

certain decent and humane values. To support those values may soon become a considerably more radical gesture than it has been for many generations. But it is not merely by supporting those values that we shall solve the only real political question which in the long term lies before us – the threat of fascism. If I were a member of the National Front, I would feel ambiguously about the possibility of a Conservative election victory. On the one hand, a Conservative government is more likely than a Labour one to steal some of the National Front's clothes; on the other hand it is likely to prepare the legislative and ideological context which will conveniently facilitate the National Front's rise to power. The Front is doubtless banking on the fact that a Conservative government will both help to swing public opinion in their direction, and, by proving itself incapable of muzzling the unions, demonstrate the truth that only the measures proposed by the Front itself could possibly do so. In this they are not only cunning but absolutely correct. The only way in which capitalism can solve its difficulties with the unions is, ultimately, by resorting to fascism, much as it detests the idea. Otherwise we will be stuck with the contradictory situation we have now, where everybody agrees with the right to withdraw one's labour but objects to strikes. In the end, as the National Front rightly see, it is only a fascistic form of capitalism which can remove this contradiction. Or, of course, socialism.

TERRY EAGLETON

St Thomas Aquinas as a Dominican

Brian Davies O.P.

St Simeon the New Theologian, telling the story of a young man called George writes: "For love for what he sought separated him from the world, and creaturely things and all affairs, and made him entirely of the Spirit and light. Yet all the while he lived in the middle of a city and was responsible for a house and occupied with slaves and free men, doing and achieving all the things that pertain to the present life."¹

With only a little modification, this description applies equally well to Aquinas, at least if we accept the accounts of him handed down to us by his early biographers.² Given to rapture and relig-

ious ecstasy, supposedly “bound with a bond of chastity that shall never be loosened” (Gui, Chapter 7) he spent his active life in an entirely urban context as writer, teacher, administrator and advisor. He dined and dined with kings; he had the ear of the papacy and highest nobility as well as the offer of the loftiest ecclesiastical preferment. The *Lives of the Brethren* says that: “One day somebody asked Master Jordan ‘What Rule do you follow’? He replied, ‘The Rule of the Friars Preachers. And this is their Rule: to live an upright life, to learn and to teach’.”³ We need to see Aquinas as a man whose rule shows itself in his life and its handling of study and teaching. In this respect, although he doubtless represents ideals common to more than one religious order, common to many Christians indeed, Aquinas is typically Dominican. The Prologue to the *Primitive Constitutions* observes that: “Our Order was established particularly for the sake of preaching and the salvation of souls, and that our whole study should be principally and earnestly devoted to our being useful to the souls of others.”⁴ If a man’s spirituality is an expression of what he regards as a way of getting to God, this stated aim of the Dominicans sums up Aquinas’s spirituality. People are commonly divided into ‘actives’ and ‘contemplatives’ – the implication being that spirituality has to do with contemplation and passivity. But the distinction is a difficult one, particularly so in the case of Aquinas. His spirituality is one of contemplative activity.

It is important to remember that Aquinas was a Dominican. We are used to a situation where distinctions between religious orders appear blurred. A man may find himself professed in one order while acknowledging the real possibility of succeeding in another. It needs to be emphasised therefore that Aquinas’s choice of the Dominicans was an extraordinarily conscious one.⁵ A recent essay on St Thomas’s biography observes that: “Ronald Knox once described Tertullian’s lapse into the Montanist heresy by saying that it was as if Cardinal Newman had joined the Salvation Army. Aquinas’s becoming a Dominican seems to have produced something of the same shock.”⁶ On the same theme, Fr Giles Hibbert suggests that: “It is slightly as if, not so much today as some few years back, the product of Eton and Christchurch, all set for a distinguished diplomatic career, went all hippy and devoted himself to social work in the slums.”⁷

There were, in fact, a number of forces which ought to have pulled Aquinas away from the Dominicans. His early life and training was Benedictine and later he was offered and declined the Abbacy of Monte Cassino.⁸ He joined the Dominicans at an unusually early age⁹ (about nineteen) when strong family pressures were all Benedictine. At the time he was studying in Naples the influence of the Dominicans there was less than paramount. There is evid-

ence that some were forced to leave in 1239, although it is also likely that it was a Dominican, Friar John of San Guiliano, who was Thomas's adviser and friend at this time.

