

# The Quarterly Review

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St Thomas Aquinas, painting by Carlo Crivelli

## Early and Later Medieval Scholasticism

**Darrell Sutton reviews new editions of timeless texts**

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 8 Vols. (2012). The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine; Cornelius à Lapide, *The Great Commentary: I Corinthians & II Corinthians and Galatians* (2016), Loreto Publishers.

Public forums in the west shelter their citizens from blatant favoritism toward one religion or another. There are politicians who may believe this assertion is questionable. Nonetheless, to others the safeguard is a defensive undertaking that is specifically germane to Europe and the Americas, unlike what is customary in many countries of the Orient. One may feel too that it is a harsh prevention that some western officials inflict on their general populace. Peoples of the world today are not less religious than they were hundreds or thousands of years ago. The effects of their piety in the West, however, are less overt. If there is a discernible difference, a major one is that nonbelievers today have more powerful tools at their disposal through social media and printed pages than in former times. By these means they can resist all formal religious indoctrination. In addition, the mega-phonetic use of television and radio amplifies their voices all around the world. That influence is now great. Why should doubters not be heard? Should the municipal use of religion to influence citizenry not be debated openly? Apologetics, so it is said, is a discipline of theology that was designed to be philosophically sensitive to opposing views.

How different things were in the not too distant past when mankind's outlook on the world and its continuance spurred robust debate among everyday citizens, chiefly within the guild of ancient philosophers. There is evidence for that claim. A book entitled *History of Theology* was composed, allegedly by a pupil of Aristotle (384BC-322BC). Eudemus of Rhodes (c.370BC-300BC) is the name by which he is popularly known. He edited some of Aristotle's writings and he was a friend of Theophrastus (c.372BC-c.287BC). It was believed by some that Eudemus had written a fine work of theological reference. Ancient Greek philosophy and theology at the time concerned discussions of the divine being. The culture which produced the great literatures of antiquity consisted of persons who were fascinated with a "creator" and with the "origin of things". It would be millennia later, during the Enlightenment, before those two disciplines would be permanently divided. Initial fissures became visible in the writings of Boethius (c.480-AD524), an avid reader of Plato (c.427-347BC) and of Aristotle. Boethius' *Theological Tractates* and *Consolation of Philosophy* show a creative academic approach to explaining every existing thing; but during the Renaissance clergy-men and non-clergy-men of the day came to view the essence of credible scholarship in a different way. Diverging predilections and some very specific scholarly objectives were determining factors. It resulted in the re-casting of religious belief, political opinions and alliances.

Even now, Protestant divines are not esteemed in degrees that are commensurate with the enduring influence once held by the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformers. The upshot of the Reformation and the so-called Counter-Reformation was not unity but greater division. The partisanship was obvious. To some extent the academy suffered. One should not suppose though that the humanist genius of Renaissance times was halted entirely by the ascendancy of Martin Luther (1483-1546), his peers or his successors. For a long time theology reigned as the 'Queen of the Sciences.' The School-men of Christian religion in the Middle Ages emphasized piety as well as the professional study of scripture. True, their method of study bore Aristotelian marks, and it was rhetorical in nature, but it combined classical Greek and Latin insights with Patristic interpretations. Theological inquiries took on a philosophical hue. The result is an extant corpus of Catholic literature, one of immense proportion whose creation marked a signal achievement. Too many of these writers composed exegetical works that are now overlooked.

Two publishing houses, The Aquinas Institute and Loreto publications, intend to effect a renewal. They aspire to change the attitude of 21<sup>st</sup> century readers, whose mainstream neglect of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Cornelius à Lapide (1567-1637), in particular, disavows the logic and common sense upon which western civilization originally was erected. These businesses have an uphill task. However, for those pilgrims willing to traverse the path the publishers now pave there are several thick volumes to read along the journey.

Until Karl Barth (1886-1968) composed his (unfinished) multi-volume *Church Dogmatics*, Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* stood in the front ranks of all theological projects. It is an outstanding contribution to philosophical theology for a Dominican priest of that day. Not without reason is Aquinas deemed the 'Angelic Doctor'. Because of the *Summa's* fame, Paul Tillich (1886-1965), a theologian of international repute within the liberal academic community, refused to describe his own theological enterprise as a summa because Aquinas' project was so exhaustive. Few scholars working in the theological sciences desire to see their academic insights compared to Aquinas' works: he left so few stones unturned; hence it is best to read Aquinas first, then move onward to all derivative literature.

