Aquinas’s Search for God: Faith Meets Philosophy

Course Description and Goals

When Philosophy is used in the service of Theology, wrote St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century, “water is turned into wine.” An important strand of the Christian tradition turns the discerning and sometimes critical eye of reason toward the mysteries of faith. For some, this examination occasions strong objections to traditional understandings of whether God is and what God is. For others like Aquinas, rational inquiry is but a way of continuing the journey towards God, a desire of the understanding to lovingly embrace the truths of faith. The meeting place between theological thought and philosophical reflection is where this course takes place. We shall orient our focus around the writings of Aquinas, one of the great minds of history and a man proclaimed by numerous popes “The Universal Doctor of the Church” and celebrated most recently in Pope John Paul II’s 1998 encyclical, Faith and Reason, as “a master of thought and a model of the right way to do theology.” Accordingly we seek to participate in an ancient conversation that tries to probe the limits of what we can know about God and how we can know it: How can we use language to speak truthfully of God? What attributes or powers does God have? How does God relate to the world? Is it possible for those who believe in God to make sense of the evil and suffering in creation? And how can human reason be employed with utmost sophistication to bring light to faith?
You do not need to go on in theology or philosophy to benefit from thinking and writing critically about these issues. St. Thomas himself once wrote, “Even if someone who reverently seeks the infinite ways of God never reaches the end of the search, the search will always have profit.” C.H. Spurgeon elaborates:

The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God.... There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity.... No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God.... But while the subject humbles the mind, it also expands it. The person who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the one who simply plods around this narrow globe.... Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity.

This class seeks to enlarge your mind by having you consider the biggest questions there are.

**Learning Outcomes**

The student who successfully completes this course will be able to:

- **Read** portions of the *Summa Theologiae* with understanding
- **Use** common Thomistic vocabulary with facility both in speech and in writing
- **Explain** Aquinas's theological method and how basic concepts in the *Summa* relating to God, creation, and humanity build off of each other
- **Develop** her own nuanced theology in conversation with St. Thomas
- **Identify** places where Aquinas's theology can be challenged or extended, and
- **Relate** the contemporary relevance of St. Thomas Aquinas to a variety of modern debates.
Requirements and Grading

Completing this course successfully entails contributing regularly and responsibly to class discussion, regularly self-assessing your individual seminar performance and that of the group, writing 3 longer papers, and passing one exam.

The grade you receive at the end of the course is broken down in this way:

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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Active and well-prepared individual seminar participation</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Brief self-assessments of your class participation emailed to me after just about every class</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Corporate participation and discussion</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Three (approx.) 6-7-page papers (worth 15%, 15%, 20%) (due by Friday, Oct. 3rd; Friday, Nov. 7th; and Wednesday, Dec. 17th)</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Exam (September 23rd)</td>
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INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATION

Since this class will be run as a seminar, your primary day-to-day responsibility will be to do the readings carefully and contribute significantly to our discussions. You will assess your own participation for each class and assign yourself a grade of √+, √, √-, or 0.

√+ You made significant contributions to our conversation either by introducing new topics or questions or by requesting or offering supportive clarifications or different viewpoints to what other students say. The level of discussion and group dynamics were significantly better because of your input. Your comments tended to be illustrated through reference to the text(s) under discussion and an evidenced close reading of same. You arrived clearly prepared and ready to talk about the material. A “√+” is equal to an “A” and means that we really couldn’t have had the discussion we did without you.

√ Your voice was heard more than once, but your contributions mostly echoed rather than challenged or engaged those of other students. You arrived
mostly, if not fully, prepared and you may have contributed occasionally and constructively to discussion, but not to the extent that the class (group dynamics, level of depth in the discussion, and so on) would have been very different without you. A “\(\sqrt{-}\)” corresponds to a low B.

\(\sqrt{-}\) You were largely passive in class and offered just one comment (or a couple very brief ones). Your contributions were cursory and didn’t provide any evidence of real engagement with the texts or the discussion. A “\(\sqrt{-}\)” corresponds to a high D.

0 You did not contribute at all to the discussion either because you did not attend class or because you attended class but did not speak. Note: you will be allowed 2 unexcused absences.