What was it about the Dominicans, then, that harmonised with the personality of Aquinas? One thing was clearly the traditional Dominican insistence on the value of study. Gilson argues that: "If we put together the few statements St Francis made on the matter of studies it is clear that he never condemned learning for itself, but that he had no desire to see it developed in his order. In his eyes it was not in itself an evil, but its pursuit appeared to him unnecessary and dangerous. Unnecessary, since a man may save his soul and win others to save theirs without it; dangerous because it is an endless source of pride."¹⁰ Few would doubt the wisdom of this principle, but it has not been glorified by Dominicans. In his dealings with the Albigensians it was St Dominic's practice to use the tools of his opponents. Thus, learning and the use of disputation (notably at Montreal) occupied an important part of his study. He quickly sought to establish his men in centres of learning, especially Paris. In Mandonnet's words, at the time of Dominic neither monks nor canons regular "could be used in a ministry that demanded, above all, a Church militia that was both well lettered and actually in contact with the social life of the times. The preachers with their new type of vocation and a mode of organisation that was also new, were the answer to the needs of a new age."¹¹

It was as a member of this Church militia that Aquinas functioned, and, as his biographers William of Tocco and Bernard Gui show, it was precisely as such that he was valued by his brethren. Thus we have the novelty noted by Grabmann, that Aquinas seems to have been the first person canonised for being a theologian and teacher.¹²

There can be little doubt that Grabmann has, to a certain extent, overstated his case. Aquinas was venerated as a holy man within days of his death at Fossanova and the early biographies are full of details about someone whose life was anything but that of the antiseptic academic. But it would be difficult to dissociate Aquinas's spirituality from his study. He was primarily a student and teacher, in Naples, Paris, Viterbo and Cologne. He even died on the job. "As a bee gathers honey he busily stored his mind with sweet treasures of doctrine that in due time would enrich many others." That is how Gui describes Thomas's life at Cologne under Albert. "Thomas", he observes, "was delighted to find himself at Cologne sitting at the feet of such a master: it seemed to him that he had found what he was seeking and was drinking of the water for which he thirsted." (Gui, Chapter 9). The conjunction of Albert and Aquinas is a natural one, the former standing to

the latter as ‘brother and master’, the language used in the *Paradiso*. Dante saw Thomas’s work as asceticism, a task for God,¹³ and Gui’s biography seems to confirm that this is how Aquinas saw it himself. According to his *socius*, Reginald of Piperno, Aquinas maintained that “prayer and the help of God had been of greater service to him in the search for truth than his natural intelligence and habit of study.” (Gui, Chapter 15). We are told that

He never set himself to study or argue a point, or lecture or write or dictate, without first having recourse inwardly – but with tears – to prayer for the understanding and the words required by the subject . (Gui, *ibid.*)

Chapter 16 of Gui’s *Life* contains a delightful account of the possible effects of this. Apparently Aquinas was once puzzled by a passage in Isaiah.

For many days he could get no farther with it, though he prayed and fasted assiduously, begging for light to see into the prophet’s mind. At last, one night when he had stayed up to pray, his *socius* overheard him speaking, as it seemed, with other persons in the room; though what was being said the *socius* could not make out, nor did he recognise the other voices. Then these fell silent and he heard Thomas’s voice calling: ‘Reginald, my son, get up and bring a light and the commentary on Isaiah; I want you to write for me’.

The story ends with the information that Aquinas’s problems were solved by a tutorial from Peter and Paul.

How seriously such accounts are to be taken is a matter for individual decision. The evidence for the present one is not bad, but even if we dismiss such testimony there is plenty of first hand confirmation regarding Aquinas’s attitude to study. Take, for example, the letter to Brother John, *De Modo Studendi*.¹⁴ Having been asked how to study, Aquinas significantly begins his advice with the words *Haec est ergo monitio mea de vita tua*. Study and life are regarded here as all together and the whole is placed in a Dominican context:

Strive to put whatsoever you can in the cupboard of your mind, as though you were wanting to fill a vessel to the brim... Follow in the footsteps of that blessed Dominic who, while he yet had life, for his fellow traveller, brought forth and produced foliage, blossoms, fruit – fruit both serviceable and astonishing – in the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts

The Dominican emphasis on the value of study, emerges again when Aquinas writes of contemplation in the *Summa Theologiae*. And once again we can see the role that study plays in his spirituality. Here ‘study’ means ‘the use of reason’. Can one talk about active and contemplative life? asks Aquinas. He replies that one certainly can for “every living thing is recognised as such by that

operation which is most proper to it and upon which it is most bent . . . the life of men (is said to consist in) intellectual knowledge and action in accordance with reason." (2a2ae, 171, 1.) In Aquinas's way of thinking man is made for the beatific vision. By nature and destiny he is thus a knower. "The division into active and contemplative", he argues, "does not apply to life in general, but to the life of man, who is the kind of thing he is through having an intellect." (2a2ae, 179, 1 and 2.) The important thing is that the knowledge of God is not simply, so to speak, laid on. We shall see presently that Thomas has a rigorously embracing theory of God's activity; but he also insists on the need for effort:

As regards the very essence of its activity, the contemplative life belongs to the intellect; but as regards that which moves one to the exercise of that activity, it belongs to the will, which moves all other faculties, and even the intellect, to their acts, as stated above. (2a2ae, 180, 1. Cf. 1a, 82,4; 1a2ae, 9,1.)

