

With the end of the Exodus series, I have decided to do a short church history series, a brief summer diversion. My thought is to take significant figures from our heritage as Christians and highlight one each week, men and women who have very much shaped our present understanding of the teachings of the Bible (both negatively and positively). My thought is to survey their lives, tell their stories, and then explain how they have shaped Christian understanding.

Thomas Aquinas
(28 January 1225- 7 March 1274)

Thomas Aquinas
(ca. 1224-1274)



Altarpiece in Ascoli Piceno, Italy, by Carlo Crivelli, 15th c.

- 1225- He was born at Roccasecca, a town near Aquino, in the Kingdom of Naples, Italy, the youngest son of Landolfo de Aquino, and into a large and aristocratic family.
- 1230- He was given to the Benedictine Abbey at Monte Cassino with the family view that he would become an abbot in the order. (The Benedictines are the oldest order in the Catholic community today having been founded by St. Benedict in 529, and famous for the Benedictine vow of “poverty, chastity, and obedience.”)

- 1239- When Frederick II occupied Monte Cassino (he was for some time excommunicated by Pope Gregory IX), Thomas was sent to study at the University of Naples. There he was attracted to the newly established Dominican Order (It was founded by St. Dominic emphasizing the extension of Catholicism through education.)
- 1244- In April, he joined the Dominican order. Because of his family's opposition, he was sent by his order out of the country to the University of Paris
- 1244- In May on the journey to Paris outside of Rome he was abducted by his family and confined to his family's castle.
- 1245- In July or August, he was released, returned to the Dominicans, and continued his studies in Paris.
- 1248-51 Influenced in Paris by the works of Albertus Magus, he moved to Cologne to further his studies with him.
- 1252- He returned to Paris. And there lectured on the works of Peter Lombard.
- 1259- He returned to Italy where he continued teaching in Dominican Houses.
- 1259- He wrote *Summa Contra Gentiles*. An apologetic summary designed as a handbook to help Dominican missionaries who were preaching in areas (esp. Spain) where they were in contact with people educated in rational argumentation.
- 1266- He began *Summa Theologiae*. He stated the purpose of this work thusly, "Because the Doctor of catholic truth must teach not only the advanced student, but to him devolves, moreover, the task of instructing beginners...we intend, in the present work, to impart the matters that pertain to the Christian religion in such a way as may befit the instruction of beginners."
- 1268-72- He was appointed to the Chair of Theology within the Dominican Order at the University of Paris.

1272- He moved to Naples.

1273- On December 6, he experienced a breakdown, a mental crisis that caused him to cease writing. "Everything I have written seems like straw by comparison with what I have seen and what has been revealed to me," he reported.

1274- In February upon leaving Lyon, he suffered a severe head injury for which he did not recover.

1277- On March 7 he was condemned for his teachings at Paris by John XXII.

1323- On July 18, he was canonized by the church.

1325- On February 14 his Paris condemnation was revoked.

1369- On January 28 his relics transferred to Toulouse and interred in a Dominican Church.

The Context of Aquinas' Life and Teachings: The Rise of Scholasticism

1. The period that commenced the Crusades to recover the Holy Lands from the Islamic invasion of Palestine (1096-1261) and the stabilization of western Europe with the ending of the Viking intrusions and the birth of powerful monarchies (France, Germany, Spain) witnessed the enormous growth of trade and economic prosperity.
2. The rise of Islam brought about the quest of the church to increase evangelistic efforts to reach them for Christ, particularly for the Franciscans and Dominicans. However, it was quickly evident that they were not equipped to encounter the intellectual argument of the Islamic scholars, being trained in the Scriptures and piety, proclamation, and asceticism, not in the skill in answering objections.
3. This created an educational crisis that culminated in the rise of the university, and a new method of training clerics and missionaries.
Not the monastery chapel, but the classroom.

Not the abbot, but a teacher (a scholastic, a scholar training in argumentation).

