

Gifts of Finest Wheat
Year 2, Session 2, Week 6:
Church History from 1225 to 1503,
Setting the Stage for the Protestant Reformation

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

- Generally recognized, along with St. Augustine of Hippo, as one of the two greatest theologians in church history
- Born in 1225, in Italy, not far from monastery of Monte Cassino
- Entered Dominican order in 1244
- Well known for work as teacher at University of Paris, 1256-1259, 1268-1272
Lived and taught in Italy during periods after 1256 when he was not in Paris¹
- Revival of ancient Greek philosophy on his part, particularly the thought of Aristotle, viewed as controversial by some
In 1277 Archbishop of Paris condemned list of danger propositions
Some ideas of Aquinas among those targeted²
Some who used Aristotle denied validity of theology and revelation³
Philosophy's understanding of natural world seen as all that was necessary for understanding of truth
Aquinas himself saw synthesis of faith and reason
Truly knowledge that could be gained from observation of the world, as well as things only known because God has revealed them to us⁴
- Wrote extensively
Philosophical works, theological works, scriptural commentaries
- *Summa Theologiae*, his most famous work
 - Lengthy work, but never completed
 - Four main parts
 - Part I, on God and creation
 - Part I – II, general discussion of human actions and virtues
 - Part II – II, discusses particular points related to actions and virtues
 - Part III, on Christ
 - Each part consists of a number of questions
Each question consists of a number of articles
Unique numbering system for quotes from the *Summa* reflects this division

¹ Ralph McInerny, ed. *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*. (London, England: Penguin Books, 1998), xxxv-xxxvi.

² William P. Baumgarth and Richard J. Regan, S.J., *Saint Thomas Aquinas on Law, Morality, and Politics*. (Cambridge, England: Avatar Books, 1988), xiii.

³ *Ibid*, xvi.

⁴ *Ibid*, xvii-xviii.

- Each article begins with series of objections to point Thomas will be defending, then presentation of his position, then particular response to each objection
- Would pose objections to his positions in strongest possible terms⁵
Defending himself against real disagreement, not straw men

St. Bonaventure (1221-1274)

- Member, and eventually head, of the Franciscan order
- Taught at University of Paris during same period as Aquinas⁶
- Upset by many members of this order moving away from Francis' ideal of poverty and simplicity⁷
His suggestion concerning "moderate use" of material possessions was used by Pope Nicholas III to address problem of divisions that had arisen in Franciscan order⁸
- Hastened end of three year (!) long Papal conclave by telling secular rulers to take the roof off of the building the Cardinals were meeting in and to threaten to cut off the Cardinals' food supply⁹
- Died in 1274 while attending Council of Lyon, 1907 edition of the *Catholic Encyclopedia* cites reputable sources speculating that he was poisoned¹⁰
- Following Scholastic theology of his day believed in importance of integration of philosophy and theology
Followed Aquinas in using Aristotle, did have criticisms of some aspects of Aristotle's thought, also influenced by Plato¹¹

Avignon Papacy (1309-1376)

- Pope Boniface VIII (1295-1303) denied right of King Philip the Fair of France to tax the clergy
Philip responded by forbidding export of gold from France
Meant Pope could not receive revenues from French church
Boniface VIII buckled
Said clergy could be taxed by king in case of emergency
King had right to determine what constituted an emergency
Tensions escalated
Philip sent mercenaries to capture or kill Boniface
Boniface captured
Group of loyal lay people helped him escape

⁵ Ibid, xx.

⁶ McInerny, xxxv-xxxvi.

⁷ C. Colt Anderson, *Christian Eloquence: Contemporary Doctrinal Preaching*. (Chicago, IL: Hillenbrand Books, 2005), 153.

⁸ Richard McBrien, *Lives of the Popes*. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 224.

⁹ Ibid, 219.

¹⁰ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02648c.htm>

¹¹ Ibid.

Died a few weeks later¹²

- Benedict XI (1303-1304)
Weak pope, largely gave into French demands¹³
- Pope Clement V (1305-1314)
Cousin of Philip the Fair
Moved his residence to Avignon, France in 1309
While this situation lasted French crown clearly exercised undue influence on Papacy¹⁴
- Pope Urban V (1362-1370)
Returned Papacy to Rome for three years
Violence and instability in the city caused him to return to Avignon¹⁵

St. Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380)

- Her influence on Pope Gregory XI (1371-1378) caused permanent return of Papacy to Rome¹⁶
- Spent summer of 1376 in Avignon, bore fruit of Gregory XI leaving the city later that year, entering Rome in January, 1377¹⁷
- Saw need for reform among the clergy, said face of the church had been deformed by greedy clergy¹⁸, that such men “devour souls who were bought with Christ’s blood”,¹⁹ and that some clergy were “wretches who had become mirrors of wickedness”²⁰
- Expressed hope that “Once she (the church) is reformed with good shepherds, her subjects will certainly change their ways”²¹

Western Schism (1378-1417)

- Resistance to reform efforts of Gregory XI and Urban VI (1378-1389) led to schism²²
- French cardinals who elected Urban VI later claimed they did so under duress
Withdrew to France
October 31, 1378 crowned anti-pope who took name Clement VII²³
- European nations divided over issue of who to give allegiance to²⁴

¹² C. Colt Anderson, *The Great Catholic Reformers: From Gregory the Great to Dorothy Day*. (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 107-109.

