



Wisdom and Holiness in St. Thomas Aquinas for a 21st Century Reader

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Abstract

Talking about St. Thomas Aquinas is nearly an uphill task. Being a man of unique caliber, the writings of the towering academician, scientist, and philosopher cum theologian are practically difficult to interpret but endowed with immense spiritual, theological, transformative and philosophical richness. However, this paper attempts to present Thomas Aquinas as a philosopher and theologian whose center of life was prayers. The prolific scholar who did so much academic and spiritual work within record time had his inspiration from prayer life. The mystic academic is often considered by some quarters as a spiritual theologian rather than a philosopher. However, a keen interpretation of the iconic Dominican may place him as full-time scholar of all weather and a full-time spiritual giant of all times. He is perennially cherished and promoted by the Catholic Church for his indispensable contributions to Christian philosophy and theology. Therefore, a 21st century reader of Aquinas still finds a rich scholar in him. This paper thus posits that the works of Aquinas undoubtedly portray an augmenter relationship between prayer life and academic life. It is yet a confirmation of unambiguous and harmonious relationship between faith and reason. This reflection is in line with Pope Francis' call to deep prayers this year 2024 as a precursor to the Jubilee Year 2025.

Subject Areas

Philosophy

Keywords

Wisdom, Holiness, Reader, Philosophy, Theology

1. Introduction

St. Thomas Aquinas is a towering academician, theologian cum philosopher in

the scholarly tradition of Catholic Church and western world [1]. Consequently, the church declared him the official Christian Philosopher and Angelic doctor of the church. For decades, Aquinas has been celebrated as “a master theologian” [2]. The scholar’s works have continued to attract friends and foes alike. The writings of Aquinas may place him at first sight as a purely spiritual theologian. But therein is enormous philosophical erudition. Hence, the works of Aquinas juxtapose a perfect union of faith and reason, theology and philosophy, prayer and academics that is very relevant for 21st century readers.

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, declared this year 2024, a year of prayer in preparation for the Jubilee Year 2025 with the Theme: *Pilgrims of Hope*. This could effectively place on the shoulders of Catholic Christians a unique responsibility to reflect on prayer as food of the soul and center of Christian life, including Christian thought. The Pope thinks that this Year 2024 will be devoted to a great symphony of prayer, renewal of our desire to be in the presence of the Lord, to listen to him and to adore him. The Pope further describes prayer as the royal road to holiness and notes that a Christian is a pilgrim of hope hence the Theme: *Pilgrims of Hope*. For Pope Francis, Prayer is the breath of faith [3]. The Pope’s description suits Aquinas path to holiness through prayer and study. Hence, a re-echo of Thomism in this work is pertinent for a 21st century reader.

Often, prayer and academic work or philosophy as academic discipline appear incompatible. Many scholars may appear ungodly in their writings, this may be a matter of contestation though. Some atheistic leaning minds may want to associate going to church to pray with “wasting precious time”. In Aquinas we find a complementary and synergetic relationship between faith and reason. As [4] explains, there is no contradiction between faith and reason. We need faith for authentic reasons, and we equally need reason for authentic faith. Pope Francis’ input to introduce the year of prayer in preparation for the Jubilee Year 2025 augurs very conveniently with the life of prayer and scholarly works of St. Thomas Aquinas. This article is reinforcement of the argument that there is indeed no contradiction in being prayerful and at the same time doing philosophy or academic work as demonstrated by Aquinas. Re-echoing the complementarity between faith and reason is timely for a world deeply rooted in technology that even slims time for contemplation and prayer. Technology without prayer ethic may be incomplete. The rationale of this study lies in the fact that some scholars of contemporary times posit that Aquinas’s works and methodology are now irrelevant to a modern reader in 21st century. This study argues that the works of Aquinas have perennial importance and interpretation for any reader of any epoch. This work uses critical historical approach to explore the life of Aquinas based on spirituality and academics. A number of Thomistic literature formed basis of content analysis on the subject.