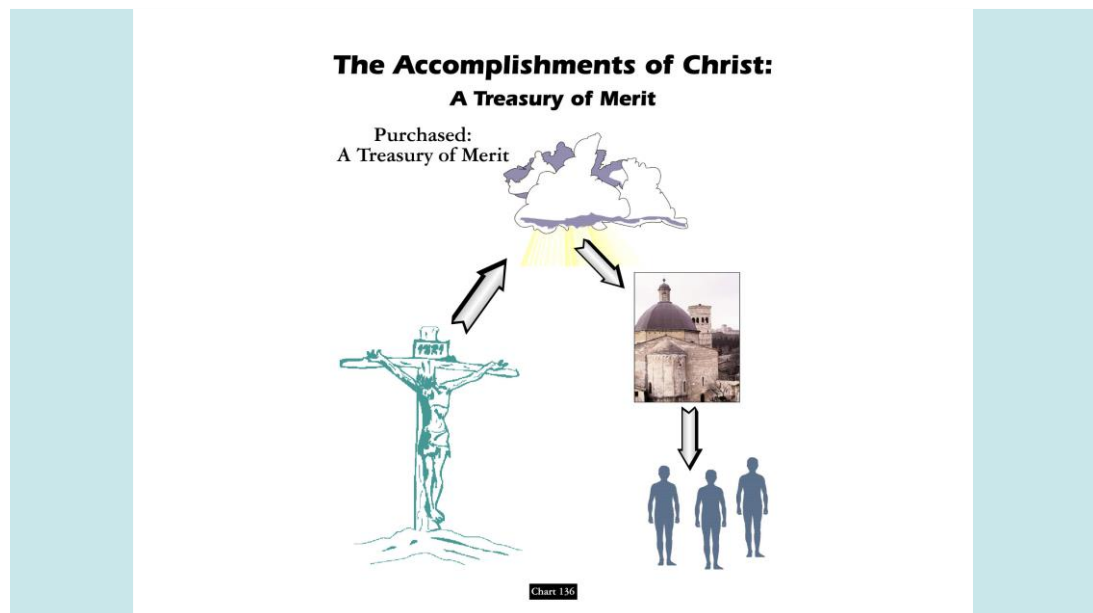
Not in prayer alone, but through the creation of textbooks (summaries of vast bodies of knowledge).

1. Peter Lombard, *The Four Sentences*
2. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summary of Theology*

The Teachings of Thomas Aquinas: the scholastic scholar

1. Doctrinal areas of agreement with Protestant teaching.
 - a. The Trinity of God.
 - b. The absolute deity of Jesus.
 - c. The absolute humanity of Jesus.
 - d. That Christ died on the cross for us and rose from the dead as the evidence that He did so for us (blood atonement).
 - e. That all of salvation begins in the grace of God.
 - f. That there are two destinies for all of mankind: a literal heaven and a literal hell.
 - g. That the gift of salvation has a cause; we cannot save ourselves.
 - h. That the offices of the church are meant to help people to heaven.
2. Doctrinal areas of disagreement with Thomas Aquinas in Protestant Teaching.
 - a. We do not embrace an interim state called purgatory after death before entrance into heaven.
 - b. We do not embrace the concept that Water Baptism erases our Adamic inheritance, human inability through the blight upon our faculties.
 - c. That major areas of disagreement do not have to do with the grace of God purchased by Christ, but how that grace comes to us, causing a gradual movement from doing wrong to doing right. Justification is not sanctification!
 - 1) Justification is not a matter of progressive moral improvement, moving from doing wrong to doing right. Justification is not to be confused with progressive sanctification.

- 2) The justified state is not the end of an uncertain journey; it is the beginning of a certain and sealed journey that will infallibly bring us to heaven.
 - 3) Christ did not die for us to secure the possibility of salvation; He died to secure it. Christ procured salvation for us; it can not be improved or diminish!! The Roman system of salvation is a redemption through Christ that does not redeem!! It is salvation through a cross that does not save!!
3. How does Thomas Aquinas explain how the benefits of Christ's death.
- a. Christ's death on the cross did not procure our redemption; it made salvation only possible. He won for us a treasury of merit or grace that is accessible through the seven sacraments. The seven keys for sacramental distribution have been given to the church and the church can unlock a "door" to dispense an increment of grace. When we have enough grace-obedience in our account we can exchange it for our justification.