You are expected to attend class regularly. Your presence in class is a kind of participation. Therefore, more than 2 unexcused absences will lower your grade. All absences for which I do not receive a written excuse from the Academic Affairs Office (121 Le Mans Hall) will be considered unexcused. More than 4 such absences may result in failure of the course. For any absences beyond 2 (excused or unexcused), you will owe me a detailed (2-page, single-space) summary of the readings for the class you missed. In rare circumstances, even an excessive number of excused absences (7 or more) may not allow you to pass this course. It is the student’s responsibility to inform the professor of any extenuating circumstances affecting attendance or class performance. Coming in more than 5 minutes after the start of the period counts as one-half absence. Consistent tardiness less than 5 minutes late will also count against you. And if I ever need to cancel a class at any other time due to illness, I will email you all or make arrangements for you to be notified of the cancellation and whatever plans I have to make up the class.

REGULAR SELF-ASSESSMENTS OF YOUR PARTICIPATION

After each class on the syllabus marked with a * next to the date, I would like you to submit an email to me by midnight of the day of the class we just had. You’ll be evaluating both your own individual participation as well as how you thought the group as a whole did. The point of having the assessment come in the day of class is to have that day’s seminar still somewhat fresh in your mind. You’ll find an online form to fill out at the class website listed in the box on p. 9. The bottom left of that website has a blinking star labeled “E-mail.” Click on that to get the self-evaluation form.

There are three points possible for each one of these self-assessments:

1. Your self-assessment is in by 12:00 AM.
2. You fill in the entire form
3. You give a reason for the class grade drawn from our initial rubric (see 3 below)

I do reserve the right to modify either up or down the actual grade you gave yourself. If I do that, I would tell you on an email. If you don’t hear anything from me, assume that that meant I agreed with what you gave yourself. What I’ll do with these
grades is average them out at the end of the semester after dropping the two lowest grades. This means that up to two absences results in no penalty to you.

3 CORPORATE PARTICIPATION

Since more is needed for a good discussion than the same two or three people contributing, you will also be giving yourself a corporate (class) discussion grade based upon how all of us do with these readings. Since at least part of what makes a good discussion is a variety of voices and perspectives, as well as the ability of the participants to make comments or ask questions that invite the contributions of others and involve every student in the room, we will fail as a learning community if we don’t approach our task communally.

In his book *The Catholic University as Promise and Project*, Fr. Michael Buckley states, “‘Discussion’ indicates a collaborative inquiry, either by the mutually supportive labor of human beings concentrated upon a single problem, exchange, or project, or by their mutually critical debate in the testing and verification of variant positions and resolutions” (p. 136). This course aims for such collaboration and will be conducted as a seminar in which my main responsibility is to steer the discussion in productive ways and assist you in the process of discovering your own theological insights and ideas. Certainly I will also be on hand to try to explain especially complicated ideas in Aquinas (there are a few!) and to prompt you to make connections between seemingly disparate points that come up in his writings. But my hope is that most of what gets said during class will be said by you. It may take awhile to reach that goal, since familiarity with Aquinas sufficient to carry a discussion isn’t something that happens overnight or even very quickly. But that’s where we want to get to by the end of the semester.

Early in the semester, we will, as a class, come up with the criteria that constitute a productive seminar discussion. These will be what you'll use to assign the class a grade. For the class grade, give an A, A-, B+ B, B- (and so on) on the basis of the rubrics we'll come up with for what makes for a good discussion. Write a sentence or two to explain the reason why you gave the grade you did to the group in relation to the rubric statement(s) for that particular grade. You should quote the relevant part of the rubric to justify the grade you assign to the group. I'll average these grades (and I get a vote too) after dropping the high and low results, and that's what the class will get for that day. **Note:** We won’t start doing this until we’re a bit into the semester to give everyone a chance to warm up to the subject matter and to each other. Also, previous experience suggests that I tend to do most of the talking in the early classes as we go through some texts fairly methodically.

4 ESSAYS

The longer papers will be spread out fairly evenly throughout the semester, with the third one due during Finals Week. These papers should all involve critical analysis of your own views in light of the texts we will be studying. All of these papers will refer back to and build upon your original position paper which will be due in the second week of the class.

While I will say more about these papers before the first one is due, may it suffice for now to say that these three papers are meant to be component pieces that will assemble into one longer statement of your theology. That is, in this course, I'm going to
ask you not only to read theology, but to do it—albeit in conversation with St. Thomas Aquinas and others. Ultimately, learning theology is like learning to swim. There’s only so much you can do from outside the pool observing others in the water and no substitute for diving in and immersing yourself.