Thus it is that study intervenes and theology, as defined by Thomas in the question 'Whether theology (*sacra doctrina*) is a science', becomes important as a preparation to receive.

A man comes finally to gaze upon simple truth only by progressive steps. Consequently, the contemplative life has only one activity in which it finally terminates and from which it derives its unity, namely contemplation of truth, but it has several activities by which it arrives at this final activity. Some of these have to do with the understanding of principles from which one proceeds to contemplation of truth; others with the deduction from these principles to the truth one seeks to know. ¹⁵

Thus Aquinas recommends reasoning, learning and reading. Finally one's own "personal application is necessary, and hence meditation is required." (ad. 4)

It may seem from all this that Aquinas is something of a spiritual élitist, a sort of medieval Basilides. This brings us to another group of elements in Aquinas's teaching on the spiritual life. An unsympathetic portrait of Aquinas might present him as a classical anti-Lutheran insisting on the need to work out one's salvation and compounding the error by making salvation depend on intellectual ability. Certainly he often insists on the role of the intellect. But the fact that Aquinas will not measure a man solely by his powers of reasoning emerges when he distinguishes between the art of reasoning about Revelation and the wisdom in understanding Revelation that comes from God. Aquinas distinguishes wisdom and knowledge. There are, he says, two ways of looking at each: as gratuitous graces (*gratia gratis data*) and as Gifts. In the first case "a person is so full of the knowledge of things divine and human that he is capable of instructing the faithful and refuting

opponents.” (1a2ae, 68, 5 ad 1.) In the second, “Wisdom and knowledge are simply perfections of the human mind which dispose it to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit in the knowledge of divine and human things. It is evident that Gifts of this sort are present in everyone who has charity.” (1a2ae 68,5 ad 1.) Perfection, for Aquinas, does not come from an effort of reasoning only and is not attributable to men. In *De Perfectione Vitae Spiritualis* he is emphatic:

Consistit autem principaliter spiritualis vita in charitate, quam qui non habet, nihil esse spiritualiter reputatur . . . Simpliciter ergo in spiritualis vita perfectus est, qui est in charitate perfectus. (Chapter 1.)

Again, from the *Summa*: “This sympathy or connaturality with divine things results from charity which unites us to God . . . The wisdom of which we are speaking presupposes charity.” (2a2ae, 45, 1 and 3.) Thus one can be a good theologian and a miserable sinner simultaneously since good theology can result from what Aquinas calls acquired intellectual virtues. (Cf. 1a, 1, 3-5). He distinguishes wisdom from “the knowledge of divine things which one achieves through study and rational investigation” adding “That, not the gift of wisdom, can co-exist with mortal sin.” (2a2ae 45,4). Theology only bears fruit by gift of God through faith. “The gift of wisdom differs from the acquired virtue of wisdom. The latter comes through human effort, the former *comes down from above* . . . the gift of wisdom presupposes faith.” (2a2ae 45, 2 and 2). It is not that Aquinas denigrates human initiative; man, not God, is responsible for sin. (1a, 19,9. Cf 1a,23, 3ad 3). He does, however, have a very pessimistic view of man’s ability to grasp God unaided. And in legacy from the Pseudo-Dionysius, he refuses to over-rate anything we say of God. Certainly, he adds, we must speak of God and *sacra doctrina* is the highest science; but God is ineffable and we rise to him only through his activity on us.

Now it is not only every natural motion which is from God as primary mover, but every formal perfection is from him as primary activity. Thus the action of the intellect, and of any created reality whatsoever, depends on God in two ways: firstly, by having the form by which it acts from him; secondly by being moved by him into action . . . Thus we must say that for the knowledge of any truth, man needs divine assistance so that his intellect can be moved by God to actualise itself . . . Yet by his grace God sometimes miraculously instructs some men about things which can be known by natural reason.

(1a2ae, 109, 1.)