2. Thomas Aquinas and Prayer

As Christians we believe that true wisdom comes from God. “The fear of the Lord

is the first stage of wisdom”, says the psalmist (Psalm 111:10). The expression alludes to the fact that a relationship with God is essential for gaining insight and making wise decisions. Therefore, philosophy is considered basically as the love of wisdom that should be sought in God. This is what Thomas Aquinas illustrated in his scholarly writings. He lived for a relatively short time but produced scholarly works of unimaginable volumes perhaps due to his prayerful trust in God as the source of wisdom.

Born in 1225 in Roccasecca, Italy, Aquinas is said to have lived for only 49 years. He was born to Landulf and Theodora, aristocrats, as the twelfth born of the family, apparently the last born [5], the date and year of Thomas’s birth is a matter of debate till the moment of this work. It is believed that he was born between 1224 and 1226 [1]. Whatever arguments for or against the date of birth may be presented, what is clear is that Aquinas was born at a certain point in time and died on March 7, at Fossanova, Italy, on his way to the Council of Lyons, France, on early 1274 [6].

In [7], his biographer, described St. Thomas Aquinas as a good man, intelligent and truly great. He is rated as the greatest scholastic philosopher and one of the most important philosophers and theologians the Catholic Church has ever produced. He synthesized Christian Theology and Aristotelian Philosophy that influenced catholic doctrine for many centuries till in modern times. Aquinas vouched for correct relationship between the disciplines—philosophy and Theology, creating independent scope of each without reducing one to the other. In his Thomism school, Aquinas argues that God is the source of Light of natural reason and the Light of Faith. This argument seemed to have secured for Aquinas a permanent seat among Natural Theologians.

The monumental work of Aquinas is *Summa Theologie*, roughly translated as the *Summary of Theology*. Though unfinished due to “early” death, this work has been described as a symphony—the greatest testimony of a man who doubles as a wise and yet humble theologian, handed down from age to age. The symphony is structured in two ways—via *i.e.*, *exitus* and *reditus*. The *exitus* refers to the way that leads from God to the world and *reditus* is the way that leads from the world back to God. The two paths have their intersection in the reality of the incarnation namely Jesus Christ who is the Way *per se*. [8] underscores of recent, the Christocentrism of Thomas Aquinas, an important piece that was probably overlooked by a number of Thomisian scholars. Reading the theology of Thomas, Jesus Christ is the cornerstone and apex of any thing called theology. He is not aftermath of theology. Jesus for Aquinas is the intersection of God and human beings. The divine intersectionality can only be expressed by amazement and surprise.

3. Aquinas and Some Critics

Some spiritual critiques powerfully argue that Aquinas thinks his way to God by the fact that his entire theology is based on rational proofs and philosophical opinions [9]. In this sense, the critics fear that Aquinas lacks docility and humility

before the mystery of God. In short, that Aquinas carries some air of dangerous pride in his theological approach. Some Protestants also add their accusation on Aquinas that his theology is sort of Christ-centeredness, hence, there is insufficient Christology. The above charges against Thomas fall sort and apparently expose lack of in-depth understanding and interpretation of works of Aquinas. For, Christ is the point of departure in Thomasian theology through and through. It is equally important to note that in Thomas' time, it was a tradition of philosophers in great universities to openly use reason to probe the mysteries of nature and God. A case in point is Aristotle's metaphysics of "being" which uncovered the inner life and reality of the being of God as cause and principle of all that is. Subsequently, Aquinas could not be an island in approach of reality of nature and God. His methodology was cognizant with academic tradition of his time. The foundation of his reasoning is that "the human being is directed to God, as to an end that surpasses the grasp of his reason" as in *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 1, art. 1. [10].

4. A snapshot of Thomas Aquinas' Works

The best-known work of Aquinas—*Summa Theologiae* raises questions after questions, objections after objections and gives responses and resolutions. Coupled with the more formal theological tracts like Scriptural feel where Aquinas raised and resolved thorny theological questions arising from scriptural commentaries—*quaestio disputata* (disputed questions), Aquinas still remained a spiritual master. As a master in Paris between 1256 and 1259, the young Theologian initiated work on what came to be known as *Summa Contra Gentiles*. This work was meant to be a handbook for missionaries working among Muslims [11]. Besides, Aquinas served as official papal theologian at Anagni, Orvieto, Viterbo and Rome in Italy. In this period, he wrote several biblical commentaries, disputed questions, massive commentaries on the works of Aristotle. The numerous scholarly writings are evidence enough to demonstrate Aquinas as a unique and disciplined scholar.