¹³ Richard McBrien, *Lives of the Popes*. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 232-233,

¹⁴ C. Colt Anderson, *The Great Catholic Reformers*, 109-110.

¹⁵ McBrien, 243-244.

¹⁶ Ibid, 245.

¹⁷ Ibid, 246.

¹⁸ C. Colt Anderson, *The Great Catholic Reformers*, 112

¹⁹ Ibid, 119.

²⁰ Ibid, 120.

²¹ Ibid, 117.

²² Ibid, 110.

²³ McBrien, 247-248.

²⁴ Ibid, 247.

- 1394 Clement VII succeeded by Benedict XIII as anti-pope in Avignon
Firmly convinced of legitimacy of his claim to be Pope
Stridency alienated him from support of the French king²⁵
- When discussions between Pope Gregory XII (1406-1415) and Benedict XIII broke down Cardinals gathered at Pisa elected 2nd anti-pope, Alexander V, in 1409
Now three claimants to Papal throne
Pope in Rome
Anti-pope in Avignon
2nd Anti-pope in Pisa
- Alexander V's successor took name John XXIII²⁶
Thankfully that name was put to better use from 1958 to 1963
- Council of Constance
Deposed John XXIII on May 29, 1415
Asked Gregory XII to resign
Gregory agreed as long as he was allowed to formally convoke council, showing legitimacy of his Papacy
He does so, then resigns
Council dealt with problem of remaining Avignon Pope by declaring Benedict XIII a heretic²⁷
- Election of Martin V brings messy affair to an end²⁸

John Wycliffe (1324-1384)

- Precursor to Protestant Reformation
- His teachings on such subjects as the Eucharist and Purgatory condemned by Gregory XI in 1377²⁹
- Donatism, taught that mortal sin meant someone was not true member of the clergy³⁰
- Clearly denied transubstantiation³¹
- Most likely first individual to make explicit claim that scriptures are only source of authority needed for Christians³²

John Hus (1372-1415)

- Condemned by same Council of Constance which ended Papal schism
- Following this burnt at the stake by civil authorities

²⁵ Ibid, 250.

²⁶ Ibid, 252-253.

²⁷ Ibid, 253.

²⁸ Ibid, 253.

²⁹ McBrien, 246-247.

³⁰ C. Colt Anderson, *The Great Catholic Reformers*, 142.

³¹ Ibid, 135.

³² Robert A. Sungenis, *Not by Scripture Alone*, (Santa Barbara, CA: Queenship Publishing Company, 1997), 50, 66.

Had been promised safe passage by political authorities

- Council was presented with copies of Hus's writings that had been altered by his opponents to contain clearly heretical statements

Intricacies of ecclesiastical trials at the time meant Hus could not deny the teachings of these writings without acknowledging them as his own³³

I, John Hus, in hope a priest of Jesus Christ, fearing to offend God and to fall into perjury, am not willing to recant all or any of the articles produced against me in the testimonies of the false witnesses. For God is my witness that I neither preached, asserted, nor defended them, as they said that I had defended, preached, and asserted them."³⁴

Unwillingness to lie in order to save himself doomed him

- Commonly seen as walking in footsteps of Wycliffe, paving way for Luther and Calvin

In union with their doctrinal break with the church

- There are some who debate this point of view, say Hus did not advocate a doctrinal break with the church, claim he strongly attacked abuses but that unlike Wycliffe, Luther, and Calvin his doctrinal beliefs do not place him outside the range of Catholic orthodoxy

This is in regards to Hus himself, does not apply to later groups of Czech Christians who broke with Rome while identifying themselves with his name

- 1999, theological symposium on Hus held in Rome, John Paul II gave opening address
 - Did not affirm or deny possibility of doctrinal rehabilitation of Hus
 - Referred to Hus's "moral courage in the face of adversity and death"
 - Said that he felt "the need to express deep regret for the cruel death inflicted on John Hus, and for the consequent wound of conflict and division which was thus imposed on the minds and hearts of the Bohemian people"
 - Expressed confidence that "Faith has nothing to fear from the work of historical research, for, in the final analysis, research too is directed towards the truth which has in God its source", and said that "The truth can also prove uncomfortable when it asks us to abandon long-held prejudices and stereotypes"³⁵
 - Did not think that Hus can be viewed as someone whose thought is compatible with Catholic doctrine, but certainly seemed to be encouraging study of Hus that could lead to serious rethinking of how he is viewed by Catholics

³³ Ibid, 142-145.