Here, all traces of spiritual elitism and self-congratulation are removed at a stroke. It is the intellect that knows God but God

moves the intellect. Even the choice of God is God's responsibility.

Man's turning to God does indeed take place by his free decision; and in this sense man is enjoined to turn himself to God. But the free decision can only be turned to God when God turns it to himself. (1a2ae, 109, 6 ad 1.)

Again,

That good movement of free choice itself, by which a man prepares to receive the gift of grace, is the action of a free choice moved by God. (1a2ae, 112, 2. Cf 114, 1; 111, 3).

One is reminded here of St Vincent Ferrer who also declares the need to cultivate a dominating and humble sense of man's dependence on God. In the *Summa's* discussion of prophecy Aquinas maintains that –

God can immediately cause to be, all at once, matter, disposition and form. So too in spiritual effects (*effectibus spiritualibus*) God requires no pre-existing disposition of the sort which would be demanded in the order of nature. Furthermore God could by creation, all at once, produce the subject himself, so that the soul in this person would be disposed towards prophecy in its creation and be given a prophetic grace.

(2a2ae. 172. 3).

In a similar passage Ferrer writes:

And consider very carefully that it is not from yourself that you have any ability to achieve any good, or any grace, or any concern for virtue: Christ gave them to you out of sheer mercy, and if he had wanted to he could have left you in the mud and given them to someone else. (*De Vita Spirituali* 4.)

We can see from all this that a rigid distinction between nature and grace must be carefully handled in an appreciation of Aquinas's theology. Of course, he does talk at considerable length about the efforts that men must stir themselves to make. They must keep the commandments and strive after intellectual and moral virtues. But everything except sin comes from God and a man cannot even sin without God's permission. The action of God lies, for Aquinas, at the heart of the Christian life. It is also its goal. Perhaps the best illustration of this comes in his account of faith. One cannot, for Aquinas, manufacture faith. It must be said to derive from God in two senses. First there is the matter to be believed. Although he accepts that all knowledge comes from God Aquinas recognises a knowledge of God which can be called 'natural' in that it is genuine but not knowledge of what is uniquely proclaimed in Christian preaching. On top of this we have Christian revelation and belief in this must, for Aquinas, be regarded as a result of what one might call an additional push from God.

The things of faith surpass man's understanding and so become part of man's knowledge only because God reveals

them, (2a2ae, 6, 1).

In this sense Aquinas holds that faith comes from God in that what is believed is to be spoken of as revealed. But faith is also God's work in a second sense, as something possessed by man because God wills him to possess it.

Since in assenting to the things of faith a person is raised above his own nature, he has this assent from a supernatural source influencing him; this source is God. The assent of faith, which is its principal act, therefore, has as its cause God moving us inwardly through grace. (2a2ae, 6, 1).

Here, presumably, one finds the fruits of St Thomas's obviously copious reading and appreciation of Augustine; Chenu attributes Thomas's teaching on grace from the *Contra Gentiles* onward to his study of the *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum* and the *De Dono Perseverantiae*.¹⁶

Far from being a pure philosopher in the sense of being someone who relies only on what he can think up for himself, Aquinas, when looked at as a whole, thus begins and ends with God. For he believes that God is the beginning and end of all things. The *Prima Pars* begins with an Aristotelian-like analysis of man (75-89) but, as Chenu puts it, "it includes, immediately following, the study of the 'condition' of the first man before the Fall (questions 90-102), an aspect one could hardly expect to find in Aristotle's treatise *Ἐπι Πνεύματι*. Within the moral analysis of sin, moreover, Saint Thomas introduces as an essential, if novel, chapter a study of that mysterious sin which he sees as the major and permanent cause of man's later condition. Such developments are not simply material additions; rather they involve the transposition of the entire conception of man within new perspectives". p 55 It is well to remind ourselves of the importance Aquinas attaches to the tool upon which the Christian has got to rely when philosophical activity, so to speak, gives up. The Bible is crucial for Aquinas, a fact which is often ignored. In contrast to the systematic theology of the commentaries on the *Sentences*, the *Summa Theologiae* includes three long tracts on Biblical theology. Clearly, for Aquinas the main thing is either to begin with the Bible or else to allow one's thinking to be influenced by it. In this Thomas reflects his age. Thirteenth century theological teaching regarded the Bible as basic and Aquinas, after all, was *magister in sacra pagina* devoting time to purely Biblical exposition. Mandonnet assumes that Thomas gave two weekly courses on Scripture at Paris and daily lectures at Naples. It seems that during the twenty years before his arrival at St Jacques there was intensive Biblical study under the direction of Hugh of Saint Cher.¹⁷ The fact is not surprising and is attributable in no small measure to the influence of Dominic, the friars and their proposed return to evangelical life.

