

THE FRIENDSHIPS OF ST. THOMAS

BRO. CYRIL DORE, O. P.



T. Thomas Aquinas is a perfect type of that harmonious union of sanctity and learning which characterizes the great Doctors of the Church. A tender affection and a sympathetic understanding, which unites hearts entirely devoted to God, can be observed in all his friendships. While bearing himself affably towards all, the Angelic Doctor had but few intimate friends and these were persons of singular learning and holiness. From a consideration of these few, we can see the great influence for good which he exerted, the wide extent of his knowledge, and the deep penetration of his intellectual prowess. They not only give us an insight into the reaction of personality on personality and the interplay of mind on mind, but in a very special manner, they exhibit the practical aspect of his writings. From the investigations of his biographers, the friendships of St. Thomas can be considered under four headings; namely, within his own Order, in the religious world, in the academic world, and in the political world.

Amongst the members of the Dominican Order, the first friend mentioned is John of St. Julian. He is referred to as the old adviser and dear familiar friend of St. Thomas.¹ This celebrated preacher directed the footsteps of the young Aquinas during the three years previous to his entrance into the Dominican Order. As a student at the University of Naples, the mind and imagination of Aquinas were captivated by the sanctity, the learning and the marvellous activity of the Dominicans. In after life, such men as John the Teuton, Raymund of Pennafort, Hugh of St. Cher, Peter of Tarentasia, and Vincent of Beauvais were intimately associated with St. Thomas, and he was edified by their unflinching devotion to Dominican ideals. It is to Reginald of Piperno, the companion and secretary to St. Thomas, and to Ptolemy of Lucca and William of Tocco, his first biographers, that we are indebted for much of the information that has come down to us.

Foremost among the members of the Dominican Order at this time

¹ Placid Conway, *St. Thomas Aquinas, O. P.* (New York, 1911), p. 13.

was Albert of Cologne, surnamed the "Universal Doctor." From his first days as a student at Cologne until his death, St. Thomas was the close personal friend of Albert the Great. Both these men were of noble birth, both were drawn towards the same high ideals and both manifested an insatiable ardor for learning which makes for genius. Albertus Magnus is one of the great master minds of all times.² The history of his career as a student at Paris, Padua, Bologna, as a Dominican friar, and as professor at Freiburg, Ratisbon, Strassburg, Paris and Cologne, as Provincial of his Order, and as Bishop of Ratisbon, would lead one to conclude that his active duties would leave him little time for writing; yet he has left thirty-eight folio volumes upon every then-known subject. The wide range of his knowledge embraces logic, metaphysics, psychology, ethics, theology, chemistry, physics, mechanics, geology, geography, botany, biology, and medicine.³ He has been eulogized as great in natural science, greater in philosophy, and greatest in theology. Albert was indeed one of the greatest thinkers of all times and it was he who moulded the mind of the greatest of all theologians, St. Thomas Aquinas.

St. Thomas was closely associated with Albertus Magnus, first as pupil and later as companion. Two instances show that his friendship increased as the years went on. At Cologne, Albert requested that St. Thomas be given the cell next to his own that both might profit by mutual assistance. At this period, St. Thomas was the constant walking companion of Albert. Then, secondly, after the death of St. Thomas, Albert journeyed on foot from Cologne to Paris because a report had gained ground that the writings of St. Thomas were the subject of furious attack. At Paris, the venerable old man assembled the University and ascending the Dominican chair, in an eloquent address, declared that he was prepared to defend the orthodoxy of St. Thomas' works.⁴ This was one of the noblest acts of his life and proved that no sacrifice was too great for his beloved disciple and friend. It also manifested the understanding of principles and conclusions which these two men had drawn up and worked out together.

The Thomistic School had its origin in the friendship of these two great thinkers. Albert introduced St. Thomas to the teachings of

² Joachim Sighart, *Albert the Great* (Translated by T. A. Dixon, O. P., London, 1876), p. 460.

