

José Ángel García Cuadrado “Tomás de Aquino, hoy”,
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Saint Thomas Aquinas belongs to the few philosophers, whose thought not only fanned discussions but also inspired contemporaneous thinkers. Multithreaded aspect of Angelic Doctor's thought eludes attempts to close it in the chronological framework of the history of philosophy. Richness of not only theological, but above all philosophical issues encourages many authors to a dialogue with the thirteenth-century author. Aquinas engages in reflection on the existence of God, transcendentals, morality or human cognition. His interests are vast and cover social and political questions. Therefore, it is not surprising that throughout history a considerable amount of studies and research was devoted to his ideas, and also now, almost eight hundred years after the death of the Dominican, he does not seem to be less popular than centuries ago.

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The study is an attempt to draw modern readers to the person and the most important ideas and thoughts of Aquinas. In the preface the author proves falsity of the formulaic approach to the Middle Ages as a period of obscurantism in history of mankind and synthetically highlights the elements that shaped St Thomas's thought, such as development of universities, architecture of cathedrals and interpenetration of three cultures: Christian, Jewish and Arab in the thirteenth century.

St Thomas's thought should be considered as a bridge between the classical pagan culture and Christian culture of the feudal era. Thomas Aquinas sought a synthetic approach to the plentifulness of centuries-old tradition of the Church Fathers and to the pagan wisdom of Plato and Aristotle. He was not afraid to undertake the dialogue with the Jewish and Arab thought, in order to deepen the truth about the human being, the world and God. He realised that you cannot monopolise truth, which transcends all attempts to dominate it.

The book is divided into two parts and each of them consists of sections that present the stages of life and selected issues of Aquinas's philosophy. First part, which

consists of 11 sections, presents the biography of Saint Thomas, focusing primarily on his scientific activity and development of his personality. The author presents the Dominican's life in chronological order, beginning with his childhood, Benedictine formation at Monte Casino and receiving a Dominican habit in Naples (1224 / 25-1245). Then he describes the trajectory of Aquinas's intellectual development - university studies in Rome, Paris and Cologne. He draws attention to the Dominican's participation in the dispute between *seculares* and *mendicantes* at the University of Paris. It seems interesting that in the period from 1255 to 1256 the situation of monks in Paris was extremely difficult: they were attacked in the street and the Dominican convent of Saint-Jacques was guarded by the king's archers. Not surprising, that on the day in which Thomas received the title of master of Theology, the University was under the special protection and not everybody was able to listen to his inaugural lecture (p. 44).

In Section 7, entitled *La Suma contra Gentes*, in the chapter about Thomas's life, the author presents circumstances of creating one of the major works of the Dominican. The text was written in Paris (1259), and completed in Italy at the turn of 1264-1265. The work was a response to the encouragement of Raimunda Penaforte to write a philosophical compendium for evangelising work in the Muslim-Jewish environment (p. 46). Thomas did not create another textbook referring to the authority of Catholic doctrine, only the text, which makes reference to the basis of knowledge of every human being, including non-Christian, in order to lead the reader to the Christian truth through rational arguments. *Summa contra Gentes* is an innovative proposal of Thomas, who saw the consistency between Christian revelation and reason. Recognition of God cannot be the result of any external means of coercion but only a personal internal experience of the Truth (*la conversión intelectual*, p. 47).

It seems interesting that Thomas, despite the difficulties with travelling at that time and taking into account the Dominican prohibition of travelling on horseback, was present in the most important intellectual centres of Europe. The author of the study gives an approximate calculation of distance covered by Angelic Doctor during his life (p. 37): Paris-Cologne (460 km), Naples-Paris (1700 km), the Rome-Paris (1520 km). Distance covered by the Dominican turns out to be very important when compared with the approximate number of his publications. Taking as a reference point the edition of the collected works (de la Frette, published in 34 volumes), Thomas for almost twenty-one years of his university work (1252-1273) wrote 20,000 pages, which gives 1,000 pages per year, and approximately over 12 pages a day. That impressive achievement of the medieval monk is due not only to his titanic work, but also to the secretaries assigned to him, whom he was able to dictate simultaneously on various topics. His secretary, Reginaldo de Piperno, recalls that Master Thomas would wake him in the middle of the night to dictate his thoughts to him (p. 45).

The last 11 section focuses mainly on the next to last year of St Thomas's life (*Última enseñanza en Nápoles-1272-1273*). During this period Aquinas gives lectu-

res on epistole concerning the Letter of St Paul to Romans, deals with editorial work on The Theological Summa, writes the comment to the Metaphysics by Aristotle, De motu corde (the work of heart). The biographical part of the book ends with the mention of the philosopher's death (1274), his canonisation (1327) and announcing him The Doctor of Church (1567).

In the second part of the book, entitled *Claves del pensamiento de Santo Tomás de Aquino*, the professor of Navarra University presents particularly distinctive features of the thirteenth-century thinker's thought. He emphasises that it is not easy to separate theology from philosophy, since there is close symbiosis between them. Those two areas of Thomas's interests interpenetrate, although it is possible to state their distinctiveness.