**Format for the Essays:** The first two essays should be approximately 6-7 pages typed and double-spaced. Your name should go on the back of the last page. Do not use a title page, but do title your essay. *Number your pages.* The three papers that will be assigned in this class can be thought of as three sections of one longer paper in which you will be constructing your own theology of God. When you turn in your final paper, I will ask for the two previous papers (sections). You should, therefore, revise those two sections in light of (a) my comments and suggestions for improvement on them, and (b) the particular issue(s) you choose to address in the third installment. I will also be asking you in the third paper to dig more deeply into an issue that your previous two sections will have identified as especially significant or interesting for you. This will involve research and the incorporation of other sources. More information will be provided about how to conduct your research.

The grade you earn on your papers is based on the following criteria:

- **Understanding:** demonstrated and accurate grasp of Aquinas’s ideas, concepts, and theories presented in the readings and in class (= you stay close to the texts in the ideas you pull from them, you present those ideas accurately, and you refrain from unfounded interpretations or leaps of interpretive fancy.)

- **Development:** structured thinking, careful organization, understandable progression of your points, orderly presentation of ideas, keen self-assessment of your earlier views (= your points build on each other and assemble coherently. You are clear in what you say, and the relationship between your points is explicitly spelled out so that the reader does not have to read between the lines to figure out what you’re trying to communicate. Your paper’s structure should be apparent and easy to follow. In this course, ‘development’ will mean not only how your ideas assemble in a particular paper but will also refer to *your own development* as a theological thinker. That is, I’ll be looking for your assessment of the progression of your views. You should be able to chart coherently the course of your intellectual growth on the issues under discussion. That is, I expect you to explain in your papers what you used to think and what you think now, and how (if different) what you’ve read in the course has led you to change your views, or how (if the same) what you’ve read has confirmed or supplemented previously held positions. You are encouraged to quote from your own previous writings as you go back to analyze and assess your earlier views. You can reference your own earlier writing in parentheses behind what you’re quoting or citing, as in “Essay 1, p. 3.”)

- **Reasoning:** demonstrated critical and interpretative skills, rational manipulation of ideas and dexterity in handling them (= you understand what the readings say and you do something with them by engaging the texts intellectually and responsibly in a way demonstrating clarity of perception and analysis. Remember that an opinion is only as good as the evidence, theory, or reasoning on which it is based. You must back up your points with reasons.)
Originality: creative self-assessment, personal appropriation of the issues and questions surrounding the topic (= you go beyond what the readings and class say to formulate some ideas of your own. Support for your ideas is drawn from your own insights and reasoning rather than only borrowed from class or the text. I should be able to hear your own voice in these essays. You take some chances with the material and show creativity by—in the words of Professor Barbara Walvoord (of Notre Dame's Kaneb Center for Teaching and Learning), "making unusual connections, looking at something in a fresh way, noticing unusual relationships or aspects of the topic, pushing beyond surface observations, challenging what others take for granted, or taking a risk with … a difficult topic.")

Mechanics: sound grammar, spelling, writing style, sentence structure, and careful adherence to the referencing scheme I provide for Aquinas's works (excessive instances of poor grammar, poor spelling, or poor proofreading or general sloppiness will lower your grade. Good writing is precise writing—especially about the issues in this class, and mistakes in grammar, spelling, or proofreading do not contribute to precision. In general, I expect professionalism in your presentation.)

These criteria correspond, in general, to the following letter grades (individualized rubrics for each paper are available through the course website).

A Excellent in all or nearly all of the above aspects. The interest of the reader is engaged by the ideas and presentation. Style and organization seem natural and easy. The paper is marked by originality of ideas and keen theological analysis. You provide evidence that you see complexities and can confront inadequate explanations and that you can answer questions and question answers. I can hear a lively, intelligent, interesting human voice speaking to me as I read the paper.

B Good, technically competent, but with a lapse here and there. The paper is clear and the prose is generally effective. There may be some gaps or flaws in the argument or some deficiency in one or two of the five criteria listed above. But these tend to be redeemed by the paper's good points.

C A competent piece of work, but not yet good. C papers are more or less adequately organized. In some C papers, very good ideas are marred by poor presentation—in development, organization, or technical errors. In other C papers, the organization, structure, and grammar are not flawed, but the ideas and how they are developed need a lot of work. Basically, a C paper contains problems with two or three of the five criteria listed above without the good points of a B paper to raise it to that level.

D A piece of work that demonstrates some effort on the author's part but that is too marred by technical problems or flaws in thinking and development of ideas to be considered competent work.

