other. St. Thomas Aquinas's revolutionary views rejected Averroes's theory, asserting that "both kinds of knowledge ultimately come from God" and were therefore compatible. Not only were they compatible, according to Thomas's ideology, they could work in collaboration: He believed that revelation could guide reason and prevent it from making mistakes, while reason could clarify and demystify faith. St. Thomas Aquinas's work goes on to discuss faith and reason's roles in both perceiving and proving the existence of God.

St. Thomas Aquinas believed that the existence of God could be proven in five ways, mainly by: 1) observing movement in the world as proof of God, the "Immovable Mover"; 2) observing cause and effect and identifying God as the cause of everything; 3) concluding that the impermanent nature of beings proves the existence of a necessary being, God, who originates only from within himself; 4) noticing varying levels of human perfection and determining that a supreme, perfect being must therefore exist; and 5) knowing that natural beings could not have intelligence without it being granted to them by God. Subsequent to

1 <https://www.biography.com/people/st-thomas-aquinas-9187231>

2 <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/theologians/thomas-aquinas.html>

defending people's ability to naturally perceive proof of God, Thomas also tackled the challenge of protecting God's image as an all-powerful being.¹

He wrote about 60 works that ranged from short to almost tome like. He was responsible in his two masterpieces, the "*Summa theologiae*" and the "*Summa contra gentiles*", for the classical systematization of Latin theology; and as a poet he wrote some of the most gravely beautiful eucharistic hymns in the church's liturgy. His doctrinal system and the explanations and developments made by his followers are known as Thomism.³

In June 1272, St. Thomas Aquinas agreed to go to Naples and start a theological studies program for the Dominican house neighboring the university. While he was still writing prolifically, his works began to suffer in quality.

During the Feast of St. Nicolas in 1273, St. Thomas Aquinas had a mystical vision that made writing seem unimportant to him. At mass, he reportedly heard a voice coming from a crucifix that said, "Thou hast written well of me, Thomas; what reward wilt thou have?" to which St. Thomas Aquinas replied, "None other than thyself, Lord."

When St. Thomas Aquinas's confessor, Father Reginald of Piperno, urged him to keep writing, he replied, "I can do no more. Such secrets have been revealed to me that all I have written now appears to be of little value." St. Thomas Aquinas never wrote again.

In January 1274, St. Thomas Aquinas embarked on a trip to Lyon, France, on foot to serve on the Second Council, but never made it there. Along the way, he fell ill at the Cistercian monastery of Fossanova, Italy. The monks wanted St. Thomas Aquinas to stay at the castle, but, sensing that his death was near, Thomas preferred to remain at the monastery, saying, "If the Lord wishes to take me away, it is better that I be found in a religious house than in the dwelling of a layperson."

St. Thomas Aquinas died at the monastery of Fossanova on March 7, 1274. He was canonized by Pope John XXII in 1323.¹

I was very impressed by how he stood firm in what he believed to be the calling for his life. Even when those closest to him went to extreme measures to try to dissuade him (kidnapping your brother to keep him from becoming a monk is not something you deal with today!) but even after all those sufferings and temptations were placed upon him, he knew what he was called to do, and it was in our great benefit that he did. It is encouraging for all of us because not always will we be supported by those closest to us to follow the path God has for us. It may be those we love the most that most deeply misunderstand us and that in itself could stop someone in their tracks. It takes deep communion with the Holy Spirit and perseverance to go on, even in spite of something like this.

3 <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Thomas-Aquinas>

