

# **“Church History: Heroes, Heretics & Holy Wars”**

## **Sunday School Notes**

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### **CLASS 9 – Christian Scholars in the Middle Ages**

Scholasticism was the intellectual movement that tried to get a comprehensive understanding of truth by integrating Scripture, liturgy and reason.

**Anselm** – Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093-1109. A Benedictine monk, philosopher and theologian; one of the most significant thinkers in the history of the Western church.

\*Faith must lead to the proper use of reason!

His main work was *Cur Deus Homo* (Why the God Man?) – Jesus’ death on the cross was an act of propitiation that satisfied the demands of God’s justice. He had to be divine to have power to achieve salvation, had to be man to stand in our place.

He also came up with what’s been called the *Ontological argument*, something along the lines of: “Everyone has some idea of God. The very idea of God carries with it the idea of His existence. God is that which nothing greater can be conceived. If you can think something higher, than what you were thinking wasn’t really God.”

**@1100 Peter Abelard** (French) tried to use reason to shed light on Christian doctrine; was the most influential scholastic of his day. Was branded a heretic and his books burned. He was forcibly castrated, but that probably had more to do with his secret marriage, and the revenge of his wife’s extended family. His book *Sic et Non* pointed out the contradictions between different church fathers, challenging people who just appealed to the church leaders blindly. The church seemed to say, “Don’t ask questions. Don’t expect answers.”

@the first 25 years of 13<sup>th</sup> century, major universities established at Oxford, Paris, Bologna, Cambridge & Naples. How could Christians prove the truth of Christianity? **Thomas Aquinas** answered: with reason. Here’s what Timothy Renick said about Aquinas’ influence:

“Thomas Aquinas ranks among the 3 or 4 most influential thinkers in the history of not merely Christianity but of Western thought in general. Aquinas’ theory of natural law shaped our modern concept of human rights. His views of the state supplied the model for the arguments of Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence. His commentaries on sex are still hugely influential (and pretty darn interesting). His views on the justice of warfare and the status of noncombatants have been codified into international law and can be found in U.S. military handbooks. 700 years after his death, his proofs of God’s existence are still among the most discussed by philosophers. And the compromise he worked out between faith and reason... is the answer adopted by most modern Christians to this day.”<sup>1</sup>

Thomas was born in Aquino (Aquinas is not his last name) between Rome & Naples @1225. Sent to a monastery at age 5 to be an apprentice; took to learning, by age 14 he was studying at the

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy M. Renick, *Aquinas for Armchair Theologians*, pp. 1-2.

University of Naples. Became a Dominican monk in his late teens, his parents disagreed and had him imprisoned in a castle for 2 years. Became a priest at 25, then regent master of the University of Paris at 32. Exposed to Aristotle who most influenced his thought. His major work was *Summa Theologica* as well as numerous commentaries. Council of Trent in 16<sup>th</sup> Century adopted his work as the basis of Roman Catholic dogma, in 1879 the Pope declared that his theology was valid for all time.

->Handout on Aquinas' Five Arguments for Existence of God

Aquinas: primacy of the intellect

Duns Scotus: primacy of the will

William of Ockham: absolute separation of the realms of nature and grace

**John Duns Scotus (writing last quarter of 13<sup>th</sup> century)** and the Franciscans took different approach from Aquinas: the main consideration was **the will**. God can do anything He wills; the only reason the grass is green and not purple is because God wills it, not because of a requirement of reason. The Atonement was effective not because it was necessary but because God willed it.

**William of Ockham (1300-1349)** was a Franciscan, but rejected both reason and will; he taught nominalism – God is not bound by what He's done in the past or revealed to us. We must merely try to understand it and trust Him in all things. The realm of reason and the realm of grace were different, you couldn't find one without the other. William of Ockham was sometimes called "the First Protestant" because he argued for the independence of church and state, that the pope should not interfere in civil affairs. He openly questioned papal infallibility; church councils are higher than Pope opinion, but Scripture is the highest. Of course, he was excommunicated for those views.

Ockham's Razor principle: when you have two explanations, the simpler one is the likely one! (If you hear footsteps, expect a horse not a zebra.)

Sources Used:

Iain D. Campbell, *Heroes & Heretics: Pivotal Moments in 20 Centuries of the Church*. Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2009.

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Bruce Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, Dallas: Word, 1995.