F This grade is reserved for papers demonstrating minimal effort on the author's part. Perhaps the writer has drastically misinterpreted the
assignment or left it almost completely underdeveloped. There are serious problems in just about all of the above 5 criteria.

You are welcome to use outside sources for more papers than just your last one, but please footnote appropriately. References to Aquinas's writings or to any other course reading should be referenced in parentheses in your paper according to the format presented at the beginning of the semester.

Your essays will be due by Friday, Oct. 3rd, Friday, Nov. 7th; and Wednesday, Dec. 17th (Finals Week). All papers must come in by noon to my office, 116 Spes Unica. You are welcome to submit drafts for my review prior to the due dates. I will promise to read and return (with comments) papers that come four or five days before the papers are due so that the author may revise them and resubmit by the due date. Depending on my schedule for a particular week, I may be able to do the same with papers turned in two or three days before the due date, but you’d be taking your chances. And there definitely wouldn’t be time to turn the paper around for your revisions if handed in the day before. So it’s to your advantage not to wait until the last minute to turn your paper in.

Late Papers and Academic Honesty: Papers not turned in during class on the due date will be considered late. One-day extensions are possible, but they must be approved in advance. I will not accept a late paper unless you have previously asked for an extension or told me ahead of time (= at least 1 day before the due date by noon) that it will be late. If you receive an extension for the 1st or 2nd essays, you must turn in a brief outline of your paper on the regular due date so that I have something to hold you to; and if you receive an extension on any of your essays and still don’t turn your paper in by the new due date, it will be lowered 1 whole letter grade per day late. And of course, the student handbook policy on academic honesty (http://www3.saintmarys.edu/student-handbook-section-eight#6) is in effect. You are responsible for knowing and following it.

**EXAM**

The exam on September 23rd will cover the important ideas from the early part of the course. As you’ll see, the material in this first section is the foundation on which everything else in the semester rests. So it’s important to be sure that you have a good grasp of those foundational ideas. The test will be a series of short essays, and you will receive a Study Guide before taking it to help you prepare.

**Required Texts** (the following titles are available in the Saint Mary's bookstore)

- St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Questions on God*

The price for hardcover versions containing all the readings from St. Thomas that we’ll be examining in this class would be exorbitant. Fortunately, all of the *Summa Theologiae* (and most of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*) is online. So we’ll be able to get by with the first book listed above, a mix of xeroxes that I’ll hand out, and readings that you
can just print off the web. I’ve set things up on the course website so that all the links are in place and easy to find. This also enables you to read ahead (if you want) by finding future readings on the web. You can even download the entire *Summa Theologiae* at http://www.ccel.org/aquinas/summa/smt_html.zip. The first book listed above contains all of the questions from Part I of the *Summa Theologiae* up to Q. 26. All readings beyond Q. 26 of Part I will need to be completed through the course website. A hard copy of the *Summa Theologiae* is also on reserve at the Saint Mary’s Library. You will find the course website at the address listed below. When this page loads, you’ll see two frames: the left one takes up about 25% of the screen, the right one occupies the remainder. The left frame contains course data and information along with some shortcuts to other websites useful for this class; the right one contains the online resources we’ll use throughout the semester. Several times during the semester, you’ll have other readings or assignments to do from the web. These are designated on the syllabus by ONLINE ASSIGNMENT. You may access these assignments on the internet by going to the course website, looking in the left frame and selecting the date on which the particular assignment is due. Click “View Class” and the online assignment(s) for that day will come up in the right frame. Then just click on the link in the right frame and that will take you to where you need to be.

You can access the course website at the following address:

http://www.saintmarys.edu/~incandel/FMP.html

You need to type this address exactly as shown—note that FMP is in all capitals. The handout I’ll pass out on the first day of class will explain the website in more detail.

**Narrative of the Structure of the Course**

To get the most out of this course, you’ll need to keep in mind its structure and how the different parts of Aquinas’s writings and thought that we will study fit together and build upon one another. You should review this narrative periodically to help you place each new topic we encounter within a wider framework.