- b. Salvation begins with the gift of grace, but it does not save. Divine grace from the treasury of merit allows us to do good deeds and act right which is rewarded with more grace until we have the reward of salvation.

Thomas Aquinas: The Steps to Salvation

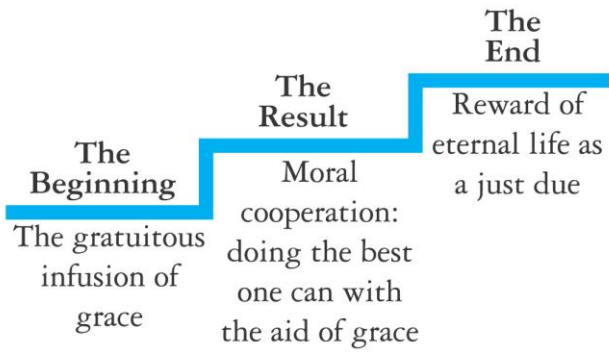
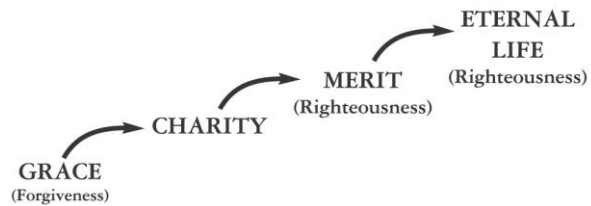


Chart 140

Thomas Aquinas: Divine Redemption and Merit



"The meriting of eternal life depends principally on charity."

"Our merit is the secondary cause."

"A man merits an increase of grace by each and every meritorious action."

"He cannot merit the first grace."

Chart 138

Thomas Aquinas and Merit through an Increase of Grace

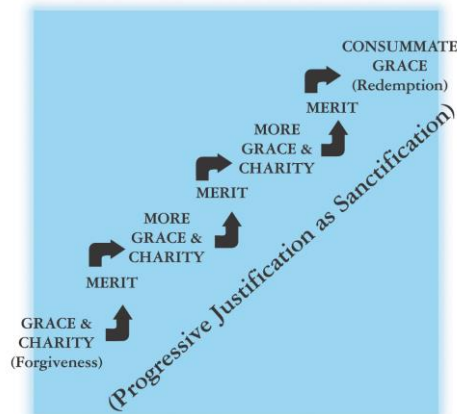


Chart 137

Thomas Aquinas and Justification: Forgiveness without Righteousness

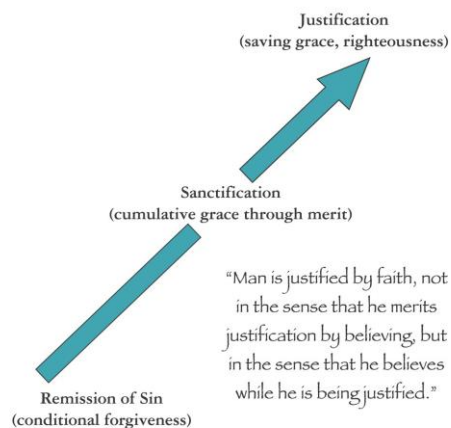


Chart 139

- c. In both Lombard and Thomas, the means of the accumulation are the seven sacraments.

Baptism removed the stain of Adam's blight restoring human ability.

Confirmation rewards with grace those who opening embrace the Faith.

The Eucharist celebration is a re-enactment of the death of Christ leading to forgiveness of yesterday's sins. In the Roman system

only past sins can be forgiven so the Mass should be attended daily.

Penance restores those who fall from innocence through auricular confession.

Extreme Unction is the grace given to those incapables of repenting through the grace that priests can dispense.

Holy Orders is to enter clerical service.

Matrimony is an avoidance grace preventing lust.

Peter Lombard: The Seven Sacraments as a Means of Grace

1. Baptism
2. Confirmation
3. Eucharist
4. Penance
5. Unction
6. Orders
7. Matrimony



d. The Roman system of sacraments functions in this manner.