The life of the young scholar was rather characterized by intense discipline. This disciple cut across his spiritual, academic and theological life. He is said to have had two Masses a day. One he celebrated himself as a main celebrant and the other, he concelebrated. This is a disciple he curved for himself and kept for life. Yet his day rotated around reading, teaching and writing. According to the testimony of his close confidant Reginald of Piperno Thomas would solve his intellectual problems not so much with thought as with prayer [12]. Hence, Aquinas' prayer life remained a burning torch directing his entire life.

5. The Saintly Aquinas

But where did the greatness of St. Thomas come from? In answering this question, Aquinas' prayer life is paramount. Prayer probably formed the foundation of Aquinas' greatness in life as a theologian and a philosopher. Aquinas is said to have been an extra ordinary personality right from childhood. His parents

already destined him an abbot, although this wild idea did not see the light of the day. Legend has it that he was miraculously saved from a violent wind that destroyed their habitat killing the sister and leaving him peaceful in the wreckage [13].

Aquinas distinguished himself through his towering contributions to the church and Western culture so much so that it is often difficult to understand him completely [14], in unison with other scholars, describes him as a philosopher, scientist, mystic, theologian, scriptural commentator and above all, a saint. [14] emphasizes the last title (saint) as the greatest of all. The saintly life of Aquinas appears most overlooked by his commentators and yet it is the most illuminating. Interpreting Aquinas as only a rationalist philosopher or theologian for Barron, is missing the burning heart of all his writings. Aquinas had intimate relationship with Jesus Christ and the image of Christ pervades the entire edifice which is his philosophical, theological and scriptural work as opposed to accusations of insufficient Christology. Perhaps, the saintly life of Aquinas is what made him unimaginable scholar of all seasons and disciplines.

[14] further describes Aquinas as “a consummate spiritual master, holding up the icon of the word made flesh and inviting others into its transformative power.” A divine proof to his saintly life was again manifested when Aquinas wrote a book on Eucharist and he is said to have placed the text at the foot of the crucifix, inviting Christ himself to pass judgment on the book. Tradition has it that a voice from the statue of the crucified Jesus announced that Aquinas had written well concerning the sacrament. In recompense, the Lord asked: what would you have? The saintly response of Aquinas was “*Non nisi te, Dominum*” (nothing but you, Lord) [12]. From this mystical conversation, the key to interpreting Aquinas’ whole life is practically discovered. In the words of [14], Aquinas wanted *nothing more than Christ, nothing other than Christ* [and] *nothing less than Christ*. All his writings allude to the path of discipleship.

According to [15] submission, the saintly life of Aquinas was centered on prayer. The summit of his prayers was the Holy Mass which he offered twice a day. During Mass he would almost literally weep in an attempt to relive the passion of Christ he was celebrating. As a mystic, Aquinas would get transfixed with God. It is also contented that while wrestling with particularly thorny theological problems, Aquinas would rest his head against the tabernacle and with tears beg for inspiration. Still on the account of his closest associate Reginald, the events surrounding his death complete the account of the life and spirituality of Aquinas. He famously uttered to this close associate when pressed that he continues writing after hanging up his instruments of writing that “I can’t because that I have written seems like straw to me”. With these narratives, it can be deduced that Aquinas’ greatness in scholarly and spiritual dome were a fruit of his prayerful and saintly discipline that he observed throughout his entire earthly life. Such an attribute surely fits any reader of this great saint who may endeavor to venture in scholarly enterprise.

6. Aquinas' Path to Philosophy

One other fundamental issue that propelled Aquinas to high philosophical, theological and above all spiritual echelon is his early acquaintance with contemplative Benedictine monks of Monte Cassino [5]. There he received basic education as young as five years old. Initially, Aquinas was engaged at younger age with the Benedictines to resolve political impasse between his family and the ruling dynasty of the day. The pinnacle of the problematic relationship “walled” the Pope against the *Holy Roman Emperor*. It was hoped that the young Aquinas would meant fences with the aggrieved parties as the future abbot. However, this arrangement only came to pass without seeing the light of the day.