I. We’ll begin, as St. Thomas himself did, with God as God is in God’s self. Namely, what is it for God to be God? Here we’ll study how the frequently neglected theological concept of divine simpleness is the key to unlocking what Aquinas is up to in the first 13 questions of Part I of the *Summa Theologiae* and to much else after that. We’ll show how Aquinas builds on this concept of simpleness to get to God’s perfection, oneness, limitlessness, omnipresence, unchangeableness, and eternity. All of these will have the cumulative effect of distinguishing God from the world—distinguishing the creator from the creation. As Aquinas will show, God’s distinction from the world will deliver up a God we cannot know on our own terms. Accordingly, Aquinas’s task through the *Summa*
will always be to use reason in the attempt to know what's unknowable. We'll end this section of the course with an inquiry into the language we use to speak of God. If indeed God is so distinct from the world and from creaturely experience, how can we hope to use words that make any real contact with (and deliver any truths about) the creator of all things?

II. The second section of the course will move from who God is (Section I) to what God does. As we'll see St. Thomas explain, what God does follows from who God is, just as what you do follows from who you are. In particular, we'll ask how what God knows (for example, does God know your future?), what God wills, and what God loves follows from who God is. An important challenge here will be how to make room for human freedom in light of a God who knows all and is all-powerful.

III. The third section will examine three examples of the loving relationship between creator and creatures. First, after examining what God knows and does (divine activity in general), we'll take up the study of creation—the procession of all things from God and, for St. Thomas, the paradigmatic activity of divinity. With creation, we will see how all of the previous ideas from Aquinas we have studied now assemble to articulate what is perhaps the central theological component of the Summa. The idea of creation, and of God as creator, is really (as we'll see) the main hinge of the Summa Theologicae. Everything else turns on it. We'll ask how creation relates God to God's creatures and what creation therefore tells us about who God is. We'll take the results of this inquiry into creation to a more explicit look at God's goodness and what Aquinas thinks is related to it—namely, that God is both supremely happy and that God is supremely beautiful. Second, we will turn to Aquinas's ethics, which (as we'll see) is grounded in divine goodness and God's role as both the source and goal (telos) of all creatures. If the first part of this section led up to the procession of all things from God, the remaining two parts will consider the return of all things to God. For Aquinas, God is not just the origin of all things, but also the goal (or "end") of all things—the summit of both goodness and beauty. This is the famous movement of exitus (the procession of all things out from God through creation) and reditus (the return of all things to God through the redemption wrought by Jesus Christ). Divine goodness, therefore, functions both as the beginning and end of all things, both the reason why we exist at all but also the model and goal for all our strivings and desires. And so we'll study God as ultimate end. This will lead us to explore what Thomas says about human happiness—where it's found, and where it's not found. From there we shall examine Thomas's understanding of human activity. What does human freedom mean for him in light of what he's said about God's power and creative activity? How is this freedom settle into various grooves or dispositions, which make us who we are? This will lead to an exploration of the so-called cardinal (justice, temperance, prudence, courage) and theological virtues (faith, hope, and love). We'll focus in on charity, a virtue which allows creatures to attain true happiness by growing in friendship with their creator. In short, charity is a way for us to know God as we grow in friendship with the source of our being. Thus, there is a natural bridge from God as the goal of human desire to God as the goal of human knowing. How do human beings know an unknowable creator? This is an issue that will have been with us all semester long. We now turn to it explicitly. Note that what something is obviously affects what we can know about it and how we can know it. For example, I can know what shirts and shoes are because I can see them, touch them, or even put them on. I can know what Auckland, New Zealand is because I could visit it. Or, I could consult a variety of sources (a native of that city, travel guide books, encyclopedias, etc.) for information. But how can anyone know anything about God? That is, our usual routes to knowledge and ways of knowing seem ineffectual because of the kind of 'thing' God is (namely, we can't see, touch, or 'visit' God). So: what can we know about God? What sources should we consult? Is human reason an adequate source? Can it prove God's existence? How St. Thomas handles this issue, therefore, will affect what you think
about all the previous topics we discussed in this semester and will provide a crucial test case for all that has come before. Third, we turn to Jesus Christ and to the trinity. We will see how Thomas’s treatment of Jesus and the trinity of persons in the *Summa* recapitulates earlier themes about the will and love of God the creator.