³ D. J. Kennedy, O. P., *St. Thomas Aquinas and Medieval Philosophy* (New York, 1919), p. 40.

⁴ Sighart, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

Aristotle. It seems that the two great objects that Albert always had in view were: first, that the wisdom, clearness, and systematic methods of paganism should be used for the defence of the Church,—that Aristotle should be Christianized; and, secondly, that faith should be thrown into the form of a vast scientific organism by the application of a Christianized philosophy. Thus would the Church possess the highest truths of Greek philosophy for us against her intellectual enemies. In this work, Albertus Magnus levelled the ground, purged the doctrine and assembled the material. St. Thomas was given a wonderful start. Through Albert's efforts, St. Thomas saw from the outset the fund of truth in the philosophy of the Stagyrite. In sublimating Aristotle, they made him a champion of Catholic philosophy. St. Thomas far surpassed his master in speculative studies, and with clarity and method he carried out Aristotelian principles to more profound conclusions. In so doing, he reconciled Faith and Reason. Herein precisely lies the truly philosophical value of the Thomistic System and it is what makes it the turning point in the history of human thought.⁵ St. Thomas accepts simultaneously his Faith and his Reason, each with all the demands proper to it. As a result, he developed a new theory of knowledge, he added several proofs for the existence of God, he submitted the concept of creation to fresh criticism and he entirely reorganized the structure of traditional ethics. The whole secret of Thomism lies in the immense effort of intellectual sincerity in reconstructing philosophy; and its full accord with theology appears as a necessary consequence of the rigorous demands of reason itself, rather than as the accidental result of a wished-for harmony.⁶ This was no small task and it brought stern opposition at every turn. It required a man of extraordinary ability; and very few men could have gone through with so vast a program and come out unscathed as did the Angelic Doctor.

Although there were many sincere men opposed to Thomism in its inception, yet the religious world, as well as the academic world of his time, looked to him for guidance. With such eminent apologists as Albertus Magnus and St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas put up so brilliant a defence for the Religious Orders before Pope Alexander IV that the accusations of William of St. Amour were completely disproven. The Mendicant Orders were restored to their chairs at the University of Paris and the writings of William of St. Amour were condemned.

⁵ E. Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas* (Translated by Edw. Bullough, Cambridge, 1924), p. 32.

⁶ A Whitacre, "The Theology of St. Thomas," *St. Thomas Aquinas* (St. Louis, 1925), p. 73.

St. Thomas' famous treatise, *An Apology for Religious Orders*, won for him the eternal praise of all Religious Orders. During his stay in Italy, St. Thomas confuted another work of impiety and false mysticism, *The Eternal Gospel*.⁷ After this brief sojourn in Italy, he returned to complete his studies for the doctorate at the University of Paris.

At the University of Paris, St. Thomas met St. Bonaventure and one of the most beautiful friendships ever recorded followed. Dante places these two angels of the schools in one of the highest spheres of his *Paradiso*.⁸ Like St. Dominic and St. Francis, they were eminently representative men of their respective Orders. St. Bonaventure, the disciple of Alexander of Hales, became the leading exponent of the Augustinian tradition; while St. Thomas held with his master, Albert, for Aristotelianism. They were in the habit of visiting each other from time to time to discuss the leading problems of the day and the relative merits of their systems of philosophy. St. Thomas refers to Bonaventure's opinions in commenting on, *The Book of the Sentences*. Bonaventure did not misprise Aristotle for, as Dr. Henry O. Taylor observes, "there is Aristotelian ballast in Bonaventure's Platonic-Augustinian theology."⁹ Part of St. Thomas' devotion to St. Augustine and his understanding of Plato's poetic mysticism can be attributed to his friendship with St. Bonaventure. The largeness and spirituality of Plato's mind acted with dynamic force on the powerful and cultivated intellect of St. Thomas. Such men as Bonaventure and Aquinas, leaders in thought and action, were the proud boast of the University of Paris at the height of its fame and the lasting memorials of the true greatness of Scholasticism.

