



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## World History



### Thomas Aquinas

#### Education and Early Beliefs



Philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas was an authority of the Roman Catholic Church and an extensive writer who followed in the tradition of medieval scholasticism. A member of one of the noblest families in the

Kingdom of Naples, he was a firm believer in the idea of natural theology, the study of God using reason and ordinary experience.

Aquinas was born in the town of Roccasecca on January 28, 1225. Following the tradition of the period, Aquinas was sent to the Abbey of Monte Cassino to train among monks when he was five years old. Aquinas is described as having been a "witty child," who "had received a good soul." During his stay, the quizzical young boy repeatedly posed the question, "What is God?" to his instructors. Aquinas would later go on to study at the University of Naples, eventually earning a degree in theology.

After completing his education, Aquinas devoted himself to a life of traveling, writing, teaching, public speaking, and preaching. Aquinas focused on one of the major philosophical discussions of the period: can

a person rely upon both theology (faith) and philosophy (reason)? Could one accept both knowledge they obtained through God's revelation **AND** that which was observed using their minds and their senses? Aquinas believed that they could, that revelation could guide reason and prevent mistakes; reason, likewise, could clarify and demystify faith.

#### Theology and Philosophy

Throughout his career, Thomas Aquinas penned close to 60 known works on a wide variety of topics. In his most important published work, *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas argued that the existence of God could be proven in five ways:

- movement in the world was proof of God
- observe cause and effect and identify God as the cause of everything
- the impermanent nature of people proves the existence of a necessary being, God
- humans are imperfect; a supreme, perfect being must, therefore, exist
- natural beings cannot have intelligence without it being granted to them by God

In his works, Aquinas also addressed law and man's behavior toward God. Aquinas identified three types of law: **eternal, human, and natural**. According to Aquinas, eternal law is the decree of God that governs all creation. Human law (positive law) is the law applied by governments to people and societies, laws intended to preserve order and stability. By following the laws of governments, Aquinas argued

that people could earn the salvation of their souls in the afterlife. However, Aquinas also believed that certain laws, natural laws, are simply part of human nature and do not have to be made by governments; among these are the desire to live in peace, to worship, or to have a family. Natural law, claimed Aquinas, granted people rights that governments must not violate.

### The Legacy of Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas' teachings regarding natural law have influenced both other philosophers and even governments themselves through the present day. During the 17th century, the English philosopher John Locke embraced the ideas of Aquinas, and argued that man is essentially good by nature and enjoyed certain natural rights (life, liberty, and property). Any

government that either violates or fails to protect these rights, according to Locke, must be overthrown. Indeed, the ideas of Thomas Aquinas (and John Locke) are even apparent in the Declaration of Independence, where Thomas Jefferson argued that all men are "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

In January 1274, Thomas Aquinas journeyed to Lyon, France, but fell ill and was taken to the Cistercian monastery of Fossanova, Italy. On his deathbed, Aquinas uttered his last words to the monks who had so graciously attended him: "This is my rest forever and ever: here will I dwell for I have chosen it." Aquinas died at the monastery of Fossanova on March 7, 1274.

1. Define the idea of *natural theology*.

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2. According to Aquinas, how could a person rely upon both *faith* and *reason*?

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3. How did Aquinas define the idea of *natural law*?

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4. In what ways did the teachings of Thomas Aquinas influence future philosophers and governments?

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