IV. We close the course with three moments of commentary or criticism of Aquinas. All of these represent areas of great theological ferment. First, what did St. Thomas say about women? Can feminists *possibly* claim him as an ally? Or is he the ultimate proponent of an androcentric, patriarchal theology? Second, what about the evil in the world? Can Aquinas’s God be reconciled with the kind of suffering so prevalent in our world today which hollows out humanity and carves up human dignity to expose raw surfaces and trails of scars? Does God suffer with those who grieve? Or does it diminish God if God is capable of suffering in God’s divine nature? Aquinas will say the latter. And third, since Aquinas is the patron saint of Catholic education, it’s fitting that we conclude with thinking about the relevance of Aquinas for Catholic education. To help us understand what St. Thomas is trying to say about the dialectic between faith and reason, theology and philosophy, we’ll turn to Pope Benedict XVI’s September, 2006 statement about faith and reason from his Address at University of Regensburg. From there we’ll look at a very interesting article by moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre of Notre Dame, which will examine what a Catholic college which takes seriously views (like Benedict’s and John Paul II’s before him) on the relationship of faith and reason should look like. We’ll contrast that with a fascinating piece for Fr. Thomas O’Meara entitled “Aquinas in Africa,” that describes how Aquinas can be translated into a very different setting with all sorts of implications for theological diversity and pluralism. As such, these essays provide a fitting finale to “Aquinas’s Search for God.”
**Course Outline**

**Aug 26  Syllabus, Course structure**

In addition to the listed readings due for next class, I want you to:

◆ learn the referencing scheme to Aquinas’s works (see handout);
◆ read pp. 1-11 of the syllabus to get clear on course policies, due dates, and so on; and
◆ make a contribution to the class Writeboard (wiki) on what the characteristics are of an interesting, effective seminar discussion. You’ll get an email from me today containing the URL of the Writeboard and the password for joining it.

**Aug 28  Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas’s Life & Writings**

◆ Fr. Paul Wadell, “Meeting a Man with Designs on Us” [handout]
◆ **ONLINE ASSIGNMENT:** Michael Sudduth, “Intellectual Background to Aquinas”

📖 **Reading Guide:** Why does Aquinas think God cannot have a physical body? What authority does he cite for this view? As you read the material from Fr. Wadell, note especially how he explains the structure of the *Summa*, and how, in particular, it mirrors the great coming forth of all things from God (the exitus) and the return of all things to God (the reditus). Why is truth “something we do together”? How does that conviction fuel Aquinas’s method of disputation? Why is creation so important for St. Thomas? What was the real danger that Aristotle posed for Christians in the thirteenth century (see especially the online piece by Sudduth)? Why does Barron think it crucial to remember that Aquinas was a saint? I’d also like you to briefly examine the structure of the *Summa Theologiae* that I distributed at the first class.
I. The Nature of Divinity: The Unknowable God

A. What God is Not: Divine Simplicity and Its Implications

Sept 2  1. Simplicity

- Barron, Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master, pp. 61-62, 77-83
- ST Prologue to Part I, Q. 3 [QoG, pp. 28-29]
- ST I.3.2–8 [QoG, pp. 31-43]
- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: Look up form & matter, essence & existence on the web

Position Paper Due Reading Guide: The online material will help you understand the concepts of form and matter, essence and existence, potentiality and actuality, which play an important part in these questions from the Summa. What does St. Thomas mean by God’s simplicity and why is simplicity such an important concept for him? Try to summarize what he’s saying about God’s simplicity. Why does Barron say that “a valid one-sentence summary of Thomas Aquinas’s doctrine of God” is that God “is very strange” (p. 61)? And why does Barron say that it’s so important to Aquinas that God not be able to be ‘categorized’ (see I.3.5)?

Sept 4  2. Perfection and Oneness

- ST I.4.1–2; I.11.3–4 [QoG, pp. 44-48; 109-112]

Reading Guide: In the words of one commentator on St. Thomas, Q. 3 of Part I is “the key to the Thomistic package.” You may be able to see why after reading QQ. 4 & 11. What does Aquinas mean by God’s perfection? and how does Q. 4 depend upon Q. 3? Finally, address the same issue for Q. 11. That is, how does what’s discussed in Q. 11 relate back to the issue of simplicity in Q. 3?
Sept 9  

3. Limitlessness and Existence in Things

◆ ST I.7.1—2; I.8.1—4 [*QoG*, pp. 69-72; 78-86]
◆ ST I.104.1 [see website for today’s class]

**Reading Guide:** In Q. 7, how is the absence of matter-form composition employed to argue for God’s limitlessness (a. 1), and how is the absence of essence-existence composition used to claim that other realities cannot be limitless in the same way (a. 2)? How does Aquinas argue in Q. 8 that God exists in all things and is present everywhere? In particular, what does St. Thomas mean when he says in a. 1 that “God must be ... intimately, in everything”?