St. Thomas had many admirers at every university in which he lectured. Chapter after Chapter of his Order was besieged with requests for his services by the leading universities of his day. At the Chapter held in Florence, 1272, the professors of such universities as Paris, Cologne, Rome, Bologna and Naples requested that the Angelic Doctor be sent to teach at their institutions. After several petitions from each of these academic centers, it was finally decided that the petitions of Charles, King of Sicily, should prevail. St. Thomas, therefore, went to the University of Naples and his biographers dwell at length upon his arrival at that city.¹⁰ The whole city

⁷ Conway, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁸ Frederic Ozanam, *Dante et la Philosophie Catholique* (2 ed., Paris, 1862), Part III, p. 288.

⁹ H. O. Taylor, *The Mediaeval Mind* (4th ed., New York, 1925), II, 435.

¹⁰ R. B. Vaughan, *Life and Labors of St. Thomas of Aquin* (London, 1872), II, 894-5.

turned out to receive him, and he too must have been elated, for Naples was his Alma Mater. This trip was a veritable homecoming. He was looked upon, not only as a genius, but also as a man sent of God. And as at Paris and Bologna, so also at Naples, professors, students and even the citizens of the town attended his lectures. The charm of his genius and the clearness of his exposition captivated all who heard him. Not only in life were great tributes of esteem paid to him, but even more so after his death. These same universities, when they heard of his death, strove by every means within their power for the guardianship of the remains of the Angelic Doctor. Paris requested that, since the Holy See would not give them the body of St. Thomas, one of his unfinished Commentaries on Aristotle be sent to them. Such was the loyalty of his friends among the university men of his day.

Before next considering the friends of St. Thomas in the political world, let us take a glance at the blood lines of the House of Aquino. William of Tocco and Ptolemy of Lucca, disciples of St. Thomas and his first biographers, relate that St. Thomas Aquinas was born of a noble and illustrious family and that under the rough wool of a friar flowed the pure blood of kings. Besides being allied with the sovereign houses of Europe, the Aquino family could boast a descent through four centuries of Lombard princes. Landulf, his father, belonged to the noble house of Sammacoli and was Count of Aquino, Lord of Loreto, Acerra and Belcasto. His mother was sprung from Norman princes and was the Countess of Teano in her own right. St. Thomas was the nephew of Emperors Frederick I and Henry VI; cousin of Frederick II; and closely allied to the Kings of Aragon, Castile and France.¹¹

St. Louis, King of France, was St. Thomas' closest friend among his many regal relatives. This virtuous king and illustrious crusader loved St. Thomas tenderly and desired to see him and St. Bonaventure in a leading position in the schools.¹² He knew that these two men of singular learning and saintly lives would act as leaven amidst the crudities and freedom of scholastic life. St. Thomas acted as counsellor to this saintly ruler and we are told that the King was wont to inform the Angelic Doctor on the evening before of all important business to be discussed on the morrow, so that he might come prepared to tender advice. One is not surprised to find that the years of St. Thomas' residence in Paris synchronize with this monarch's greatest temporal glory and that they open an epoch of lasting benefit to

¹¹ Conway, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹² Vaughan, *op. cit.*, II, 82.

France. The King, furthermore, employed St. Thomas and his confrere, Vincent of Beauvais, in arranging the Royal Library which is estimated to have contained twelve hundred precious volumes. Often might the King be seen sitting and listening to the commanding eloquence of St. Thomas within the walls of Notre Dame or of the Dominican Church of St. James. "Who in history has ever read of so priestly a prince and of so princely a Dominican," writes Vaughan.¹³ The bloom of St. Louis' character was brought to its full perfection through the influence of such men as Aquinas and Bonaventure. Both king and priest were governing spirits, each in his own sphere; St. Louis in the governing of a kingdom, St. Thomas in the directing of souls and in the solving of high problems of philosophy and theology. Much of St. Thomas' social and political teaching was acquired from his intimate association with St. Louis, King of France.