That the form taken by this return met with Aquinas's approval goes without saying. We have already noted the self-conscious manner in which his choice of the Dominicans must be viewed and, specifically, one must take account of the fact that he defends them systematically by replying around 1256 to William of Saint Amour in *Contra impugnates Dei cultum et religionem*. Among other tracts, as a response to the work of Gérard d'Abbeville he produced *Contra pestiferam doctrinam retrahentium homines a religionis ingressu* in 1269-70. (Cf 2a2ae, 182-189). Aquinas's defence in the secular-mendicant controversy is not just an approval of the mendicants. Unlike the 'brown' Franciscans, Aquinas refuses to see the essence of spirituality in evangelical poverty. His line, which has more in common with that of the later Conventual Franciscans, is that in charity alone is the essence of perfection. That the whole issue of defending mendicant life engaged Aquinas deeply at a personal level is clear from the mere language of his contribution to the debate. Austerely detached and unheated as he may be in most of the philosophical writings, he is positively vitriolic in the *Contra retrahentes*:

If any man desires to contradict my words, let him not do so by chattering before boys, but let him write and publish his writings, so that intelligent persons may judge what is true, and may be able to confute what is false by the authority of the Truth. ¹⁸

St Catherine of Siena is supposed to have told Raymond of Capua that "The greatest consolation she had in this life was talking about God or discussing God with intelligent people."¹⁹ Humbert of Romans maintains that "preachers are the mouth of God. No human activity is so noble as talking, because it is in this especially that man excels the animals. So preaching, being an activity of the mind, is noble task."²⁰

Dominicans are supposed to be great talkers, but what place does language have in Aquinas's spirituality? Clearly it was an essential part of Aquinas's life as writer and teacher even if he lacks the rhetoric and literary magnetism of an Augustine or Kierkegaard. As we have seen he holds that there is a grace to be gained through the study of theology and theology is only talk about God. It is, however, possible to infer from this that Aquinas merely peddles a spirituality of understanding, a kind of cosy and assertive religion of the kind satirised by Matthew Arnold when he wrote about talking of God as if he were the man in the next street. And this is not the case. A biographical corrective can be seen in the famous reported statement to Reginald of Piperno that "such things have been revealed to me that all I have taught and written seems quite trivial to me now." (Gui, Chapter 27)

The theoretical background to this remark (sometimes curiously

and stupidly interpreted as a retraction of some kind) can be found at various stages in the published writings. As we have seen, Aquinas is deeply pessimistic of our ability to contain God in language. We can know that God is and we can make true statements about him but we cannot know what God is in himself. We do not, if you like, know what the word 'God' means. Clearly, he argues, God can be seen and enjoyed; he can, in a sense, be laid hold of:

And thus comprehension is one of the three endowments of the blessed, corresponding to hope as does vision to faith and fruition or enjoyment to charity . . . the blessed . . . see him for ever in their sight, and holding him they enjoy him as their ultimate goal fulfilling all their desires. (1a, 12, 7 ad 1).

All the same,

no created mind can attain the perfect sort of understanding that is intrinsically possible of God's essence . . . it is impossible for any created mind to understand God infinitely; impossible, therefore, to comprehend him. (1a, 12, 7).

Even though we have natural theology, mere reasoning cannot give us God's essence:

The knowledge that is natural to us has its source in the senses and extends just as far as it can be led by sensible things; from these, however, our understanding cannot reach to the divine essence. (1a, 12, 12).

The reason is partly Aristotelian. We know things through language and language is earth-bound.

Our souls, so long as we are in this life, have their being in corporeal matter, hence they cannot by nature know anything except what has its form in matter or what can be known through such things. (1a, 12, 11. Cf. 1a, 12, 4).

In so far as God has given us *sacra doctrina* it is as a concession to our nature.

Holy Scripture fittingly delivers divine and spiritual realities under bodily guises. For God provides for all things according to the kind of things they are. Now we are of the kind to reach the world of intelligence through the world of sense, since all our knowledge takes its rise through sensation. (1a, 1, 9).

One cannot know God's essence as one knows that buttercups are yellow. The latter kind of knowledge is restrictive. But it is important to remember that it is not, for Aquinas, the only kind of knowledge. We look in vain for first hand reports of Aquinas's mystical experiences; he is, that is to say, no St Theresa, no Lady Julian. But he certainly entertains the idea of mystical experience in certain familiar senses. Sometimes God's essence is knowable.