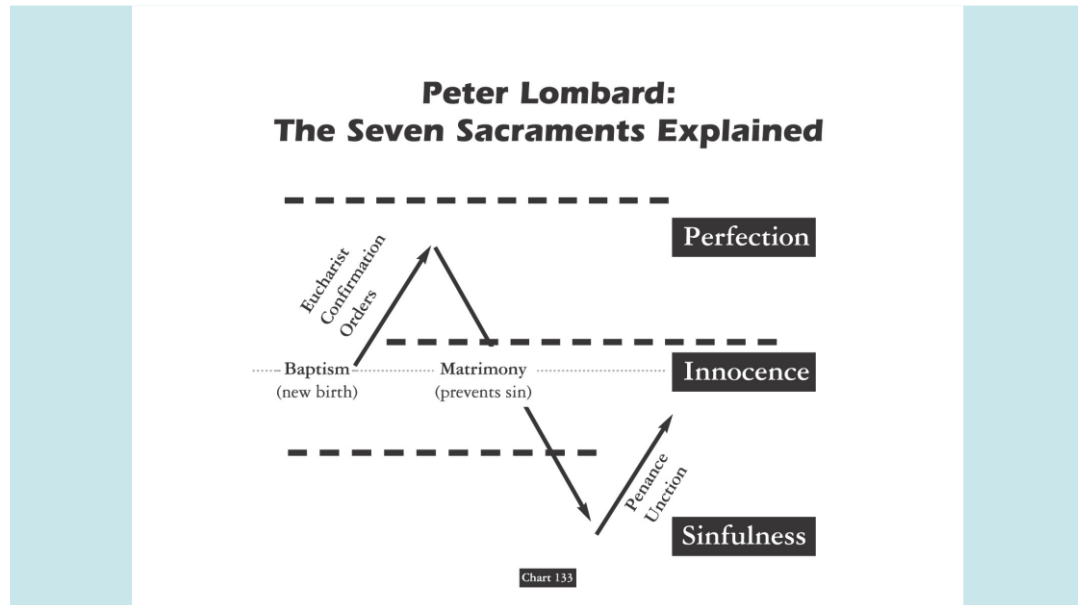
All are born guilty before God, but baptism renders us innocent, not righteous. It restores ability to choose obedience.

To enter heaven, we must be righteousness. We can gradually obtain that righteousness through sacramental obedience, though not fully in this life.

In death those progressing in righteousness, but not wholly righteous, enter purgatory, a place of purgation, where the prayers of loved ones and the grace of the church eliminates any sins that prevent entrance into heaven.

If a person dies below the line of innocence, their awaits the awfulness of hell.

For such sins while living there is penance that restores to innocence and Extreme Unction, a gift by the church from the Treasury of Merit earned by Christ.



Applications:

1. I cannot imagine why we should not forever rejoice and be thankful that God sent faithful people to help us understand the person and claims of Jesus. We have been given forgiveness when Jesus died for us completely admitting not possibility of its depletion. Since all our sins were future, as our creation, when Jesus did for us, this means that all our sin has been forgiven.
2. What wonderful news it is that eternal life has been merited for us through the provision of Christ at Calvary. There is not uncertainty; we are not unsure of our destiny. Why? It certainly is not because our hearts are steadfast; it because His promises are sure because they are a fruit of His character which is holiness, righteousness, and truth. He cannot act contrary to Himself!
3. Some have claimed that we need unsurety and the possibility of failure to spur us to obedience. This is not true. We do not obey God to obtain something that we do not have because God has given us all that we will ever need in Christ Jesus. We do not obey to obtain something that we do not have because we have been blessed with all the riches in Christ Jesus. Why then do we obey? It is because the magnitude of the gift has produced in His child a thankful heart. The motivation is appreciation!

4. It should break our hearts to think that people are taught that they must do something to earn God's favor. Jesus earned it for us by paying a debt we owed, and we could never have paid!
5. Are you not glad that you are in a church that does not use fear to motivate obedience? We believe that grace is enough! We should not tell people to do something to be acceptable to God; we should tell them that He who has made us acceptable to God.