

Thomas Aquinas: Majestic Thinker, Unquestioned Saint

By LAURENCE MULLIN
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The 700th anniversary of the death of Thomas Aquinas, Dominican friar, philosopher-theologian, mystic, and saint, who, by any accounting, was one of the giants of the Western intellectual world, was noted last month.

He had set out from Naples, with two companions, to attend the Second Ecumenical Council of Lyons at the temporary residence of the Pope in southern France. He did not get very far. Just north of Capua, about 25 to 30 miles from Naples, he struck his head against a low tree branch extending over the road. He was half stunned and hardly able to stand.

After a few hours further travel, he asked to stop at the residence of his niece, near the Cistercian Abbey of Fossanova. At the castle, he fell ill. As his condition steadily worsened, and he felt he was near death, he asked to be taken to the abbey. "If the Lord is coming for me, he was heard to say, 'I had better be found in a religious house than in a castle.'"

There, a short time later, early on a Wednesday morning, March 7, 1274, he died. He was 49.

Friar Thomas d'Aquino, whose life spanned the middle 50 years of the 13th Century, lived at a time when the Christian West had recently become acquainted with a wealth of Greek and Islamic philosophical analysis and speculation.

To some minds, Greek philosophy, particularly that of Aristotle, loomed as a dangerous and seductive threat to the integrity of the Christian faith.

But Thomas, in a serenely open-minded search for truth, utilized and developed the legacy of ancient Greek thought — and insights of Muslim and Jewish philosophers — in a way that made his contemporaries regard him as a trail-blazer.

He constructed and elaborated a synthesis of Christian theology and Greek philosophy (united with non-Greek elements), in which philosophy is regarded in the light of theology and theology itself is expressed, to a considerable extent, in categories borrowed from Greek philosophy, particularly from Aristotle. It gave a whole new direction to the intellectual history in the West.

It was the fruit of a life of unremitting intellectual labor — wide-ranging reading,



profound reflection, voluminous writing — permeated and motivated by deep spirituality and touched by mystical experience.

His life began at the end of 1224 or the beginning of 1225 (there is no documentary evidence of the day or year) in the castle of Roccasecca near the ancient town of Aquino, which lies between Naples and Rome. He was the youngest son of his father's second marriage. The family is described as "lower nobility." ("de Aquino" is the general family name.)

At the age of 5, Thomas was sent to the Benedictine Abbey of Monte Cassino for elementary schooling. He remained there until February 1239 when the forces of Emperor Frederick II — in a dispute with the reigning Pope — occupied the abbey and expelled the monks.

In the Fall of that year, Thomas enrolled at the state university of Naples, where, for the next five years, he studied arts and philosophy. There he was introduced to Aristotle's logic and natural philosophy and to Aristotle's Arabian commentator, Averroes.

It was there, too, that Thomas first came in contact with members of the Dominican Order, technically known as the Order of Friars Preachers, which was founded in 1215 in southern France by Spanish-born Dominic de Guzman.

Like the older Franciscans, Dominicans were "mendicants" who, besides preaching, wandered throughout the city begging for their food and other necessities.

Attracted by the Dominicans' evangelical form of life, Thomas entered the order in April, 1244. The move aroused bitter opposition on the part of his family, whose plans for Thomas included his return to the abbey of Monte Cassino as a step toward ecclesiastical preferment; a lowly, mendicant friar would not be much help to the family's financial security. The family managed to have Thomas seized and kept him under a kind of "house arrest" at Roccasecca for a year or more, while unsuccessful efforts were made to dissuade him from his resolution to remain a Dominican.

In the Summer of 1245, Thomas was allowed to leave home (the family's financial situation having improved in the meantime), and shortly afterwards, he traveled north to Paris, where, probably, he spent the next three years in private study at the Dominican priory of Saint Jacques.

There he met the illustrious German

Dominican thinker, St. Albert the Great, a man of vast erudition and breadth of scholarship, to whom, more than to any other thinker of the time, belongs the credit of making the philosophical system of Aristotle and the writings of Arabian philosophers intelligible to the Christian West.

The sojourn at Paris, and in Cologne, Germany (1248-1252), in company with Albert was a factor of prime importance in the intellectual development of young Thomas.