Sept 11 *  

4. Unchangeableness (Immutability)

◆ Barron, *Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master*, pp. 92-96
◆ ST I.9.1—2; I.14.15; I.19.7 [*QoG*, pp. 87-91; 195-197; 230-232]
◆ Fr. Michael Dodds, O.P., “Of Angels, Oysters, and an Unchanging God: Aquinas on Divine Immutability” [handout]

**Reading Guide:** In Q. 9, how is the denial of potentiality—which follows from God’s simpleness—shown to entail God’s immutability? How does Fr. Barron respond to some of the commonly voiced criticisms of divine immutability? How can an unchanging God know and will changeable things? For example, does St. Thomas think that, strictly speaking, God can come to learn new things (I.14.15)? How does Fr. Dodds argue that for Aquinas “an inability to change may also betoken a higher level of being”? What’s his point about angels vs. oysters? How does Dodds think divine immutability functions to remind us that “God is not like us”? Does God’s unchangeableness entail either a lack of activity or an inability to love?

Sept 16 *  

5. Eternity

◆ Barron, *Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master*, pp. 96-100
◆ ST I.10.1—4 [*QoG*, pp. 92-99]

**Reading Guide:** What does Aquinas mean by God’s eternity? How does eternity follow from simpleness? Why does eternity belong to God alone? This next question is a bit more difficult
because it requires putting some things together on your own; but here goes: How does God’s role as creator imply—or presuppose—divine eternity? That is, what’s the link between creation and eternity? Why must the creator of all things be eternal? (Hint: this isn’t easy, but it requires going back to Q. 3.)

B. Speaking about an Utterly Simple God

Sept 18 * St. Thomas and Analogy

◆ Herbert McCabe, O.P., “Signifying Imperfectly” & “Analogy” [handout]
◆ ST I.13.1—6, 8, 11—12 [QoG, pp.138-152; 156-157; 162-166]

Reading Guide: What are the difficulties Aquinas points to in speaking about God? Why does Aquinas think that language isn’t used univocally of God? Why does he think language isn’t used equivocally of God? (univocal = words are used in exactly the same sense or meaning for both God and humans; equivocal = words are used in completely different senses of God and humans.) Which way is left between univocal and equivocal speech about God?

Sept 23 EXAM
II. God and the World:  
Divine Knowledge and Power

A. God’s Knowledge (Divine Omniscience)


- ST  I.14.13 [QoG, pp. 190-194]
- *Summa Contra Gentiles* (hereafter: *SCG*) I.66—68; II.1

**Reading Guide:** What do you think is at stake theologically in this issue of whether God knows all things? That is, why does it matter? Or doesn’t it? Namely, what would be the implications in God didn’t know all things—past, present, and future? Summarize St. Thomas’s explanation for how God can know future free events (the Nash reading should help here). How does Thomas appeal back to what he said in Questions 9 & 10 of Part I about God’s relationship to time to present his views about God’s knowledge of future contingent things? Can human beings still be free if God knows the future? What does Thomas mean, following Aristotle, when he says “that which is, when it is, necessarily is” (I.14.13.ad 2)? What parts of I.14.13 are unclear to you? (Some help with terminology: In I.14.13, Aquinas speaks about “antecedents” and “consequents.” An antecedent is the first part of an if/then statement; a consequent is the second part. And so for example, in the statement “If it’s raining, the sidewalk is getting wet,” the antecedent is “If it’s raining,” and the consequent is “the sidewalk is getting wet.” It’s a lot more complex as it’s applied by Aquinas to God’s knowledge, but that’s the basic point.) In SCG II.1, how does Aquinas make the transition between a study of God as God is in God’s self (roughly, everything we did in the preceding section of the course) to a study of God’s knowledge and power, especially God’s power over creation? This transition will give you a sense of how the subjects we begin today follow from issues examined in the previous section of this class.
Sept 30 * 2. God as Truth Itself

◆ Barron, Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master, pp. 100-105
◆ ST I.14.1—12, 14, 16 [QoG, pp.167-190; 194-195; 197-199]
◆ SCG I.48—49; I.59—62

Reading Guide: How does St. Thomas think that God’s knowledge differs from the knowledge of human beings? I don’t mean just that God knows more things. I’m asking about the way God knows. In particular, consider these three points: [a] Why does St. Thomas say that God can only know things by seeing them in God’s self? (ST I.14.5-6; SCG I.48) [b] How can God know evil things? (ST I.14.10) [c] Why does St. Thomas think it proper to say that God is Truth? (SCG I.59-62) At best, human beings can know the truth. But Aquinas is committed to saying that God is truth itself. Why?