In the first section of the second chapter, *Dios y la ordenación de las ciencias: la universidad*, the author emphasises that the main feature of Thomistic thought is its orientation towards God. Aquinas's thought forms the rudiments and guarantees that Thomism - although theocentric - is not antihumanistic. The work of Thomas offers real humanism, whose basis is reference to transcendence (p. 58).

In the second section (*Dios y el hombre el problema de la libertad*), the professor of Navarra, making reference to thought of Thomas, enters into dialogue with atheistic humanism and the formula by J. P. Sartre: If God exists man is not free; but if a person is free, God cannot exist. Postmodernist thought rejects God as the guarantor of morality and creator of rational principles governing the world. It contrasts the divine freedom (*libertad divina*) with human freedom (*libertad humana*).

Yet Aquinas stresses that human freedom is possible because God's freedom exists. Creation is a free act of God and existence of the world is a manifestation of freedom and love. Man participates in some way in this act of freedom, although as a contingent and finite being, is limited by matter, time and space. However, man gifted with reason and free will is able to make free decisions, which self-determine him, *hic et nunc*, but also affect his eternity - man is the only creature who can reject God (p. 66-67).

The next section (*El humanismo cristiano de Tomás de Aquino*) concentrates on the issue of understanding „humanism” in contemporary culture. José Ángel García Cuadrado points out that modern thought has been seduced by atheistic philosophy and illusion of technological progress. Logical consequence of this is anti-humanism (*ver el Programa Gran Simio*). Man is no longer *imago Dei*, but only one of many creatures living on earth, not distinguished by anything in particular.

The idea of “creation of man in the image and likeness of God „ was the basis of Jewish-Christian anthropology. Angelic Doctor features two dimensions of „God's image” in man. The first is static and refers to the truth that man was created by God and thus possesses divine attributes: intelligence, free will and spiritual nature. These characteristics set him apart from all creation and decide about his privileged position in the world. The second dimension is dynamic and refers to the specific vocation of man, which is perfection in relationship with God. Man being rational

and free is able to love and get to know God. Both dimensions of humanity are complementary and indicate that human nature is enriched by divine element: man is the image of God, but he is not God. He participates in God's life, but still remains God's creation (p. 69-71).

The truth that man is *imago Dei*, is for the medieval thinker a basis to build his anthropology, whose main feature is ethical humanism. This means that the world is subordinated to man and his accomplishment in the world. However, man cannot mindlessly exploit things. His actions should be guided by ethical element: good of the other (*Amar es querer alguien para el bien*, p. 74).

In the section called *El amor a la Verdad* the professor from Pamplona emphasises personal character of truth in thought of St Thomas. Truth cannot be reduced to subjective beliefs or an abstract metaphysical problem. If it is not possible to identify truth with the person, the subject of love, then it is not worth human cognitive effort. For St Thomas love of truth means to recognize and experience the personal dimension of the Word which is the Truth, the Logos: Christ is the Truth (Juan 14: 6). José Ángel García Cuadrado, contemplating thought of Aquinas, points out that man participates to a greater or lesser extent, in the reality of Truth (p. 80). However, limited cognitive abilities of man, do not allow him to be fully the depository for truth. Truth is the space, which in earthly terms, has no boundaries. Man can always know the truth more and better, and that is why human can still explore subjects and issues that have already been studied. That is why, Thomas Aquinas rejects the thesis of impossibility to learn the truth by human reason (skepticism), or attempts to reduce it to a number of equivalent opinions, even contradictory ones (relativism). Angelic Doctor highlights the privileged position of truth in cognising reality (real y objetiva), and its close relationship with human intelligence.

The last section of the second part of the book presents the political doctrine of Aquinas (*Democracia y valores*). Author of the study draws our attention to the multithreading of the political thought, which appears in the commentary (unfinished) to Aristotle's *Politics*, in the treatise *De regimine principum* and in *De regno*. Political doctrine of Aquinas stems from the socio-political tension of the era, in which he lived - the dispute about the primacy of power between the emperor and the pope. Thomas believes that political and spiritual authority should be autonomous. Politics is an activity of man who should organise and direct the lives of citizens in a rational way, without the need to impose supernatural authority. Although religion and politics have two different goals, they interpenetrate, because both of these human activities search for ways to achieve happiness.

According to Thomas, politics cannot be perceived just as a technical tool of a narrow group of people, which has power over a particular community. Politics is „un arte que busca el último fin, la felicidad y Virtud de los gobernados” (an art, that seeks the ultimate goal, which is happiness of an individual, and good of the entire society, p. 85-86)

The synthesis of life and thought of Thomas Aquinas, presented in the book,

stems from the rich academic experience of the author and from his knowledge of Thomistic thought. Professor of the University of Navarra shows the readers St Thomas as a man of flesh and blood, who was not only devoted to divine matters, but also struggled with specific problems of his era. The medieval thinker can be for the man of twenty-first century a model of an integrated personality, who on complicated roads of life, struggling with doubts of faith and cognitive limitations of human reason, admires and contemplates the beauty of truth. The vast philosophical and theological legacy of St Thomas is for the man of the twenty-first century quite a challenge, but also an invitation to pose questions about the condition of man and the world in which he lives. Therefore, without doubt, you should reach out for the book by José Ángel García Cuadrado, which in a synthetic and attractive way shows the life of the Dominican monk and explains the most important aspects of his vast intellectual heritage.

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