A person can be in this life in two ways. First, actually, that is, so far as he is in fact using his bodily senses, and under these conditions contemplation in the present life can in no

way attain to a vision of God's essence. (2a2ae, 180, 5)

There is, however, rapture. Here, the "soul is joined to the body as its substantial form yet does not use the bodily senses or even the imagination." (2a2ae, 180, 5) With the senses put aside there is, Thomas concludes "a simple contemplation of intelligible truth" comparable with "knowledge of first principles which we know by simple intuition." (ad 2. Cf. 2a2ae, 175, 4)

For Aquinas, the aim of the Christian is to get beyond words. Here we can see traces of Plato. At the same time he insists that we need language and intellectual and moral virtues. Here we find Aristotle at work. The two tendencies are well exemplified in *De Manifestatione Divinae Cognitionis*.²¹

God is indeed respected by silence. But this does not mean that we may say nothing about him, nor inquire into him, but that we should understand that (however much we may say or inquire), we fall short of fully grasping him.

The mention of Aristotle at this point reminds one that it is, perhaps, as a Christian Aristotelian that Aquinas is best known. The description is justifiable, in so far as any such uses of jargon can be, but one can still exaggerate its value. The corner-stone of Aquinas's theological structure is God, and it is the Christian God at that, God as revealed in Christ. It would be foolish to forget that for Aquinas it is the Incarnation that takes us where Aristotle could not go. Aquinas regards the Incarnation as giving us revelation and hence as providing the necessary condition for anything properly called theology. Aquinas is no slave of Aristotle whatever he may have thought about Aristotle on slavery, and it is fair enough for Bertrand Russell to have commented that "the *De Anima* leads much more naturally to the view of Averroes than to that of Aquinas."²²

In Aquinas's writings, *sicut patet per philosophum* does not imply that something is right because Aristotle said it but that Aristotle said it in a way that throws light on the problem. In his commentary on the *Physics* (8,2) he explicitly refers to "those who vainly endeavour to prove that Aristotle said nothing against the faith", and in his comments on *sacra doctrina* there is a dismissive allusion to authority which is "weakest when based on what human beings have discerned." (1a, 1, 8 ad 2)

At the same time, however, Aristotle is a dominating influence on Aquinas and this is of relevance for the topic of spirituality. For Aquinas as for Aristotle it is by means of sense experience that knowledge is achieved. Instead of regarding sense experience as an aberration therefore he regards it as good. In 1a2ae, 31, 5 Aquinas allows that "physical and sensory pleasures" are not "greater than spiritual and intellectual pleasures"; but he also says that sensuality is good and sexuality is good. Even the renuncia-

tion of wealth is only a way to perfection and it is allowed that a rich man may be perfect if his spirit is not trapped by riches but is totally joined to God. "Abstinence from food and drink", Aquinas drily observes, "does not of itself relate to salvation." (3a,40,2) It cannot be sufficiently emphasised that the whole basis of Aquinas's ethical thinking is poles apart from a stern exaltation of duty. His discussion of morality, we may say, revolves not around the question 'What ought I to do?' but 'How can I be happy?' "For the emotions", he explains (1a2ae, 24, 3). "are not 'diseases' or 'disturbances' of the soul, except precisely when they are not under rational control . . . Emotion leads one towards sin in so far as it is uncontrolled by reason; but in so far as it is rationally controlled, it is part of the virtuous life." Aquinas is no philosophical idealist in the style of Berkeley. The world about us is no illusion. Furthermore, it is created by God and, as Aquinas blandly remarks, "What God has created is good." (*Contra Gentiles* 3, 69). The path to God thus begins for St Thomas with the world around us. Rather than urging escape from it, rather than insisting on its unreality, his counsel is that it should be used and enjoyed. It is even a medium of communication with God and hence, says Aquinas, we have the sacraments. Are they really necessary? Certainly, he replies, and that for three reasons:

The first is taken from the way in which human nature functions in achieving knowledge of spiritual or intelligible realities. It has the special property of arriving at this knowledge deductively through its experience of physical and sensible realities . . . Hence it is appropriate that in bestowing certain aids to salvation upon man the divine wisdom should make use of physical and sensible signs called the sacraments . . . (Secondly) . . . the remedy designed to heal man has to be applied to that part of his nature affected by the sickness. Hence it was appropriate for God to apply spiritual medicine to men by means of certain physical signs . . . The third reason is taken from the fact that in his activities man is particularly prone to involve himself with physical things. Lest, therefore, it should be too hard for him totally to dispense with physical actions he was given certain physical practices to observe in the sacraments . . . Through the sacraments, therefore, sensible things are used to instruct man in a manner appropriate to his own nature. (3a, 61, 1).