In a twist of events, Aquinas instead learnt the rudiments of contemplative life and *fell in love with the scriptures, the sacred page of the Bible (Sacra pagina)*. Eventually, he would understand and present contemplation as the highest accomplishment of human kind. Monte Cassino, therefore, stands tall in planting the seeds of all-inclusive development in Aquinas. It would seem the future saint theologian cum philosopher has constantly been bombarded with the reference to God in catechism lessons by his instructor. With the characteristic curiosity of Aquinas, he promptly raised the question “But who is God?” This eventually became a perennial question in his life docket [8]. The question paid off in the prolific theological, philosophical, scientific, prayerful and spiritual writings he produced in record period of “short” life of 49 years, a product that has perennially remained influential.

The developments at Monte Cassino did not last to the realization of the basic assumption of sending Aquinas to the Monastery. Nine years down the road with the Benedictines, Aquinas exited for political reasons for University of Naples where he undertook philosophical studies. Perhaps it was in the University of Naples that Thomas Aquinas got grounded in philosophy. One hall mark at this time was the rejuvenation of teaching metaphysics of Aristotle, an ancient Greek philosopher whose metaphysical ideas that touched doctrines like the existence of God and the nature of the soul were on “death row” in church cycles. Numerous popes had condemned Aristotle’s teachings that appeared to be rubbing soldiers with the church teaching. One scholar and teacher—Peter of Ireland also known as Peter of Hibernia—at the University of Naples ventured to introduce the condemned section of Aristotle’s metaphysics to Aquinas. This revolutionary lecture caught the eyes of the young future philosopher cum theologian. This curiosity was fully realized in the Albert factor in the life of Aquinas.

St. Thomas Aquinas clandestinely studied Aristotle under the tutelage of Albert the Great in the University of Cologne, Germany. Aquinas then became intellectual apprentice of Albert. It was in Cologne that Aquinas was nicknamed “the dumb ox of Sicily”. The philosopher cum theologian “prophet”, Albert the Great, at this point of nicknaming prophesied that “the bellowing of that [dumb] ox will one day fill the world” [12]. The Albertan factor therefore probably caused Aquinas to grow to heights as future philosopher cum theologian. Indeed, the nursed

aspiration propelled Aquinas to earn him the title “Doctor Angelicus”—“Angelic doctor” by Pope Pius V in 1567 [13]. This title was bestowed on the saint to underscore his incomparable intellectual contributions and the perceived purity of doctrine.

Aristotelian metaphysical ideas appeared radical and more rational on the great questions of God and the nature of the world. The ideas were more appealing and more refreshing to a cross section of Christian philosophers than the rigid thinking catholic theorists on the ticket of doctrines. The conservative preservatives or rather stewards of catholic doctrines on God and the world thwarted Aristotle’s metaphysics as diversionary. But truth cannot be trampled upon forever. The right time came through Aquinas. He took it up and illuminated the whole church into consuming the metaphysical ideas of Aristotle on the existence of God and the world. This influence has not been erased up to date. Aquinas still remains a giant and foundational among the contemporary philosophers and theologians.

As an enthusiastic adherent of Aristotle, Aquinas Christianized his ideas into theological doctrines as already hinted on, to the extent of Pope Pius V declaring him as “Angelic” doctor of the church [13]. The revolutionary attitude of Aquinas did not stop with radical Aristotelianism, it also extended to spiritual renewal after the example of St. Dominic who introduced the order of preachers. In congruous with his contemporary St. Francis of Assisi, Aquinas revitalized the life of the church by a return to simple power of the gospel message. This was implemented through observance of poverty, preaching and unquestioning trust in God. Although the poverty advocated by Aquinas was rather embarrassing, it thrilled some aficionados to the realization that the gospel lifestyle is possible in practical terms. This is what [14] described as “back-to-basics evangelicalism”.

The modern world I think, needs this “Thomistic” spiritual renewal. In technologically filled pomp of the world like of 21st century, reliving simple gospel message is a powerful reminder of the relevance of re-evangelization in context. Science is, but also limited. This fact apparently has no refreshment among many scientists who think that the world needs more scientific affiliates than religious theorists. Religious truths appear second class-like truths. Much as it may appear trivial, entertainments like of sports are replacing church services. Practically stadiums have the population far more than that of traditional churches. The result is more stadium constructions than churches, particularly in Europe. In effect, unlike churches, the stadiums are not places of ethic culture.