Ordained priest in 1251, Thomas returned to Paris in 1252, continued his course of studies, lectured, and published the first of his writings.

In 1256, at the exceptionally early age of 31, he was declared a master of sacred theology and assigned one of the two chairs allotted to the Dominicans at the University of Paris.

From 1259 to 1269, he was in Italy, where he taught successively at Naples, Orvieto, Rome, and Viterbo. In 1269 he resumed his lecturing at Paris but in 1272 went back to Naples to organize the Dominican house of theological studies.

During all this time, he managed to produce some 40 volumes of writings, aided by a phenomenal memory, an awesome power of concentration, and a battery of secretaries. (He could dictate to two or three at one and the same time, on different subjects.)

He was working at full tilt on his master work, the *Summa Theologiae*, when, suddenly, on Dec. 6, 1273, after an experience while celebrating Mass, he suspended work on the treatise, telling a secretary he had reached the end of his writing. The secretary later disclosed that Thomas had told him: "All that I have written seems to me like straw compared with what now has been revealed to me." He neither wrote nor taught thereafter.

James A. Weisheipl, O.P. of the Institute of Medieval Studies in Toronto, Canada, is of the opinion that Thomas may have suffered a physical breakdown.

David Knowles, Emeritus Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, England, thinks otherwise.

"Majestic thinker and unquestioned saint," says Dr. Knowles, "Thomas was not speaking as a tired or disheartened writer. He had seen with a saint's direct, infused vision that his words could not express the divine reality of his faith."

Mt. Camel Council Sets Good Friday Procession

By PAT PETRASKE

They will be picking up where the Italians left off. Resurrecting a religious custom celebrated in Romance language countries, the Spanish committee of Our Lady Of Mt. Camel's parish council is

Nuns Set Plans For Holy Week

ELMIRA — The Dominican Nuns, located at 1310 W. Church St., invite all to their Holy Week Services. Services planned:

HOLY THURSDAY—Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, 5 p.m. Adoration before the repository will be in the Old Chapel until midnight. (Signs will direct you).

GOOD FRIDAY—Liturgical

sponsoring a "Procesion del Viernes Santo" (Procession of Holy Friday), April 12, beginning at 1:30 p.m. at the church.

The custom of having a religious, artistic and cultural procession during Holy Week was

Services, 3 p.m. Stations of the Cross, 7:30 p.m.

HOLY SATURDAY—Easter Vigil, 11:15 p.m.

EASTER MORNING—Mass at 11 a.m.

Father Reginald Haller, O.P., a professor of music and composer, will be Mass celebrant.

begun 70 years ago by the Italian immigrants who settled in Rochester. Two years ago the multi-ethnic parish council at Mt. Camel voted to revive the commemoration.

A procession will wind its way through the streets of the 16th ward. Climaxing the event will be a Mass at Mt. Camel immediately after the parade, offered by Father Laurence Tracy, co-pastor.

"The Italian people are so happy to have the procession again. They are laughing and crying for joy and will join in the celebration," said Mrs. Carmen Fernandez Teremy, director of the Puerto Rican Arts and Culture Center and responsible for the event's publicity. The center has

donated money for some of the costumes to be worn in the procession.

Mrs. Teremy praised the "religious experience" as an occasion "to bring the two ethnic groups together."

Coveted positions are being sought by parish council members and other parishioners who will play Veronica, "La Dolorosa" (the Sorrowful One), angels, maidens and bearers of the statue of Jesus in the tomb. Felix Montalvo, the only Puerto Rican policeman in the city, has asked for the honor of patrolling the procession.

More than 50 people are expected to participate in the event from which it is believed

"spiritual merit" may be obtained, according to Mrs. Teremy. Spanish-speaking members of other parishes have been asked to join.

ND Provost To Speak Here

Father James T. Burchaell, CSC, Provost of the University of Notre Dame, will speak at the 51st annual University of Notre Dame Night, sponsored by the Notre Dame Club of Rochester.

The event will be held at the Monroe Golf Club, Pittsford, 7:30 p.m., Monday, April 15. Topic of the dinner will be "The Future of Notre Dame."