

Faith Builds on Reason

Our Catholic Heritage

The Building of the Corporations of Scholars

By FATHER THOMAS McMANUS
 "How pleasantly one's thoughts fly back to those celebrated schools and universities which flourished of old in Europe — to Paris, Salamanca, Alcalá, to Padua and Bologna, to Naples and Coimbra and to many another. All know how the fame of these seats of learning grew with their years, and that their judgment, often asked in matters of great moment, held great weight everywhere." (Pope Leo XIII, Aeterni Patris)

The most enduring of all the accomplishments of Medieval Christendom are the Universities, the corporations of masters and scholars that began to spring up in the 12th century.

From the very beginning of the Middle Ages, education was very much the province of the Church. Enlightened monarchs like Charlemagne would occasionally foster learn-

ing in court schools, but the bishops and monks formed the backbone of education. In time, the word "clerk" meant both a learned man and a priest.

Monasteries like Iona (Scotland), Monte Cassino (Italy), and Bec (Normandy) were famous in their day for their schools. By the 11th century, leadership in education had passed to the cathedral schools of Northern France and Lorraine, e.g., Chartres, Rheims, Tournai and Liege ("the second Athens").

The end of the 12th century saw the rise of a new phenomenon, the universities. The old schools had been directed toward practical education. The universities gave vent to the growing fascination with intellectual experiment.

They bred "an intellectual proletariat of needy and ambitious students, contemptuous of the past, impatient of restraint, followers of the fashionable teacher and the doctrine

of the moment." (Christopher Dawson, Religion and the Rise of Western Culture.)

Among all the brawling centers of thought and dispute, of poverty and prayer, of faith and reason, two stood out as powers in their generations. It was a proverb that Italy had the papacy, Germany had the empire, and France had knowledge. Paris was the queen of the schools, excelling in philosophy and theology. It became the archetype and standard of all the universities.

"The science of the schools of Paris is in the church like the Tree of Life in the terrestrial paradise, a shining lamp in the Temple of the Soul..." (Pope Alexander IV, 1255)

The great rival of Paris was the University of Bologna in Italy. Its specialty was the law. While Paris was a clerical corporation, Bologna was a lay university, a student corpo-

ration which treated its teachers more like employees than masters. Of all the medieval universities Bologna had the greatest influence on the government and organization of the Church. It was the nursery from which "went forth the leaders who rule the Christian people." (Pope Honorius III, 1220)

Modern science would not exist today had not the western mind been trained by centuries of intellectual discipline to accept the power of human reason to investigate and understand the universe. The Church would not have been able to weather the shock of the centuries ahead had she not learned in the great cathedrals of ideas, which were the universities, that faith and reason cannot contradict one another. From Paris, Bologna, and scores of other schools flowed "the rivers of knowledge which water and make fertile the soil of the universal Church." (Pope Innocent IV)

St. Thomas Aquinas — 'The Angelic Doctor'

By FATHER THOMAS McMANUS
 "Among the Scholastic Doctors, the chief and master of all, towers Thomas Aquinas, who, because he most venerated the ancient doctors of the Church, in a sense seems to have inherited the intellect of all of them." (Leo XIII, Aeterni Patris)

The man who was to become famous forever as the Angelic Doctor was born of noble parents in Rocca Secca, south of Rome, in 1225. He went to school at the nearby monastery of Monte Cassino and at the newly founded Dominican university at Naples. It was at Naples that Thomas felt the call to a life of poverty. He promptly joined the Order of Preachers.

His noble family was deeply shocked by such a decision. Thomas was shut in a family dungeon to force a change in his career plans. After a year of such punishment the family relented, and in 1245 Thomas went off to the University of Cologne to study under St. Albert the Great. Always a quiet person, Thomas gained the nickname "the Dumb Ox." Albert, who recognized the young man's brilliance, made the famous observation:

"You may call him the dumb ox, but soon the whole world will listen to the bellowing of this ox."

Thomas was shortly posted to the University of Paris, the intellectual capital of the day. The Dumb Ox became the wild bull, and effected one of the few intellectual revolutions in history. He cre-

ated a philosophical and theological system to rival the gothic cathedrals. He welded faith and reason into an "everlasting philosophy." He baptized and christianized the work of the ancient pagan



St. Thomas Aquinas
 (Art by Robert F. McGovern)

philosopher Aristotle. Thomas was a man of such brilliance that he said he understood every page he ever read. At the same time he was a saint of such humility that he could admit that he learned more at the foot of the cross than he ever did from books.

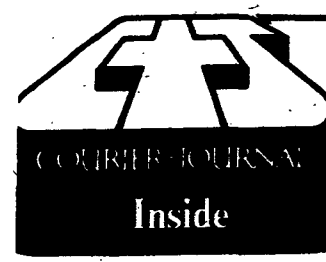
"Richly endowed with human and divine science, like the sun he heated the world with the warmth of his virtues and filled it with the splendor of his teaching." (Leo XIII)

In Thomas, we see the rare phenomenon of the sanctity of the intellect.

In 1259 he was called to the papal court to teach among the pope's scholars. From then until his death he threw himself into the composition of his greatest work, the "Summa Theologiae." In 1272 Thomas was made Regent of the University of Naples. Two years later he was summoned to the Second Council of Lyons, and died on the way in the Cistercian house at Fosse Nova.

Thomas' greatest hour was to come 300 years after his death, in the Church's darkest hour at the Council of Trent:

"The chief and special glory of Thomas, is that the Fathers of Trent made it part of the order of that conclave to lay upon the altar, together with the Sacred Scriptures and the Decrees of the Supreme Pontiffs, the Summa of Thomas whence to seek counsel, reason, and inspiration." (Leo XIII)



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