In a podcast hosted by [16], a political scientist, with research focus on religiosity and political behavior, the argument is that people leave the church for logistical reasons. People slowly drift away from the church overtime. They drift towards places where they think they fit in, where they think they belong. Among these places is sports which has taken a major part of the life of such people. In order to counteract such trends as above, some churches tend to become more entertainment focused to regain and retain the congregants. The danger may be the resultant counter productivity among the young people seeking deeper spiritual

evangelization. They may switch off and drift away as well. Aquinas thus remains relevant perennially in reliving the gospel message through practical exercise of biblical poverty and life style of prayer, notwithstanding authentic academic search of truth through philosophy and theology.

Using the conclusion of [17], it can be deduced that St. Thomas Aquinas ably combined in his person two great radical extremes of Aristotelianism and Gospel simplicity. He turned the condemned Aristotelian metaphysical ideas on existence of God and the world into explaining the unclear doctrines on the same which became more comprehensible than before. The explicit show of evangelical poverty by literally begging in the streets of European cities by the mendicant missionaries was a shock to many and at the same time a tacit reminder to concrete living of the gospel which revived Christian living at that time. The scholarly life of Aquinas depended practically on the spiritual contemplation of the gospel values that he labored to live in trendy concrete life situations. Often academic life and spiritual life are considered mutually exclusive by some quarters. But Aquinas made it possible in his numerous writings and life experiences.

For [18] who described Aquinas “the dumb ox”, joining a band of monks who donned beggars’ costume was a total disappointment for his family that hoped he would become a lordly abbot in Monte Cassino. It was like joining a cult or marrying a wanderer—a gypsy. This state of affairs prompted the family to kidnap their son on his way to Paris for formal Dominican studies. Tradition has it that he was kept away from public in the family castle at Roccasecca as a prisoner in a tower. The intention was to make him forget his adolescent idealism and get to a very serious life carrier that would probably enchant the family name. In his characteristic spirituality and conviction, he outwitted all staged temptations of marriage masterminded by the siblings.

In the unfolding of the family squabble, Aquinas is said to have scared a prostitute to near death when she was made to tempt him into sexual pleasure [19]. The more the family pressurized the young Aquinas to abandon the crazy idea of becoming a poor monk in the family “prison”, the more he committed himself to memorizing the scriptures. This was not a mean feat. The memorized scriptures would later be reflected in his theological writings. He would freely quote thousands of scriptural verses not from research but from the memory, if the testimony of his contemporaries was to be relied on. For a contemporary Christian, the courage and resilience of Aquinas still holds much water in the spiritual struggle to win the fluid world of temptations of relativism where truth is relative.

However, amidst all the family challenges, it is probably upon his undisputed intellectual proficiency that the superiors of Aquinas sent him to the University of Paris which by then was the intellectual capital of Christendom in the world. This was after failed attempts of his family to vehemently block him from achieving his spiritual call to become a monk. The family eventually relented and let go. This appears to testify the divine intervention in Aquinas’ life, a sign that his destiny was practically divinely predetermined.

7. The Influence of Albert, the Dominican

The University of Paris had profound influence on the young Aquinas' philosophical and theological formation. In particular, Albert the Dominican scientist cum philosopher stood tall in the intellectual and spiritual life of the future saint, theologian and philosopher. Because of his ingenuity, Albert earned for himself the title "the Great" [13]. Aquinas continued, though surreptitiously, the study of Aristotle under the keen supervision of Albert the Great who eventually became a master and a mentor to the Angelic doctor. It is important to note here that the clandestine study of Aristotle started under Peter of Ireland in Naples. Aquinas vested interest in the metaphysics of Aristotle that split open the understanding of God's existence and the nature of the world. The somehow complicated doctrine advanced by the church to explain the existence of God and the nature of the world caused confusion in the minds of thinkers of the time. Aquinas saw a window of opportunity and hope through Aristotle's explanations. The study of Aristotle became therefore, a relieve for many in interpreting the doctrine of the existence of God. In Naples therefore, Aquinas embraced several ideas of Aristotle's philosophy. Aquinas synthesized Aristotle's philosophy with Christian thought that gave rise to several Christian doctrines in the Roman Catholic Church mainly in the University of Paris [20].