Many of the rulers and princes of Europe sought advice from the Angelic Doctor on the best manner of ruling their subjects. Some of St. Thomas' answers to them have been preserved. Glancing through the smaller works of St. Thomas, we find such writings as the following: *De regimine principum* and *De regimine Judaeorum*. The first of these was written to Hugh III, King of Cyprus. Some historians have stated that St. Thomas did not write this work; others maintain that he wrote all of it. But the opinion of those who have made a thoroughly scientific examination of the work is that St. Thomas wrote the First Book and the first four chapters of the Second Book.¹⁴ The reason given for his unwillingness to finish it is that the protection of the Holy Land was given to Hugh, King of Cyprus, who was an enemy of the King of Sicily. St. Thomas was a close friend of the King of Sicily and his refusal to finish the work was a wonderful act of loyalty and displayed his consideration for the interests of his friend. The second work mentioned above was written to the Duchess of Brabant, a relative of St. Thomas. She had written asking if she should make exactions from the Jews. St. Thomas' answer is an epitome of Christian principles on the government of states and is still practicable. A person reading the advice of St. Thomas in these letters will at once see with what prudence, tact, and judgment he viewed the difficulties proposed to him.

Amongst others for whom St. Thomas wrote were Pope Urban IV, Cardinal d'Annibaldi, Raymund of Pennafort and Reginald of Piperno. Under the title *Catena Aurea*, St. Thomas compiled one of

¹³ Vaughan, *op. cit.*, II, 872.

¹⁴ P. Mandonnet et J. Destrez, *Bibliographie Thomiste* (Le Saulchoir 1921), I.

the fullest commentaries on the Gospels ever written. The commentary on St. Matthew's Gospel was dedicated to Pope Urban IV who died shortly after it was written. His commentaries on the three other Gospels were dedicated to Cardinal d'Annibaldi.¹⁵ For Urban IV, St. Thomas also wrote his *Contra Errores Graecorum*. No one who had not been familiar with the mind and system of the Fathers could have succeeded, as St. Thomas has, in so delicate an operation.

At the request of Raymund of Pennafort, St. Thomas wrote the *Summa Contra Gentes*, a work which is second only to the *Summa Theologica* in depth of thought and scientific exposition. Raymund of Pennafort wanted a work that would bring into prominence arguments from reason for the establishment of Christianity among the Moors and Jews of Spain. Lastly, we have to mention the works dedicated to Reginald of Piperno. One of the most useful of the Saint's works, *Compendium Theologiae*, was written for his beloved companion and secretary, Reginald. This work is a model of simplicity and accurate reasoning,—a sort of *summa theologica* in minute form. To Reginald he also dedicated his opusculum, *De Natura Angelorum*.

From this brief consideration of the friendships of St. Thomas, we can conclude that his superb spirituality was enhanced by his intimate association with learned and saintly men; and that a clearer insight into the practical aspect of his writings is had from a consideration of the influence exerted by the interaction of mutual interests and sympathetic understanding. In Albertus Magnus, we beheld his guide into the vast scientific and philosophic field of Aristoteleanism. Bonaventure carried him further than anyone else into the domain of poetics and mysticism, and St. Louis, King of France, brought him into close touch with the social and political needs of a great nation. To these and other intimate friends, St. Thomas was in some degree indebted for the rounding out of his character. As a result of these friendships, not only the men of his own day, but all succeeding generations have profited by the learning and sanctity of the Christian Aristotle,—the Prince of Theologians. The *Summa Theologica*, the greatest compendium of Christian teaching ever written, will stand until the end of time as a proof of St. Thomas' sublime spirituality, as an expression of his most lofty concepts and as a lasting memorial to the influence and devotion of those who were bound to him by the ties of friendship.

¹⁵ "Admonitio Praevia" Fr. Jo. Franc. Bernardi Mariae de Rubeis, O. P., in *Catena Aurea* (Taurini, 1915), I, vi.