³⁴ See Daniel Didomizio's 1999 article "Jan Hus's *De Ecclesia*, Precursor of Vatican II?" in Volume 60, Issue 2 of the journal *Theological Studies*. Can be found online through www.questia.com

³⁵ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1999/december/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_17121999_jan-hus_en.html

- Hus does not seem to have denied transubstantiation, or have fallen into Donatism by making claim that sinfulness of priests means the sacraments they celebrate are invalid³⁶
- Strongest claim that it seems possible to make against him was a rejection of the Papal office, although even this is uncertain³⁷

Even if true would put him in same basic category as Eastern Orthodox, not as far separated from the Catholic Church as Protestants

Must keep in mind that he was responding to exaggerated claims concerning the Papacy made by some Catholics

Hus affirmed that Peter “by a certain prerogative ... was the first among the apostles”

But felt need to make claim that Peter "was not a person higher in dignity than Christ's mother; nor was he equal to Christ or made the governor of the angels”³⁸

These weren't empty rhetorical points Hus was making, he was responding to specific claims made by some at the time³⁹

- Strong statement:

If he who is called to be Peter's vicar follows in the paths of the virtues just spoken of, we believe that he is his true vicar and the chief pontiff of the church over which he rules. But, if he walks in the opposite paths, then he is the legate of antichrist at variance with Peter and Jesus Christ.⁴⁰

But is it any stronger than statements made by Sts. Peter Damien, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Catherine of Sienna?

Are we going to say that if you use this type of language to attack the corruption of priests and bishops we'll make you a saint, if you use it to attack the Pope you're a heretic?

Remember this was at a time when there were three claimants to the See of Peter, people had a right to be upset with way in which those who claimed to be Pope were conducting themselves

- Following statement could be seen as holding to Protestant understanding of scripture alone:

All truth in the religion of Christ is to be followed, and only that is truth which is known by the bodily senses, or discovered by an infallible intelligence, or made known through revelation, or laid down in sacred Scripture.”⁴¹

³⁶ Daniel Didomizio's, "Jan Hus's *De Ecclesia*, Precursor of Vatican II?".

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ C. Colt Anderson, *The Great Catholic Reformers*, 137.

⁴⁰ Daniel Didomizio, "Jan Hus's *De Ecclesia*, Precursor of Vatican II?".

⁴¹ Ibid.

However, his use of scripture involved reading it through the eyes of the conciliar creeds of the early church and such scriptural commentators as Augustine⁴²

Frequently cited such figures as Gregory the Great, Ambrose, Jerome, Cyprian, and Bernard of Clairvaux, as well as occasional references to Aquinas⁴³

Arguments that he made to show that Pope can at times be wrong supported by his use of direct quotes from Augustine and the 7th and 8th century English church historian Venerable Bede⁴⁴

Different approach than Wycliffe who spoke of Augustine, Benedict, and Bernard holding to positions worthy of damnation⁴⁵

Statement on sources of truth by itself could be seen as affirming scripture alone

But his theological method and use of authoritative church sources doesn't necessarily seem consistent with this

- Hus had some sympathy for Wycliffe

Affirmed some of the Englishman's teachings

But not every statement of a heretic is heresy

Not unusual for some statements of a figure to be condemned without all of their thought being treated in the same way⁴⁶

Remember, some of Aquinas's statements condemned after his death by Archbishop of Paris

Saying Wycliffe got some things right does not imply acceptance of his rejection of core Catholic teachings

- Might be upsetting, challenging for Catholics to reconsider views on a figure as divisive and controversial as Hus

But could also be seen as something helpful to Catholic apologetics

One of most notable figures in Church history is actually one of us, or at very least closer to traditional Catholic views than he is typically thought to be

St. Thomas A' Kempis (1380-1471)

- Wrote *The Imitation of Christ*, one of the best known spiritual works of all time
- Born in Germany, lived most of adult life in Netherlands
- Part of Congregation of the Common Life, church approved community that lived poverty, chastity, and obedience but did not take formal monastic vows
- *The Imitation of Christ* intended for those living community life in religious orders, small portions of text probably not helpful for those not living that life⁴⁷
- *The Imitation* is divided into four books

⁴² C. Colt Anderson, *The Great Catholic Reformers*, 138.

⁴³ Daniel Didomizio, "Jan Hus's *De Ecclesia*, Precursor of Vatican II?"

⁴⁴ C. Colt Anderson, *The Great Catholic Reformers*, 138.

