
A SHORT HISTORY
of THOMISM

ROMANUS CESSARIO, O.P.

A SHORT HISTORY
of THOMISM

The Catholic University of America Press

Washington, D.C.

International Copyright © 2003

Editoriale Jaca Book Spa, Milan

All rights reserved

Published in Italian with the original title: IL TOMISMO E I TOMISTI

within the series *Per una Storia d'Occidente. Chiesa e Società* ed.

Guy Bedouelle, Editoriale Jaca Book Spa, Milan, Italy.

U.S.A. edition published by arrangement with

Eulama Literary Agency, Rome.

Copyright © 2005

The Catholic University of America Press

All rights reserved

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of

American National Standards for Information Science—Permanence of

Paper for Printed Library materials, ANSI Z9.48-1984.

∞

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Cessario, Romanus.

[Tomismoe e i tomisti. English]

A short history of Thomism / Romanus Cessario.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8132-1386-x (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Thomas, Aquinas, Saint, 1225?-1274. I. Title.

B765.T54C4613 2005

149'.91—dc22

2004002866

For

JOHN AQUINAS FARREN, O.P.

Rector, Saint John's Seminary

&

Sometime Director of the Leonine Commission

Contents

Foreword by <i>Ralph McInerny</i>	ix
<i>One.</i> Thomism	I
1. Who is Thomas Aquinas? 2	
2. Speaking about Thomism 11	
3. Customary divisions in the history of Thomism 28	
4. A new conception of this history 33	
<i>Two.</i> The Thomists	40
<i>Three.</i> After the French Revolution	82
Conclusion	93
Index of Names, Subjects, and Book Titles	97

Foreword

That brevity is the soul of wit may seem an ironic remark when we consider its connection with Polonius, but it contains an important, one might almost say Thomistic, truth. Simplicity in an important sense rides on profundity. It is the mark of the wise man that he can marshal and order vast amounts of material, and possesses a keen sense of the beginning, the middle, and the end of inquiry; only a very learned author could have provided the *tour du monde thomiste* that Father Romanus Cessario gives us here. Thomas Aquinas himself was not much given to historical surveys, save for those he found in the Aristotelian treatises on which he commented, but Cessario may be said to mimic his master in that he has written a survey of the history of Thomism which will be read with ease by the beginner and with delight and admiration by those who have spent a lifetime with the text of Aquinas.

What is a Thomist? What is Thomism? In the introductory part, Cessario puts before the reader, with a marvelous ease of erudition his footnotes can only suggest, the ways these questions have been understood and answered. Out of the discussion emerges his own suggestion: he will write a *histoire fleuve* of the school as he has defined it that emphasizes the unity of some seven hundred and

more years, noting without overstating the influence of historical events and the shifting geographical centers of gravity of Thomism. The result will enable the reader to navigate those centuries under the captaincy of an author who has a compass in hand and an eye for the far horizon.

We are often rightly told that Thomas was principally a theologian, but the reminder has sometimes been made in order to downplay the importance of Thomas as a philosopher. Cessario reminds us that Thomas as theologian has given us the most formal distinction between theology and philosophy, a distinction that enables us to identify philosophical discourse when we see it, in Thomas and elsewhere, but which does not preclude the role that philosophy plays within theology. Cessario emphasizes the unity of theology for Thomas and gently chides those who would fragment sacred doctrine into a number of constituent specialties. The subject of theology is God himself and the viewpoint is the sapiential one vouchsafed us by revelation.

For all that, philosophy has its own integrity for Thomas, and it is no accident that so many of the great Thomists of the twentieth century were philosophers, and indeed laymen. Philosophy remains the *lingua franca* enabling believers and non-believers to come together in the recognition of naturally knowable truths. The resulting wisdom can seem exiguous to the believer, and it is, but it manifests the range of reason and the natural truths presupposed by theology and put to a higher purpose.

Father Cessario enables us to see the long and checkered history of Thomism, and he brings us into the present where temptations to prophesy and predict present themselves. Whither Thomism? The long and unbroken patronage of the teaching Church has

proven a stimulus to generations of students of Thomas. In these latter times, it is often suggested that Thomism lost its hegemony at Vatican II, and that efforts to revive it are counter-revolutionary. Perhaps. But as Cessario enables us to see, the supposed corpse did not show up for its funeral. Moreover, there seems to be afoot a new flourishing of Thomism, however we characterize those thinkers who find inspiration in Thomas's writings. It is not the label that is important, finally, nor indeed the man. Leo XIII wrote that we find more in Thomas than Thomas himself. Indeed. And that more is a truth that transcends personal ownership. Thomism in the public domain is a good thing since, in philosophy at least, the thought of Thomas is grounded in what everybody knows. This wise little book will doubtless play a role in that flourishing.

Ralph McInerny
University of Notre Dame