

SAINT THOMAS ON THE ARGUMENT OF THE *PROSLOGION*

see how the blessed in heaven know His existence. They see God's essence, and for them the proposition "God exists" is self-evident. Thus, Saint Anselm's error provides an opportunity for Saint Thomas to find the truth.

Quodlibeta

THE WONDROUS LEARNING OF BLESSED THOMAS

Fr. Thomas McGovern, S.J.

We are come together here at the holy sacrifice of the Mass this afternoon to commemorate the death of this school's patron. The death of so great, so holy a man, who served the Church of Christ in so signal a fashion is indeed an occasion not only to commemorate, but even more to celebrate. For it marks the occasion of the saint's hearing from the lips of Him whom he had so loved and served: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of the Lord." "The Lord has loved him and adorned him, and laid on him a stole of glory." (Alleluia, Mass: *In medio*)

According to the second nocturne of the old office of Saint Thomas, he did indeed die on the seventh of March, in 1274. Pope Gregory X had sent him as theologian to the Council of Lyons. But the Council had to face and solve its problems without him, at least without his actual physical presence. En route, his final illness laid hold of him, and he died among the Cistercian monks in their monastery at Fossa Nova.

It is symbolic of the indefatigable industry that characterized his entire life that, ill though he was, he spent his last days at work—on the Canticle of Canticles. These final labors are indicative still more of the depth of the love of God which moved him, even then in those days of failing energies, to

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deepen by just a little his understanding of God's word contained in that Old Testament allegory and to transmit to the monks about him the divine truth so discovered.

The Collect prayers of the Mass—which we call now the opening prayers—have a way of beginning with an acknowledgment, ending with a petition. In this respect the prayer of Saint Thomas' old Mass runs true to form: "O God, who dost enlighten your Church with the wondrous learning of Blessed Thomas. . . ." It is God Himself, so runs our acknowledgment, who has been at work in His church through the genius, and the labors, and the prayerfulness of Thomas Aquinas.

The divine work alluded to is just that—a work of enlightenment; we acknowledge that God "dost enlighten. . . ." Man needs light. In the dark we are unsure; the dark offers concealment for the forces of evil who love to work therein. We need light to live by, to direct our steps aright.

This light we profess, this needed light, God has granted his Church. He has bestowed it "mira eruditione beati Thomae", by the learning of Saint Thomas that is wondrous, far beyond the ordinary, as learned men go. He has left us that learning, and we find it is marvelous, for example, in its universality, unmatched in this regard by any other. For Saint Thomas knew well all of nature, at least on the universal plane, and man especially, who is nature's crown—his senses and emotions, his mind and will. And his learning extends to nature's first cause, God one and three, to the Incarnation and redemption, the law and grace and the Church, morality and the religious life, prayer. This same doctrine is marvelous, too, in its depth. For the resolution is where it ought to be—in self-evident principles, or in the revealed word of God. As that same learning came from his pen, it is no less in the precision and conciseness, the serenity and tranquil assurance of its expression. The language in which he speaks is itself a work of art in which no art is apparent; it is not possible to improve on his expression of what is to be expressed. Wondrous also

is the sheer magnitude of the *Opera Omnia*, completed in the whereabouts of twenty-five years.

In the prayer of the old Mass, our acknowledgment of God's work among us continues: "You enrich your Church by his holy work." Our liturgy is, in concept, to help us turn the thoughts of our minds and the affections of our hearts toward God. What Saint Thomas has contributed thereto does just that. The liturgical office of Corpus Christi, for example, is his work. Our hymns to the Blessed Sacrament most treasured for their content and fervor are his: *Pange lingua*, *Adoro te devote*, *Lauda Sion*, *Verbum supernum*. The prayers of his own heart that he committed to ink and paper can, in turn, help us to pray and to pray well—prayers centered upon the Mass, the Blessed Sacrament, the Mother of God, and the prayer, as we well know, before study.

"Oh God who dost enlighten your Church by the wondrous learning and enrich it by the holy work of Saint Thomas. . . ." On reflection we are grateful for the brightness and the extent of that enlightenment, dismayed by the thought of the resultant darkness without it.

Then, in this same prayer, we make our petition. We make of God a request that we make in the Mass of no other doctor—"et quae docuit intellectu conspicerere"—to know what he taught, at least as much thereof as opportunity and our own efforts, assisted by the grace of God, will allow.

Clearly, the Church would have us take Saint Thomas seriously. This brief prayer of the Church finds its echo in the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* of Pope Leo XIII, in which he established Saint Thomas as *the* teacher of Christ's followers. This same pontiff named Saint Thomas heavenly patron of Catholic schools, colleges, and seminaries. The urging of the authoritative magisterium must constitute our initial motive for a special and unique attention to Saint Thomas. This first motive may well, in time, yield to another—a conviction borne of experience. We follow the Church's direction and come

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to find that she is right. Saint Thomas never fails, and never disappoints. The effort required to grasp what he has said is not small in many matters, but then, neither are the rewards. For he provides us with knowledge that not only directs toward happiness in this life and in the life to come, but itself makes happy and constitutes a foretaste of the Blessed Vision to come.