

THOMAS AQUINAS

Selected Writings

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PENGUIN BOOKS

I. The Inaugural Sermons (1256)

The following texts mark milestones in Thomas's academic career, although there is lack of agreement as to when the first sermon was preached. Some date it from 1252 when Thomas came back to Paris to resume his studies. Others place both of them in 1256 when Thomas became a master of theology. These sermons have been known to modern readers only since 1912, when they were discovered at the Santa Maria Novella among the writings of Remigio dei Girolami. It will be remembered that this friar had studied under Thomas in Paris and in turn may have taught Dante. The reader will marvel at the deft manipulation of texts, with Scripture being used to comment on itself. An alternative title of the master of theology was magister in sacra pagina – master of the sacred text. The new master exhibits his prowess in these sermons.

COMMENDATION OF AND DIVISION OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

This is the book of the commandments of God, and the law that is for ever. All that keep it shall come to life: but they that have forsaken it, to death.

Baruch 4.1

According to Augustine in *On Christian Doctrine* 4.12, one skilled in speech should so speak as to teach, to delight and to change; that is, to teach the ignorant, to delight the bored and to change the lazy. The speech of Sacred Scripture does these three things in the fullest manner. For it firmly teaches with its eternal truth. Psalm 118.89: 'Thy word, O Lord, stands firm for ever as heaven.' And it sweetly delights with its pleasantness. Psalm 118.103: 'How sweet are thy words to my mouth!' And it efficaciously changes with its authority. Jeremiah 23.29: 'Are not my words as a fire, saith the Lord?'

Therefore in the text above Sacred Scripture is commended for three things. First, for the authority with which it changes: 'This is the book

of the commandments of God.' Second, for the eternal truth with which it instructs, when it says, 'and the law that is for ever.' Third, for the usefulness with which it entices, when it says, 'All that keep it shall come to life.'

The authority of this Scripture is shown in three things. First, its origin, because God is its origin. Hence it says, 'the commandments of God.' Baruch 3-37: 'He found out all the way of knowledge.' Hebrews 2-3: 'For it was first announced by the Lord and was confirmed unto us.' Such an author is infallibly to be believed, both on account of the condition of his nature, because he is truth; John 14-4: 'I am the way and the truth and the life.' And on account of his fullness of knowledge; Romans 11-33: 'Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God!' And also on account of the power of the words; Hebrews 4-12: 'For the word of God is living and efficient and keener than any two-edged sword.'

Second, it is shown to be efficacious by the necessity with which it is imposed. Mark 16-16: 'He who does not believe shall be condemned.' The truth of Sacred Scripture is proposed in the manner of a precept, hence the text says, 'the commandments of God.' These commandments direct the intellect through faith: 'You believe in God, believe also in me,' John 14-1; inform the affections with love: 'This is my commandment, that you love one another,' John 15-12; and induce to action: 'Do this and you shall live,' Luke 10-28.

Third, it is shown to be efficacious by the uniformity of its sayings, because all who teach the sacred doctrine teach the same thing. 1 Corinthians 15-11: 'Whether then it is I or they, so we preach, and so you have believed.' And this is necessary because they all had one teacher. Matthew 23-8: 'Your teacher is one.' And they had one spirit, 'Have we not walked in the same spirit?' and one love from above, 'Now the multitude of believers were of one heart and one soul' (Acts 4-32). Therefore, as a sign of the uniformity of doctrine, it says significantly, 'This is the book.'

The truth of this teaching of Scripture is immutable and eternal, hence the words, 'and the law that is for ever.' Luke 21-33: 'Heaven and earth will pass away but my words shall not pass away.' 'This law will endure for ever because of three things: first, because of the power of the lawgiver. Isaiah 14-27: 'For the Lord of hosts hath decreed, and who can dissuade it.' Second, on account of his immutability. Malachi 3-6: 'For I am the Lord and I change not'; Numbers 23-19: 'God is not a man, that he should lie: nor like the son of man, that he should be changed.' Third, because of the truth of the law. Psalm 118-86: 'All thy commandments are faithful.'

Proverbs 12-19: 'The lip of truth shall be steadfast for ever.' 3 Ezra 4-38: 'Truth remains and gathers strength eternally.'