Upon completion of "undergraduate" studies at the University of Paris, the multi-talented Aquinas took to graduate studies in theology beginning with the study of the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. May be for beginners in Thomism, the *sentences* referred to various patristic quotations that were gathered around central themes in Theology by Peter Lombard. Thomas made a commentary on the *sentences* that doubled as his doctoral dissertation. By 1256, Thomas Aquinas had already started lecturing in Theology in Paris, holding Master of Theology.

The tasks assigned to a master of theology at Aquinas' time is important to understand at this material time. It helps one to understand Aquinas' theological project in perspective. The primary task of a master of theology at Paris University Campus was oddly to preach, that is, to split the word of God open for the benefit of students and the other faculty members. This was the overriding task of the professor. This appears clear in Aquinas' writings. The theology master was not simply satisfying the curiosity of his listeners and interpreters but rather to change their lives and transform their hearts. Hence, the young theologian was primarily preaching to bring salvation of souls. In this sense, his works were not predominantly a response to intellectual curiosity or questions on God and nature of his time and the time to come.

The second important task of a master of theology was biblical commentary. Aquinas was thus tasked to illumine and explain the *sacra pagina* – the sacred page of scripture [19], not primarily to lecture philosophy or metaphysics. As cited by [14], Weinandy, Keating & Yocum would remark that it is unfortunate that the biblical commentaries of Aquinas are the least known. Students of Aquinas have lately downed on this fact. Though late, it has to be made known that Aquinas'

scriptural feel and focus define his formal theology.

In the reckoning of [14], the third and last task of a Parisian *maestro* was to “raise and resolve those thorny questions that emerged from biblical commentary.” This was manifested in the famous phrase *quaestio disputata*—disputed question. This public forum was rather interesting. Students would raise theological questions and objections. The responsibility of the *Maestro* was to respond to these questions and objections. It constituted an academic defense in the miniature. Not many professors were enthusiastic in such a public defense. Some would probably dodge such sessions. But this was not the case with St. Thomas Aquinas. He took the bull by the horns. It emerged that Aquinas was the most respected in *quaestio disputata* forum. This further proved his intellectual prowess that was spiritually based. It may suffice to say that Aquinas’ intellectual and spiritual prowess to a greater extent, had its secure foundation from Albert the Great.

The holistic life and spirituality of the great saint—Aquinas is only complete when studied as a unit. Emphasizing some aspects of his life may be unfair representation of the man of all trades. His renowned theology is founded on his Aristotelic philosophy. Most important to note is the role played by the spiritual life of Aquinas in his intellectual lifecycle. He often used the word path or way – via in his scholarly and spiritual writings. The way is used in reference to God. This way of Aquinas is double edged. One leads to God—*raditus* and the other is from God—*exitus* to the people.

8. Is Thomas Aquinas Still Relevant to a 21st Century Reader?

That Aquinas is a perennial “read” may be idiosyncratic. Undoubtedly, Aquinas is a widely read and celebrated scholar. Of him, St Pius V said he is “the most brilliant light of the church”. For Pope Paul V, it suffices to say he is “the defender of the Catholic Church and the conqueror of the heretics”, therefore, the doctor of the church was title the Pope crowned him with [21]. Accordingly, St. Ignatius of Loyola made him an obligatory reading for Jesuit aspirants. Earning him the title “the Angelic Doctor”, Thomas Aquinas was largely considered to be a saint of unimaginable magnitude. Pope John Paul II added him yet again the title “Doctor of Humanity” [22]. Canon 589 of 1917 Code of Canon Law still recommends his method, doctrine and principles to candidates for priesthood training in Philosophy and Theology [23]. This sentiment is re-emphasized in 1983 Code of Canon Law and Vatican II Council—Decree on the Training of Priests, referring to Aquinas as “their Teacher”. Candidates for priesthood need thus to study Thomas Aquinas with the seriousness it deserves.

