

Aquinas was first and foremost a theologian

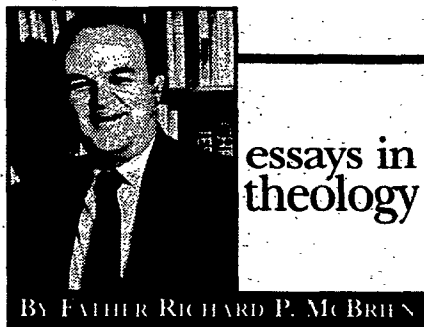
St. Thomas Aquinas may have been an early victim of the housecleaning spirit that followed the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), a classic case of throwing out the baby with the bath water.

Some Catholics, caught up in the conciliar renewal, assumed that Thomas was somehow passe, even though theologians steeped in his thought, like Yves Congar, OP, Karl Rahner, SJ, and Edward Schillebeeckx, OP, were among the major creative influences at Vatican II.

Thomas O'Meara, OP, professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame and author of *Thomas Aquinas Theologian* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), suggests that this brief period of neglect came to an end by 1980 with a resurgence of interest in the Angelic Doctor, stimulated in part by the 700th anniversary of Thomas' death in 1274.

Thereafter, many volumes began to appear. A recent bibliography lists more than 4,000 works on Aquinas appearing since 1977, many of which emphasize the theological and pastoral aspects of his writings. A case in point is the two-volume study by Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

Although a broad spectrum of Catholics seems once again to appreciate



By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

the abiding significance of the Angelic Doctor's work, misreadings of his thought continue not only among the self-proclaimed orthodox, but also among certain philosophers, Catholic and Protestant alike. They interpret Thomas' writings as if he were, like themselves, a philosopher rather than a theologian, a thinker driven primarily by intellectual curiosity about possible worlds rather than passion for the Gospel that is to be proclaimed to this world. Indeed, his classic *Summa theologiae* was written for the formation of preachers. (Aquinas himself was a Dominican — a member of the Order of Preachers.)

Just as it was wrong, therefore, to have once regarded Thomas Aquinas as an inflexible custodian of the past, when, in fact, he was a brilliantly innovative scholar who advanced our understanding of

the central mysteries of faith, so it is wrong now to read him as if he were a philosopher who only employed theology to illustrate the finer points of his philosophy. This is a misunderstanding that Thomas O'Meara challenges in his book.

As Father O'Meara insists, in his vocation and in the profession he chose for himself, Thomas Aquinas was first and always a theologian — in the university, in the pulpit, and while in his room writing. Whether commenting on Scripture or interpreting the works of theologians and philosophers of the past, he was always seeking to develop a fresh and vital understanding of Christian faith. His writings, in other words, were not for the sake of provoking philosophical debate but for providing a more effective way of preaching the Gospel in an entirely new world of universities, religious orders and emerging sciences.

Yet one must be careful not to place too much blame on the philosophers. Untrained in modern theology at the doctoral level, many of them rely, by default, on the neo-Scholastic theology of their youth, or of their mentors' youth. Father O'Meara points out, for example, that a search through a library catalog or a perusal of a bibliography of articles on Aquinas written prior to Vatican II yield

more material on the metaphysics of an unmoved mover (i.e., God) or on philosophical virtues than on our redemption by Christ or the richness of the sacraments.

Another distinguished Aquinas scholar refers to the period before the council as one in which Thomas was "under house arrest" by the neo-Scholastics, and to the period after the council as a return "from Thomism to Thomas."

"In the spirit of Aquinas' theology of grace amid people and societies," O'Meara wrote, "the Council looked positively on the aspirations of the world, the religions of humanity, and the quests of people of good will."

Is it only a coincidence that those philosophers who do not read Thomas primarily as a theologian also reflect an often anxious, skeptical, and negative attitude toward the world and its cultures, contrary to Thomas' central theological understanding of grace, which builds on nature, as creative, redemptive, renewing, and unifying?

One of the best correctives to that misunderstanding is Thomas O'Meara's new book.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

The Holy Spirit inspires evangelization

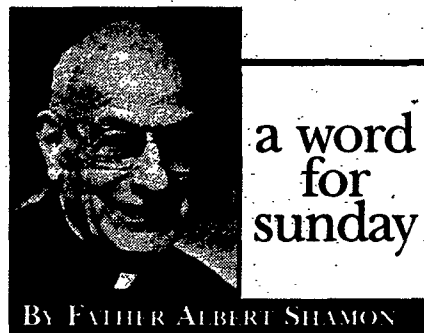
Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 20:19-23. (R1) Acts 2:1-11. (R2) 1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13.