For this enterprise the Aquinas Institute has produced some very large tomes. These dark, dominating blue hard-covers of the *Summa* line my bookshelves. The volumes are in three parts, covering more than 400 questions, each with sub-topics that are treated

lucidly. Inside each volume is a beautiful Latin text, carefully edited. On the facing side of the page is a close rendering in English. The *Summa Theologica* is a treasury of analytical logic. Much like a Catherine Wheel, it shoots sparks in different directions. Aquinas' method is resourceful. He notes down objections, one after another, and then meets each objection with thoughtful answers. The questions and answers reveal specific issues that distressed religious and irreligious persons. Moreover Aquinas shows great deference to Aristotle all the way through, but he does not typically use his name in the discussions. He simply refers to Aristotle as 'The Philosopher.' Patristic Fathers who wrote in Latin are cited profusely.

The Institute could have helped readers by providing an 'Introduction' which describes the historical situation and the need for the *Summa*, even recording why it yet is popular in Philosophy departments worldwide. Much more than a philosophy of religion is presented by Aquinas. Any reader of these topics, although he or she may be an unbeliever in any deity, can acquire technical equipment useful for oral and literary debate. Novices to the Latin language can reacquaint themselves with it by slowly deciphering it or by going on to become skillful in Aquinas' nuances. Some of the arguments are tedious; men of lesser genius have made similar grand attempts at working through their beliefs in print. Few of those texts became the impetus for an ongoing revival. Neo-Thomism, also known as Neo-Scholasticism, is a movement whose intellectual flame will not be extinguished. As long as students ruminate over the Doctor's concerns further gains will be made in understanding the 13<sup>th</sup> century's foremost philosophical theologian in the west.

Granted, Aquinas wasn't loved by all Catholic academics in the Occident that came after him. Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457), for one, did all he could to undermine the influence of scholasticism, particularly the form it took from Aquinas' hand. Ciceronian modes of thought were fashioned to rival Thomism. The end product was a humanism which reached back beyond Aquinas to classical Greek and Roman texts. But Aquinas was not forgotten. His cosmological arguments for the existence of God and many of his psychological observations (see below) continue to resonate. His notion of the liberty of the will passed through the centuries unchallenged until the Reformation. It was not wholly unlike the view of St. Augustine.

It is important to read Aquinas in large chunks. So for comparative purposes I have studied the text of Aquinas Institute's volumes alongside my two large 1846 volumes,

*Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, containing both Peter Lombard's Latin text of *Sentences* and Aquinas' Latin text of *Summa*. The text is essentially the same.

When treating of '**Whether There is a Natural Fear** (Q.41 Article 3)'

Aquinas first registers objections, then sets forth his view:

<p><b>Ad tertium sic proceditur.</b> Videtur quod timor aliquis sit naturalis. Dicit enim Damascenus, in III libro, quod est quidam timor naturalis, nolente anima dividi a corpore.</p>	<p><b>Objection 1:</b> It would seem that there is a natural fear. For Damascene says (<i>De Fide Orth.</i> iii, 23) that <i>there is a natural fear, through the soul refusing to be severed from the body</i></p>
<p><b>Praeterea,</b> timor ex amore oritur, ut dictum est. Sed est aliquis amor naturalis, ut Dionysius dicit, IV cap. de Div. Nom. Ergo etiam est aliquis timor naturalis.</p>	<p><b>Obj. 2:</b> Further, fear arises from love, as stated above (<u>A2</u>, ad 1). But there is a natural love, as Dionysius says (<i>Div. Nom.</i> iv). Therefore there is also a natural fear.</p>
<p><b>Praeterea,</b> timor opponitur spei, ut supra dictum est. Sed est aliqua spes naturae, ut patet per id quod dicitur Rom. IV, de Abraham, quod contra spem naturae, in spem gratiae credidit. Ergo etiam est aliquis timor naturae.</p>	<p><b>Obj. 3:</b> Further, fear is opposed to hope, as stated above (<u>Q40</u>, <u>A4</u>, ad 1). But there is a hope of nature, as is evident from Rom. 4:18, where it is said of Abraham that <i>against hope of nature, he believed in hope of grace</i>. Therefore there is also a fear of nature.</p>
<p><b>Sed contra,</b> ea quae sunt naturalia, communiter inveniuntur in rebus animatis et inanimatis. Sed timor non invenitur in rebus inanimatis. Ergo timor non est naturalis.</p>	<p><b>On the contrary,</b> That which is natural is common to things animate and inanimate. But fear is not in things inanimate. Therefore there is no natural fear.</p>
<p><b>Respondeo</b> dicendum quod aliquis motus dicitur naturalis, quia ad ipsum inclinatur natura. Sed hoc contingit dupliciter. Uno modo, quod totum perficitur a natura, absque aliqua operatione apprehensivae virtutis, sicut moveri sursum est motus naturalis ignis, et augeri est motus naturalis animalium et plantarum. Alio modo dicitur motus naturalis, ad quem natura inclinatur, licet non perficiatur nisi per apprehensionem, quia, sicut supra dictum est, motus cognitivae et appetitivae virtutis reducuntur in naturam, sicut in principium primum. Et per hunc modum, etiam ipsi actus apprehensivae virtutis, ut intelligere, sentire et memorari, et etiam motus appetitus animalis,</p>	<p><b>I answer that,</b> A movement is said to be natural, because nature inclines thereto. Now this happens in two ways. First, so that it is entirely accomplished by nature, without any operation of the apprehensive faculty: thus to have an upward movement is natural to fire, and to grow is the natural movement of animals and plants. Secondly, a movement is said to be natural, if nature inclines thereto, though it be accomplished by the apprehensive faculty alone: since, as stated above (<u>Q10</u>, <u>A1</u>), the movements of the cognitive and appetitive faculties are reducible to nature as to their first principle. In this way, even the acts of the apprehensive power, such as</p>

quandoque dicuntur naturales.

understanding, feeling, and remembering, as well as the movements of the animal appetite, are sometimes said to be natural.

Et per hunc modum potest dici timor naturalis. Et distinguitur a timore non naturali, secundum diversitatem obiecti. Est enim, ut philosophus dicit in II Rhetoric., timor de malo corruptivo, quod natura refugit propter naturale desiderium essendi, et talis timor dicitur naturalis. Est iterum de malo contristativo, quod non repugnat naturae, sed desiderio appetitus, et talis timor non est naturalis. Sicut etiam supra amor, concupiscentia et delectatio distincta sunt per naturale et non naturale.

And in this sense we may say that there is a natural fear; and it is distinguished from non-natural fear, by reason of the diversity of its object. For, as the Philosopher says (*Rhet.* ii, 5), there is a fear of *corruptive evil*, which nature shrinks from on account of its natural desire to exist; and such fear is said to be natural. Again, there is a fear of *painful evil*, which is repugnant not to nature, but to the desire of the appetite; and such fear is not natural. In this sense we have stated above (Q26, A1; Q30, A3; Q31, A7) that love, desire, and pleasure are divisible into natural and non-natural.

Sed secundum primam acceptionem naturalis, sciendum est quod quaedam de passionibus animae quandoque dicuntur naturales, ut amor, desiderium et spes, aliae vero naturales dici non possunt. Et hoc ideo, quia amor et odium, desiderium et fuga, important inclinationem quandam ad prosequendum bonum et fugiendum malum; quae quidem inclinatio pertinet etiam ad appetitum naturalem. Et ideo est amor quidam naturalis, et desiderium vel spes potest quodammodo dici etiam in rebus naturalibus cognitione carentibus. Sed aliae passionibus animae important quosdam motus ad quos nullo modo sufficit inclinatio naturalis. Vel quia de ratione harum passionum est sensus seu cognitio, sicut dictum est quod apprehensio requiritur ad rationem delectationis et doloris, unde quae carent cognitione, non possunt dici delectari vel dolere. Aut quia huiusmodi motus sunt contra rationem inclinationis naturalis, puta quod desperatio refugit bonum propter aliquam difficultatem; et timor refugit impugnationem mali contrarii, ad quod est inclinatio naturalis. Et ideo huiusmodi passionibus nullo modo attribuuntur rebus inanimatis.