Much as thick ink has been poured on the line emphasizing reading of Aquinas as the epitome of theology and philosophy on catholic cycles and among scholars, his ideas may not interest a contemporary reader the way it did in 18th, 19th and perhaps early 20th centuries. Times have changed. Methodologies of study keep on being upraised. Ideas have mutated. Theological and philosophical debates have acquired new proportions and methodologies. Heretics of 21st century may not

necessarily need “*Thomasian*” methodology of refutation. A number of factors may conglomerate to make a modern reader lose taste in reading Thomas with every veracity. The fact that he wrote in Latin may occasion obvious challenges due to a lack of deep mastery of the language to masticate the author’s technical terms and allusions. Further, translation of his works into various languages may also come with translation challenges of word imports.

One of the modern criticisms of Aquinas was advanced by [24]. His criticism stated that:

He [Thomas Aquinas] does not, like the Platonic Socrates, set out to follow wherever the argument may lead. He is not engaged in an inquiry, the result of which it is impossible to know in advance. Before he begins to philosophize, he already knows the truth; it is declared in the Catholic faith. If he can find apparently rational arguments for some parts of the faith, so much the better; if he cannot, he need only fall back on revelation. The finding of arguments for a conclusion given in advance is not philosophy, but special pleading. I cannot, therefore, feel that he deserves to be put on a level with the best philosophers either of Greece or of modern times.

In this thinking, [24] did not consider Aquinas to be a philosopher due to his theological leaning with apparently no rational content. Even though Aquinas did not consider himself to be a philosopher and bluntly accused philosophers of being pagans, with no faith, “falling short of the true and proper wisdom to be found in Christian revelation” [9], he believed that truth is known by reason (natural revelation), rationality and faith (super natural revelation). Several of his works bear philosophical contents, hence he can rightly be called a philosopher. Besides, his philosophical topics influenced and continue to influence Western philosophy in general and catholic theology in particular.

Although Aquinas is known for writing clearly and precisely, his style of writing may not attract clientele. While commenting on *Summa Theologiae*, [25] avers that “his text does not sparkle.” However, not everything about Aquinas’ prose is gloomy. Thomas Pieper discerns that “beauty of language, certainly exists in the works of Aquinas”. He quickly adds: “But it is not really a beauty of a work of art.” He continues to say, “This language is beautiful, and as a perfect tool, it is beautiful.” [17]. The writings of Aquinas qualify as classics. Therefore, perennial interpretation is attached to them both in philosophical and theological academic arena.

9. Conclusions

In sum, from our study, the thrust of Thomas Aquinas’ academic work was prayer. He remained committed to his religious vocation till the end of his earthly life. For those called to priesthood and religious life, Aquinas remains a key figure for both formation and living religious life at all times. This may apply to any Christian who strives to live a scholarly and holy life.

The works of Aquinas do not show contradiction between faith and reason, academics and spirituality/prayer. Instead Aquinas argues that faith and reason are complementary in nature. God reveals himself in nature. With natural reason, human beings can arrive at the knowledge of many things that are proper to their nature. Aquinas, in his own words, says in *Summa Theologie*, I-II, Q109a1:

Now every form bestowed on created things by God has power for a determined act [uality], which it can bring about in proportion to its own proper endowment; and beyond which it is powerless, except by a superadded form, as water can only heat when heated by the fire. And thus, the human understanding has a form, viz. intelligible light, which of itself is sufficient for knowing certain intelligible things, viz. those we can come to know through the senses [26].

Therefore, when we study nature, by use of natural reason, we also study theology as well. For, God also reveals himself through natural things. Aquinas concludes that rationality is congruous with faith; faith is a higher order of knowing God through divine revelation. Throughout his major works, Aquinas sets out to prove that faith and reason are complementary not contradictory.

Aquinas still widely enjoys admiration of ardent followers from scholars and ordinary readers world over regardless of elegance of writing. Despite the fact that every century comes with new challenges, ideologies, schools of thought, and perhaps heresies, Aquinas' approach may still be of use to tackle ideological challenges at all times. It could be a matter of harnessing his methodology to suit a particular challenge in time. He still remains a spiritual and academic giant in Christian world. His thoughts on reality remain pertinent and powerful, offering wisdom for the present. It can safely be concluded that Aquinas is a perennial hall mark in the history of thought. His works are continually interpreted with new zeal and academic flavor so long as fundamental human questions continue to be asked about nature and the destiny of this nature.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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