I read the other day that President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore come from that part of our country famous for producing rednecks. Not knowing what a redneck was, I consulted a dictionary. The dictionary defined a redneck as a white member of the Southern rural laboring class; sometimes used disparagingly.

Why in the world am I talking about rednecks on Pentecost? It is because Galilee was the cultural equivalent of redneck country in the time of Jesus. You could always tell a Galilean by his or her accent. Galileans had the habit of swallowing syllables when speaking. They might say things like *runnin'* instead of *running*, or *huntin'* instead of *hunting*. The might say "far" for "fire."

When Peter was warming his hands in the courtyard of the high priest during the trial of Jesus, the servant girl accused him of being one of Jesus' disciples. Why? Because of his accent — his Galilean accent gave him away. So Galileans were looked down upon as being provincial, backward and even a little slow.

Now on Pentecost, these Galileans, these rednecks, suddenly spoke elo-



By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

quently in foreign languages! Can you not imagine how stunned the crowds were when they heard this group of rednecks, with limited or no education, speaking exotic languages. No wonder when Peter stood up to preach thousands were converted. This was unbelievable; country bumpkins becoming remarkable communicators, articulate ambassadors.

Pentecost contrasts with what happened at the tower of Babel. When men sought at Babel to build a secular city, a city without God, God confused their speech so that they could not communicate with one another. The result was that the tower could not be finished and people were scattered.

Babel, turning on God, led to disunity among peoples. Pentecost, the outpour-

ing of the Holy Spirit, led to unity of people speaking different tongues. The key to unity among people is the Holy Spirit.

The giving of the Holy Spirit is the gift of God. He comes in answer to prayer.

Finally, those filled with the Holy Spirit became evangelistic. Thousands were added to the church in a short period of time after Pentecost.

At the end of World War II, Robert Woodruff, Coca Cola's president, said, "In my generation it is my desire that everyone in the world have a taste of Coca Cola." Today Coke is sold from the deserts of Africa to the interior of China. Woodruff motivated his colleagues to reach their generation around the world for Coke.

A healthy organization reaches out. If it did not, it would die. Our church is sound, but too often it is sound asleep. It is far too easy for Catholics to become a sort of religious clique and church a place to retreat from the world. The last command of Christ was, "Go, teach all nations." And that was exactly what the Apostles did after Pentecost. Before the last one had died, the Gospel had been preached throughout the world. The first Apostles after Pentecost realized that they were not called for privilege, but for mis-

sion. They existed not for their own benefit, but for that of the whole wide world.

Legend says that at the gate to heaven, two questions will be asked of everyone seeking admittance. The first question is this: "Did you come alone?" If you answer, "Yes," the second question will be, "How could you?"

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

- Monday, June 1**
2 Peter 1:2-7; Mark 12:1-12
- Tuesday, June 2**
2 Peter 3:12-15, 17-18; Mark 12:13-17
- Wednesday, June 3**
2 Timothy 1:1-3, 6-12; Mark 12:18-27
- Thursday, June 4**
2 Timothy 2:8-15; Mark 12:28-34
- Friday, June 5**
2 Timothy 3:10-17; Mark 12:35-37
- Saturday, June 6**
2 Timothy 4:1-8; Mark 12:38-44

Musical Spec (Music of Hope)

presents

The Rose Without a Thorn

Gregorian chant and Renaissance choral settings of the Salve Regina and Ave Maria texts
Colleen Liggett, soprano

Thursday, June 4th at 8:00 pm

Saint Anne Church

1600 Mt. Hope Avenue, Rochester, New York

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A benefit for Camp S.O.A.R.

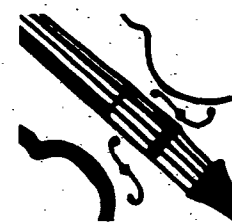
for HIV positive and HIV affected children and their families

Camp S.O.A.R. is a non-profit organization that provides a safe and supportive environment for children and their families.



SUZUKI MEMORIAL MASS CONCERT

With music performed by the Eastman Suzuki Program



Saturday, 30 May 1998, at 10:30 A.M.

Saint Anne Church

1600 Mt. Hope Ave. Rochester, New York

On Monday, 26 January 1998, Dr. Shinichi Suzuki entered into eternal rest. His funeral Mass was celebrated in Japan by Father Takashi Kimura in Matsumoto Catholic Church on Wednesday, 28 January 1998, at 1:00 PM. A public Memorial Service was held at the Negano Ken Matsumoto Bunka Kaikan on Tuesday, 17 March 1998.

This Suzuki Memorial Mass Concert in Rochester, New York will feature violin students from the Eastman Suzuki Program performing musical selections before and after the Mass. During the Liturgy, Anastasia Jempelis and Nori Kuwamura will perform works of Mozart.