The usefulness of this Scripture is the greatest: 'I am the Lord thy God that teach thee profitable things.' Hence our text continues: 'All that keep it shall come to life.' Which indeed is threefold: First it is the life of grace, to which Sacred Scripture disposes. John 6-64: 'The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.' For through this life the spirit lives in God. Galatians 2-20: 'It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me.' Second is the life of justice consisting in works, to which Sacred Scripture directs. Psalm 118-93: 'Thy decrees I will never forget, for by them thou hast given me life.' Third is the life of glory which Sacred Scripture promises and to which it leads. John 6-69: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast words of everlasting life.' John 20-31: 'But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.'

The Division of Sacred Scripture

Sacred Scripture leads to this life in two ways, by commanding and by helping. Commanding through the mandates which it proposes, which belong to the Old Testament. Ecclesiasticus 24-33: 'Moses commanded a law in the precepts of justice.' Helping, through the gift of grace which the lawgiver dispenses, which pertains to the New Testament. Both of these are touched on in John 1-17: 'For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.'

Hence the whole of Sacred Scripture is divided into two principal parts, the Old and New Testaments, which are mentioned in Matthew 13-52: 'So then every Scribe instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings forth from his storeroom things new and old.' And Song of Songs 7-13: 'In our gates are all fruits, the new and the old, my beloved, I have kept for thee.'

The Old Testament is divided according to the teaching of the commandments, for the commandment is of two kinds, the binding and the warning. The binding is the command of a king who can punish transgressors. Proverbs 20-2: 'As the roaring of a lion, so also is the dread of a king.' But a warning is the precept of a father who must teach. Ecclesiasticus 7-25: 'Hast thou children? Instruct them.' The precept of a king is of two kinds, one which establishes the laws, another which induces to observance of the law, which is customarily done through his

heralds and ambassadors. Thus it is that three kinds of command are distinguished, that of the king, that of the herald and that of the father. On this basis the Old Testament is subdivided into three parts, according to Jerome in his prologue to the Book of Kings.

The first part is contained in the law which is proposed by the king himself. Isaiah 33.22: 'For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our King.'

The second is contained in the Prophets who were, as it were, ambassadors and heralds of God, speaking to the people in the person of God, and urging them to observance of the law. Aggeus 1.13: 'And Aggeus, the messenger of the Lord, as one of the messengers of the Lord, spoke.'

The third is contained in the works of hagiographers, writers who were inspired by the Holy Spirit and spoke as for themselves and not for God. Hence they are called saintly writers because they were writers of the sacred, *agios* meaning 'sacred', and *graphia* meaning 'scripture'. Thus the precepts found in them are paternal. As is evident in Proverbs 6.20: 'My son, keep the commandments of thy father.'

Jerome mentions a fourth kind of book, namely, the apocryphal, so called from *apō*, that is, 'especially', and *cryphōn*, that is, 'obscure', because there is doubt about their contents and authors. The Catholic Church includes among the books of Sacred Scripture some whose teachings are not doubted, but whose authors are. Not that the authors are unknown, but because these men were not of known authority. Hence they do not have force from the authority of the authors but rather from their reception by the Church. Because there is the same manner of speaking in them and in the hagiographical works, they are for now counted among them.

The first part, which contains the law, is divided into two parts, insofar as there are two kinds of law, public and private.

A private law is imposed for the observance of one person or one family. Such law is contained in Genesis, as is evident from the first precept given to man, 'But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat' (2.17), and to Noah, 'Saving that flesh with blood you shall not eat' (9.4), and to Abraham, 'And again God said to Abraham: And thou therefore shalt keep my covenant, and thy seed after thee in their generations' (17.9).

The public law is that which is given to the people. For the divine law was given to the Jewish people through a mediator, because it was not fitting that the people should receive it immediately from God. Deuteronomy 5.5: 'I was the mediator and stood between the Lord and

you and at that time to show you his words.' Galatians 3.19: 'What then was the Law? It was enacted on account of transgressors, being delivered by angels through a mediator.' Thus a twofold level is found in legislation. First, when the law comes from the Lord to the mediator, and this pertains to three books, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. Hence we frequently read in them, 'God spoke to Moses.' Second, when the law is given to the people by the mediator, and this pertains to Deuteronomy, as is evident from its very beginning, 'These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel.'