But in the first sense of the word *natural*, we must observe that certain passions of the soul are sometimes said to be natural, as love, desire, and hope; whereas the others cannot be called natural. The reason of this is because love and hatred, desire and avoidance, imply a certain inclination to pursue what is good or to avoid what is evil; which inclination is to be found in the natural appetite also. Consequently there is a natural love; while we may also speak of desire and hope as being even in natural things devoid of knowledge. On the other hand the other passions of the soul denote certain movements, whereto the natural inclination is nowise sufficient. This is due either to the fact that perception or knowledge is essential to these passions (thus we have said, Q31, A1,3; Q35, A1, that apprehension is a necessary condition of pleasure and sorrow), wherefore things devoid of knowledge cannot be said to take pleasure or to be sorrowful: or else it is because such like movements are contrary to the very nature of natural inclination: for instance, despair flies from good on account of some difficulty; and fear shrinks from repelling a contrary evil; both of which are contrary to the inclination of nature. Wherefore such like passions are in no way ascribed to inanimate beings.

**Et per hoc** patet responsio ad obiecta.

**Thus** the Replies to the Objections are evident.

Aquinas had no problem delving into the intricacies of the mind, its mental processes and unpleasant feelings of *phobia*. It is clear that readers must make a supreme effort to stay with his very involved arguments. But in a world in which *fear* seizes hearts daily and governs the lives of many persons, some knowledge of its nature is still useful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As for Cornelius à Lapide's 33 volumes of *The Great Commentary (TGC)*, written entirely in Latin, it was a remarkable scholastic achievement. Each republished volume will be bound in sturdy, bright red hard-covers. The commentaries on the four Gospels were issued in 2007. Now *I Corinthians & II Corinthians* and *Galatians* (2016) are available in one volume. More prolific than the Protestant divine John Calvin (1509-1564), who lectured and published on so much of the Bible, à Lapide commented on all the canonical texts (except *Job* and *Psalms*) and deuterocanonical books. In the Foreword (p.vii) of the *Matthew* commentary of Loreto's new edition, Charles A Coulombe writes,

“The divorce between sanctity and scholarship that has grown since the Reformation is perhaps the greatest impediment today to the study of Scriptures or Theology of any kind. For the first fifteen centuries of Christianity's existence, it was presumed that one studied and commented on the Bible as part of one's own personal quest for holiness and salvation... from the time of Martin Luther, biblical research has tended to degenerate ever more into either an intellectual exercise or a search for textual weapons with which to belabor ideological opponents.”

The above words are part of the opening paragraph. The stance is clear. The Reformers' scholarship has proved to be, in one way or another, the force behind successive movements away from reverent reflection of scripture toward a more secular and polemical approach to reading canonical documents. Educated Protestants of the 21<sup>st</sup> century would dispute those claims for sure. Scholastic Protestants of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries of course could defend their theology point by point. E.g., Philip Melanchthon's (1497-1560) *Loci Communes Rerum Theologicarum* and Francis Turretin's (1623-1687)

*Institutes of Elenctic Theology* substantiate my assertion. But few modern Protestants in the west know the Latin well enough to read them directly. Interpretations of scholarly texts from that era now are derivative of English translations mainly; but when the Latin is inaccessible an English gloss still is preferable and profitable. On this point Catholics have reason to rejoice.

Born in the Netherlands, during the conflicts between Protestant Calvinists and Roman Catholics, the Jesuit à Laipide drew many Protestants homeward to Roman Catholic belief. His beliefs were held fervently, embracing those same convictions which were once shared by another Flemish theologian, Jacobus Latomus (1475-1544). The impressions à Lapide got from Reformed commentaries, and the judgments he issued on their value as contributions to sacred science were not favorable. Unlike Antoine A. Calmet (1672-1757), in his comments on scripture à Lapide did not withhold from public notice his personal beliefs on controversial subjects. While the study of Latin remained strong in Catholic quarters, à Lapide's texts were well known. But with the displacement of Latin's dominance in liturgy and in its application for scholarly instruction, also came a lack of acquaintance with his texts. Readers can be thankful for the translation-work of Anglo-Catholic T.W. Mossman (1826-1885), and for Loreto's re-publication of Mossman's renderings of *The Great Commentary*.