⁴⁵ Robert A. Sungenis, *Not by Faith Alone*, (Santa Barbara, CA: Queenship Publishing Company, 1997), 449.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 134-135.

⁴⁷ Leo Sherley-Price, *Thomas A' Kempis: The Imitation of Christ*. (London, England: Penguin Books, 1952), 11, 13.

- Book One: Counsels on the Spiritual Life
 - Encourages reader towards purgation
 - Breaking of attachment to material things and dependence on other human beings
 - Encourages recognition of need for, and movement towards, God⁴⁸
- Book Two: On the Inner Life
 - Focus on illumination
 - Divine light of the knowledge of God⁴⁹
 - Book One a breaking away from the world, Book Two a movement towards God
- Book Three: On Inward Consolation
 - Discussion of how encounter with God leads to transformation, peace, holiness, freedom from sin⁵⁰
- Book Four: On the Blessed Sacrament
 - Shows Eucharist as center of life of the Church
 - Encourages reception of Holy Communion
 - Discussion of Eucharistic theology and it's history⁵¹

Some of the final Popes of the pre-Reformation era

Sixtus IV (1414-1484), Pope 1471-1484

- Made six of his nephews cardinals
- Reckless spending led to need to sell indulgences⁵²
 - This would soon have dire consequences

Innocent VIII (1432-1492), Pope 1484-1492

- Bribed way into office
- Favoritism towards his illegitimate children
- To secure marriage of one of his children into powerful Medici family had thirteen year old Medici boy named Cardinal
 - That boy later became Pope Leo X (1513-1521)⁵³

Alexander VI

- “Most notorious pontificate in history”⁵⁴
- Open affair with married fifteen year old girl

⁴⁸ Ibid, 14-15.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 15.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 16.

⁵¹ Ibid, 17-18.

⁵² McBrien, 264-265.

⁵³ C. Colt Anderson, *The Great Catholic Reformers*, 154.

⁵⁴ McBrien, 266.

Giulia Farnese

Depicted as statue of Justice in front of tomb of Pope Paul III in St. Peter's Basilica⁵⁵

- Made his 18 year old son a cardinal, also made his mistress's brother a cardinal⁵⁶
- Believed as well to have poisoned several cardinals in order to seize their property⁵⁷
- Died in 1503 when he attended a dinner hosted by a cardinal and he himself was poisoned
 - Probably accidentally poisoned by someone who was trying to kill the host of the event⁵⁸

Further Lingering Problems on the eve of the Reformation

- Dryness of scholastic theology, philosophical abstractness of speculative thought in universities

Theological method of being guided by scriptures read through the eyes of the early church fathers and councils had been pushed aside in many cases

St. Thomas More said that someone "might as soon obtain bodily nourishment by milking a he-goat...as spiritual nourishment by reading the schoolmen"⁵⁹

Erasmus claimed that "a man might sooner find his way out of a labyrinth than the intellectual mazes of the Realists, Nominalists, Thomists, Albertists, Occamists, Scotists"⁶⁰

Naming different intellectual schools of thought present in European universities at the time

Negative reference to Thomists is attack on commentators on Thomas Aquinas, not rejection of value of his own thought

Imagine in our own day homilies not being about God's message contained in the scriptures, but instead being randomly selected readings from canon law and Catholic encyclopedias

Transformative power of scriptures, early church fathers, and creeds and councils being lost in a cloud of minutiae

Meanwhile popular piety focused on indulgences, relics, local patron saints⁶¹

Legitimate practices, beliefs; but ones that very easily lead to superstition among those not properly formed and educated in the faith

Abstract philosophical speculation and popular superstition easy to find

⁵⁵ C. Colt Anderson, *The Great Catholic Reformers*, 155.

⁵⁶ McBrien, 268.

⁵⁷ C. Colt Anderson, *The Great Catholic Reformers*, 155.

⁵⁸ McBrien, 268-269.

⁵⁹ Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation*, (London, England: 1972), 36.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 33.

⁶¹ Ibid, 23-24.

Teachings of scriptures, great theologians of the church, and early ecumenical councils more than a little bit harder to find

- Scandal of dispensation fees
 - Priest could pay fine to be allowed to have a mistress
 - Then another to have a child with her
 - Then another to have that child baptized
 - Annulments could be bought
 - Financial aspect caused people to doubt whole system of confession and penance⁶²
- Continued selling of church offices led to those in them to expect return on their investment
 - Led to the problem of dispensation fees
 - Led to selling of indulgences on a large scale
 - This would be key in paving way for Luther's Reformation
 - Leap made from cry for moral reform to one for doctrinal reforms
 - And, as we'll see next week, that's when things really hit the fan

⁶² C. Colt Anderson, *The Great Catholic Reformers*, 156.