These three books are distinguished by the three things in which a people should be ordered. First, precepts bearing on equity of judgement, and this is found in Exodus. Second, in sacraments with respect to the establishment of worship, and this in Leviticus. And third, in offices, with respect to the administration of the community, and this in Numbers.

The second part, which is the prophets, is subdivided insofar as a herald ought to do two things. He should manifest the beneficence of the king, so that men will be inclined to obey, and he should declare the edict of the law.

There is a threefold divine beneficence that the prophets expose to the people. First, the effect of heredity, and this in Joshua, of which Ecclesiasticus 46.1 says, 'Valiant in war was Joshua.' Second, the destruction of armies, and this in the book of Judges, of whose destruction Psalm 82.10 says, 'Do to them as to Madian, as to Sisara.' Third, the exultation of the people, which is twofold, namely the private exaltation of one person, and this in Ruth, and a public which is of the whole people, and this in Kings, which benefice God grants to them. Ezekiel 16.13: 'And thou wast adorned with gold and silver.' For these books, according to Jerome, are placed in the rank of prophets.

In other books which are commonly said to be of the prophets, the prophets posed divine edicts for the observance of the law. And this is said, first, in general, in the major prophets who were sent to the whole people and called for the observance of the whole law; second, in particular, and this in the minor prophets, different ones of whom were sent for different reasons to special tribes, as Osee to the ten tribes of Joel, Jonah to the Ninevites, and so with the rest.

The major prophets differ according to the different ways the prophets sought to lead the people to observance of the law, namely, cajoling by the promise of benefits, frightening with the threat of punishment, arguing by condemnation of sins. Although each of these is found in every prophet, Isaiah chiefly cajoles, as is said in Ecclesiasticus 48.27: 'With a great spirit

he saw the things that are come to pass at last, and comforted the mourners in Sion.' Jeremiah chiefly warns, hence Jeremiah 38.4: 'He weakened the hands of the men of war that remain in this city.' But Ezekiel argues and scolds, Ezekiel 16.3: 'Thy father was an Amorhite and thy mother a Cethite.'

They can be distinguished in another way, insofar as Isaiah chiefly foretells the mystery of the Incarnation, which is why he is read during the time of Advent by the Church, and Jeremiah the mystery of the Passion, hence he is read in Passiontide, and Ezekiel the mystery of the Resurrection, hence his book finishes with the raising of the bones and the repair of the temple. Daniel, however, is included among the prophets insofar as he predicted future events in a prophetic spirit; although he did not speak to the people in the person of the Lord, he dealt with the divinity of Christ. Thus the four prophets answer to the four evangelists, and also to the call to judgement.

The third part, which contains the hagiographic and the apocryphal books, is subdivided according to the two ways fathers instruct their sons in virtue, namely, by word and deed, since in morals examples are no less important than words. Some teach by deed alone, some by word alone, some by word and deed.

By deed, however, in two ways. One, instructing about the future by warning, and this in Joshua, whom Jerome places among the hagiographs. For although one is a prophet because of the gift of prophecy, this is not his office, because he was not sent by God to prophesy to the people. Hence what is said in Wisdom 8.8 can be applied to the prophet: 'She knoweth signs and wonders before they are done.' In another way, speaking of past events as examples of virtue. There are four principal virtues, namely justice, which serves the common good, an example of which is given in Paradise, in which the condition of a whole people who were governed with justice is described. The second is temperance, an example of which is given in Judith, which is why Jerome says, 'Take Judith as an example of the chaste widow.' Judith 15.11: 'For thou hast done manfully, and thy heart has been strengthened, because thou hast loved chastity.' Third is fortitude, which has two attributes. To attack, and an example of this is found in the Book of Maccabees; and to endure, and an example of this is found in Tobit 2.12: 'Now this trial the Lord therefore permitted to happen to him, that an example might be given to posterity of his patience.' The fourth is prudence, by which dangers are avoided, and an example of this is given in Ezra. For in that book we are shown how Ezra and Nehemiah and other princes prudently guarded

against the plots of enemies wishing to impede the building of the temple and the city. It also pertains to prudence wisely to repel the violent, and an example of this is given in Esther, where it is shown how Mardocheus and Esther handled the deceptions of the most powerful Aman.