Technical minutiae, i.e., linguistic matters and so on, are restored. *Matthew* begins with à Lapide's 129-page study of prefatory themes. The observations are erudite, equally informative as a specialized analysis of Gospel origins and content, in pre-Enlightenment days. The classic Douay-Rheims translation is utilized. His remarks are cross-referenced in one volume with those in another volume, as at *II Corinthians* 1:20 where his notes refer back to *Matthew* 5:37. Interesting remarks on *Galatians* 1:8 (p.614f.) highlight the polemical way in which the verse was broadly interpreted centuries ago: "*But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach a gospel to you besides that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema*". At issue was Paul's claim of the mingling of Judaism and Christianity among devotees of Christ; Protestants and Catholics used the book as a foil in Reformation debates. So à Lapide:

"In the same way I will now conclude as follows: On the rise of Luther, Calvin, Menno, and any other Protestants, either the Church and the true faith came to an end or they did not. For these two—the true Church and the true faith—are necessarily connected, so much so that if in a single point, say the invocation of

saints, the Church were to leave the track of the true faith, she must become heretical, so as not to be the Church of God but of Satan; just as any individual who maintains a single heresy, even though he correctly believes all the other articles of faith, is a heretic. I repeat therefore, when Calvin arose, either the Church came to an end or she did not; if she did, and had not existed since the time of S. Gregory the Great, as the Protestants say, then the Church had been extinct for nine-hundred years, that is to say, the world for nine-hundred years was without true faith, true religion, sacraments, Church, and salvation; therefore for nine-hundred years Christ deserted His bride; therefore the eternal kingdom of Christ had fallen, for Christ reigns in His Church; therefore the gates of hell had prevailed against His Church; therefore Calvin was born outside the Church, was no member of the Church, but an unbeliever, a heretic or a pagan; therefore he had no claim to be received by the people, by the world, and listened to as one of the faithful, but he should have been despised and rejected as an unbeliever who did not belong to the Church. If, however, the Church had not come to an end, and Calvin was born, baptized, educated, and brought up in the Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church, that Church was clearly a true Church, holding true faith. Therefore, when he withdrew from her, and shut himself up in his new dogmas, he separated himself from the true faith and from the Church, and became an apostate. Therefore, when he established another and a reformed church, it was not a true and apostolic church, but an apostate, schismatical, heretical church that he founded—a mistress and school not of faith, but of new doctrines and heresies. Let a fair-minded reader, who sincerely wavers but seeks the true faith, outside which no one can be saved, consider and weigh the force of this dilemma, and ask whether there is any escape from its conclusions, whether the rule here given is not a touchstone of what is true in doctrine and in faith.”

Those are plain statements (and analogous anti-Catholic statements can be found in Protestant literature of that day). Millions of people still adhere to à Lapide’s views. Although the language of professional writers has softened, polemical discourse continues among scholars and lay-persons whose Reformed and counter-Reformed views remain unacceptable to each other. The historical value of the debates is immeasurable. A number of readers will find some of it off-putting; objectionable testimonials aside, extracts from the Church Fathers appear in *TGC* in great quantity; and explanations of Greek and Hebrew idiom are not uncommon, turning up on page after page. Cornelius à

Lapide has the temerity to read critically, preferring the Greek and Vulgate texts over divergences from the received texts made by St. Jerome or St. Ephrem (see *Gal.* 1:7 notes).

Through these volumes, students of early and later medieval Roman Catholic scholarship have a large fund of knowledge available to them. Their expositions of biblical texts have few rivals among contemporary Catholic literature. In the English language, the closest thing to Aquinas' *Summa*, which bears witness to traditional Thomistic theological method, is Joseph Pohle's (1852-1922) twelve-volume *Dogmatic Theology*, also republished by Loreto as the Pohle-Preuss *Manual of Dogmatic Theology* (2014) in 6 volumes. Seemingly, modern Catholic theologians are radically different today in their approaches to Catholic dogma.

No series of Catholic biblical commentaries currently on the market reproduces the singular, but erudite views displayed in à Lapide's work. *TGC* established a scholarly benchmark. One wonders if it can be duplicated by any Roman Catholic exegete writing presently: a critical, albeit skeptical outlook has now firmly displaced the intellectual piety once so prevalent. And as to the lasting value of much of the available avant-garde Catholic research that I have perused, I too am somewhat skeptical. Much of it does little to inspire piety or devotion in the Church's adherents.

I heartily recommend, however, that the beginning of any reader's education of Catholic scholasticism start with the philosophical and exegetical writings of Thomas Aquinas and Cornelius à Lapide.



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