Not surprisingly, therefore, Aquinas is prepared to offer practical advice to those who have problems resolvable in a down to earth way. Are you worried about God's existence? Study the way nature behaves. "People", says Aquinas, "need pleasure as remedies for all sorts of grief and sorrow." (1a2ae, 31, 5 ad 1). Are you, then, bored or depressed? Have a bath or go to sleep or have

a good cry. (1a2ae, 38, 2). Are you in a state of sorrow or pain? Then seek out a friend. (1a2ae, 38, 3). The last point is particularly interesting from a Dominican viewpoint. "I could very well have made men in such a way that they all had everything, but I preferred to give different gifts to different people, so that they would all need each other."

That is how God speaks in St Catherine's *Dialogues* (*Dialogue 7*) and the emphasis on fraternal dependence is something found from the beginning of Dominican life. *Domnus* Dominic became Brother Dominic and his followers were Friars Preachers, preaching brothers. Vicaire²³ refers to Dominic's 'universalité' and 'sa volonté de communion fraternelle'. The tradition is taken up by Aquinas. Certainly it is the individual who knows God, but getting to know God does not exclude *amicitia* and it may also require the use of dialogue. Presumably, this accounts for Aquinas's own practice, for, as Pieper observes,²⁴ "In his own teaching at the university of Paris he cultivated the oral *disputatio* to an extent hitherto unknown. In fact, Thomas actually appears to have invented a particular form, the *disputatio de quolibet* . . . And he poured tremendous energy into this mode of teaching . . . from 1256-1259. Thomas regularly held two major disputations a week." The communal aspect of Aquinas's religious thinking plays a large part in his writing. He allows for a direct and unmediated illumination of the individual by God, but the absolute solitary is not someone with whom he seems much concerned. Brother John in *De Modo Studendi* is told to "hesitate before visiting the common room" and to love his cell "by making constant use of it." But even in his cell John is supposed to be learning from others. And Aquinas is clear that both theology and contemplation spring from human contact, the former through life in the Church which hands on the revelation for the theologian to work on, and the latter from the practice of charity manifest in activity. "It may also be said", he observes, "that the active life is a disposition for the contemplative life." Later he quotes Gregory: "Those who wish to hold the citadel of contemplation must first train in the field of good works." On this he comments that "the active life precedes the contemplative life because it disposes for the contemplative life." (2a2ae, 181, 2 ad 3; 2a2ae, 182, 4; 2a2ae, 182, 4). It is not surprising that when Thomas speaks of Christ as a model to follow one of the aspects on which he concentrates is Christ's worldliness. Asking 'Whether it was becoming for Christ to lead an austere life in this world', he denies that Christ or anyone else had to be completely world-denying. "It is," he comments, "most fitting that he who associates with others should conform to their manner of living . . . And therefore it was most fitting for Christ to conform to others as regards eating and drinking." (3a, 40, 2)

drinking.” (3a, 40, 2).

In the article following he locates Christ’s poverty in the context of preaching.

One is again reminded that Aquinas’s spirituality is grounded in effort and it would be naive to forget the place that simple labour had in his life. There is a tendency to concentrate on the supposedly ‘mystical’ details in his biography, the references to his love of solitude, his ecstasy at Mass, his levitations and abstractions in company. But all this needs to be seasoned with a good pinch of salt. Tocco and Gui allege that Thomas went into a state of ecstasy when writing the *Contra Gentiles*. Much of this survives in the famous *littera inintelligibilis*²⁵ and what emerges from a study of this is that “ecstasy, if it occurred, did not exempt Thomas from the usual pains of literary composition. The autograph shows the erasures, corrections, changes of phrasing, recasting of passages and all the other evidences of the travail of composition and the growth of an author’s thought on the way to definitive expression.”²⁶ On this M. B. Crowe rightly observes that “with all this evidence before him a biographer would be slow to apply the word ‘ecstatic’ to the composition of the *Contra Gentiles*.” (p. 277)

It comes back to the remark made earlier: Aquinas’s spirituality is one of contemplative activity.

The contemplative life is, absolutely speaking, more perfect than the active life which is taken up with bodily actions; but the active life according to which a man, by preaching and teaching, gives to others the fruits of his contemplation is more perfect than the life by which a man contemplates alone, because such a life presupposes an abundance of contemplation. And therefore Christ chose such a life. (3a, 40, 1 ad 2).