The hagiographical and apocryphal books which instruct by word, are divided insofar as words work in a twofold way to instruct, in one way, by asking for the gift of wisdom. Wisdom 7.7: 'Wherefore I have wished, and understanding was given me, and I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came upon me.' This is how the psalter instructs, speaking to God in prayer. In another way, by teaching wisdom, and this in two ways according to the twofold work of wisdom, one of which is to expose the liar, and Job who drove out errors by way of disputation exhibits this. Job 13.3-4: 'But yet I will speak to the Almighty and I desire to reason with God, having first shown that you are forgers of lies and maintainers of perverse opinions.' The other work is not to lie about what it knows, and thus we are instructed in a twofold way, because either wisdom is commended to us, and this in the book of Wisdom, or the precepts of wisdom are proposed, and this in the three books of Solomon, which indeed differ according to the three grades of virtue that Plotinus, in Enneads 1.1.2.2-7, distinguishes, since the precepts of wisdom ought to concern only the acts of virtue. In the first grade, according to him, are political virtues, whereby a man moderately uses the things of this world and lives among men, and this in the Proverbs. In the second grade are the purgative virtues, whereby a man regards the world with contempt, and this in Ecclesiastes, which aims at contempt of the world, as is clear from Jerome's prologue. In the third grade are the virtues of the purged soul, whereby a man, wholly cleansed of worldly cares, delights in the contemplation of wisdom alone, and this is found in the Song of Songs. In the fourth grade are the exemplar virtues existing in God, concerning which precepts of wisdom are not given but are rather derived from them.

In word and in deed Ecclesiasticus instructs. Hence the precepts of wisdom in praise of fathers close his book, as is clear in Chapter 44 and after.

The New Testament, which is ordered to eternal life not only through precepts but also through the gifts of grace, is divided into three parts. In the first the origin of grace is treated, in the Gospels. In the second, the power of grace, and this in the epistles of Paul, hence he begins in the power of the Gospel, in Romans 1.16 saying, 'For I am not ashamed of

the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.' In the third, the execution of the aforesaid virtues is treated, and this in the rest of the books of the New Testament.

Christ is the origin of grace. John 1.16-17: 'And of his fullness we have all received, grace for grace. For the Law was given through Moses: grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.' In Christ a twofold nature is to be considered, a divine, and the Gospel of John is chiefly concerned with this, hence he begins, 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' And a human, and the other Gospels treat chiefly of this, and they are distinguished according to the threefold dignity that belongs to the man Christ. With respect to his royal honour, Matthew speaks. Hence in the beginning of his Gospel he shows that Christ descended from kings and was adored by the Magi kings. With respect to his prophetic honour, Mark speaks, hence he begins with the preaching of the Gospel. With respect to his priestly dignity, Luke speaks, and he begins with the temple and the priesthood and ends his Gospel in the temple, and frequently returns to the temple, as the Gloss says about Luke 2.46: 'And they found him sitting in the temple in the midst of the teachers.'

In another way, Matthew might be said to speak of Christ chiefly with respect to the mystery of the Incarnation, and thus he is depicted in the figure of a man. Luke, with respect to the mystery of the Passion, and therefore he is depicted as a bull, which is an animal to be immolated. Mark, with respect to the victory of the Resurrection, and thus he is depicted as a lion. But John, who soars to the heights of his divinity, is depicted as an eagle.

[The part dealing with the power of grace as exemplified in the epistles of Paul is missing from the text. → but it's for M. W. reference to his sermon on the progress of the Church]

The execution of the power of grace is shown in the progress of the Church, in which there are three things to consider. First, the beginning of the Church, and this is treated in the Acts of the Apostles, hence Jerome says, in his preface to the Penitence, that 'The Acts of the Apostles seem to give the bare history of the birth and to clothe the infant Church.' Second, the progress of the Church, and to this is ordered the apostolic instruction of the canonical epistles. Third, the end of the Church, with which the whole content of Scripture concludes in the Apocalypse, with the spouse in the abode of Jesus Christ sharing the life of glory, to which Jesus Christ himself conducts, and may he be blessed for ever and ever. Amen.