This remark dates from the end of Aquinas’s life and, we must suppose, it represents his mature thinking. A brief essay like the present cannot hope to do justice to the richness of Aquinas’s writing, but perhaps it goes some way to making it clear that the statement is typical both of Aquinas and of the Order he did so much to represent and influence. The more one reads Aquinas the harder it becomes to forget that he was a Dominican.

- 1 ‘George’ is Simeon. Text in *Catechesis* 22 (168–173).
- 2 The major sources for Aquinas’s life are (1) the minutes of the first canonization enquiry at Naples, 1319 in *Fontes Vitae S. Thomae*, pp. 264–407; (2) biographies by William of Tocco, Bernard Gui and Peter Calo; (3) *Bonum universale de apibus* by Thomas of Cantimpré (1201–1272); Gérard de Frachet, *Vitae Fratrum Ordinis Praedicatorum* and *Cronica Ordinis*; (4) Tolomeo of Lucca, *Historica Ecclesiastica*. Among the biographies Tocco is generally held to be original with Gui dependent on him. The most useful English collection is *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas – Biographical Documents*, trans. and ed. by Kenelm Foster O.P. London, 1959. The current standard biography is *Friar Thomas D’Aquino* by James Weisheipl, Oxford, 1975.
- 3 *Lives of the Brethren III* 42, 3. MOPH 1, p. 138.

- 4 This represents the Dominican Constitution in 1220.
- 5 On Dominican spirituality see M. H. Vicaire O.P. *Saint Dominique de Caleruega*, Paris, 1954; *Dominique et ses Prêcheurs*, Paris, 1977; Simon Tugwell O.P. *The Way of the Preacher*, London, 1979.
- 6 M. B. Crowe, 'On Re-writing the Biography of Aquinas', *Irish Theological Quarterly*, October 1974.
- 7 'Thomas Aquinas' (unpublished lecture).
- 8 Aquinas's refusal of Monte Cassino parallels the attitude of St Dominic. He was offered, and refused, two, possibly three, bishoprics.
- 9 Cf. Weisheipl, pp. 26–27.
- 10 *The Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure*, trans. by Dom Illtyd Trethowan, London, 1938, p. 45.
- 11 P. Mandonnet, *Saint Dominique. L'idée, l'homme et l'oeuvre*, 11, Paris, 1938. p. 83.
- 12 Martin Grabmann, 'Die Kanonisation des heiligen Thomas', *Divus Thomas*, Jahrgang 1 (1923). Cf. Foster, p. 1: "For modern Catholics, surely, St Thomas Aquinas is, by and large, an authority rather than a saint, a sort of embodiment of theology or doctrinal orthodoxy rather than a lover of Christ."
- 13 Cf. Kenelm Foster, 'St Thomas and Dante', *New Blackfriars*, April 1974, p. 153.
- 14 Latin text with translation by Victor White O.P. London, 1947. White's version is based on that of P. Mandonnet O.P. *S. Thomas Aquinatis Opuscula Omnia*, Vol IV, p. 535 (Paris, 1927). Mandonnet counts it among the 'vix dubia' of the writings of Thomas, but there is not clear evidence that it is definitely not by Aquinas.
- 15 2a2ae, 180, 3. Cf. 'St Thomas Aquinas – His Life, Times and Spirituality' by Simon Tugwell O.P. in *Learning To Pray*, ed. Peter Lemass, Dublin, 1977. pp. 69–83.
- 16 *Towards Understanding Saint Thomas*, Chicago, 1964, p. 54. This is a poor translation of the French *Introduction a l'étude de Saint Thomas D'Aquin*. Paris, 1954.
- 17 See B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, Oxford, 1952. Cf. also Chenu, p. 240.
- 18 Cf. Weisheipl, p. 270. Similar language is found in *De Unitate Intellectus Contra Averroistas Parisienses*.
- 19 *Life* 62 (A.SS. 12, 877 DE).
- 20 *De Vita Regulari* (ed. J. J. Berthier, Turin, 1956) vol. II p. 32.
- 21 Trans. Victor White O.P. *On Searching into God*, Oxford, 1947. This is the second question of a series of six appended to a commentary of Boethius's *On the Trinity*.
- 22 *History of Western Philosophy*, London, 1946, p. 475.
- 23 *Dominique et ses Prêcheurs*, p. 163.
- 24 J. Pieper, *Introduction to Thomas Aquinas*, London, 1963, pp. 81–82.
- 25 i.e. what survives in Aquinas's handwriting. This is excessively difficult to decipher.
- 26 Crowe, pp. 266–7.