B. God’s Power (Divine Omnipotence)

Oct 2 * 1. The Will and Love of God

◆ Barron, Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master, pp. 105-112, 115-end of first ¶ on 116)
◆ SCG I.74—75; I.91

Reading Guide: How does a consideration of God’s will follow from a consideration of God’s knowledge? How does a consideration of God’s love follow from a consideration of God’s will? What’s the link between these topics such that once Aquinas has established that there is will in God, he can conclude that there is love in God? (The Barron reading should help you.) Why is the divine essence the principal object of God’s will? Why must everything ultimately depend on the goodness of the divine will and the love of God (I.21.4)? How does Aquinas move from God willing God’s self to God willing things other than God? Otherwise said: why does Barron say that for Aquinas, God’s will “spills over, overflows” (p. 108)?

1st Paper Due by 12:00 noon on Friday, Oct. 3rd at 116 Spes Unica
Oct 7 *  

2. Divine Omnipotence

a. what omnipotence is

◆ Nash, The Concept of God, pp. 37-50 [handout]
◆ ST I.25.1—6 [QoG, pp. 269-282]
◆ SCG II.25

Reading Guide: What answer would Aquinas give to the question ‘What can God do?’ Do you see any problems with his notion of omnipotence? The Nash reading will give you some background to the concept of omnipotence and the various ways it has been qualified or challenged throughout the centuries. In I.25.1 & 2, why does Aquinas say that there must be power in God? and why must that power be infinite? What’s the difference between an active and a passive power? Why does Aquinas say that God’s mercy is the highest manifestation of God’s power (I.25.3.ad 3)? Note how St. Thomas appeals back to I.21.4 (from last class). Now, turn things around slightly—is Aquinas willing to say that there are certain things even God cannot do? What reasons and examples would he give to back up that answer? Do you think that anyone who believes that there are some things God cannot do is still justified in calling God ‘omnipotent’? Can you come up with any other examples of things you’d be comfortable saying are impossible for God?

Oct 9 *

b. God’s power and human freedom

◆ Barron, Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master, pp. 116-119
◆ Fr. Brian Davies, O.P., ‘The Free Human Creature’ [handout]
◆ ST I.19.6 & 8 [QoG, pp. 227-230; 232-234]
◆ ST I.62.8; I.83.1; I-II.79.1—3 [website]
◆ SCG I.16; I.89; I.95; III.69 & 70; III.159

Reading Guide: Why does Aquinas think that human beings are free? and are they free even to refuse God? Note, in this regard, the example about seeing the sun that St. Thomas uses in SCG III.159. In general, can human beings really be free if God has infinite power? What move is Aquinas making in I.19.8 that goes from an affirmation of God’s omnipotence (“the most effective of all causes”) to an affirmation of human freedom (“contingent causes”)? What arguments does Aquinas offer in SCG III.69 & 70 for why created causes really do produce their own effects and why all things are not done directly by God alone? What do you make of the statement in ST I.81.3 ad 3 that “it does not of necessity belong to liberty that what is free should be the first cause of itself”? Why God lack any “passive potency” (SCG I.16)? What does this imply for what God cannot do? What is God’s role in human sin? In particular, in what sense is Aquinas willing to concede that sin comes from God? And in what sense is he unwilling to concede this? See I-II.79.1-3 and the reading by Fr. Davies. In what sense, for Aquinas, does God cause free human acts? And what do you make of the last sentence in I.62.8.ad 3?
III. Creator and Creatures: Three Examples of Divine Love

A. The Activity Proper to Divinity: Creation

Oct 14 * 1. Creation and Change, Creation as Relation

- Barron, Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master, pp. 113-115, 119-130
- St. Thomas Aquinas, On the Power of God, Question 3, articles 2—3 [handout]
- ST I.44.1; I.45.1—5; I.46.1 & 3 [website]
- SCG II.16

Reading Guide: Is creation a change in God? Is creation a change in creatures? Why does Aquinas think that creation may be described as a relation (that is, a relationship)? Aquinas argues that some things are really related to each other, meaning that one thing is caused by and depends for its existence on some extra-mental foundation which joins them together. For example, I am really related to my father (whether I think so or not). Other relations, says St. Thomas, are “set up by the mind.” That is, the relationship is a purely logical or mental—we could even say arbitrary—one. For example, suppose I find myself to the left of a pillar. The relationship that the pillar has to me isn’t a real one in the pillar, since its location—its being what it is in general—does not depend on me (it’s there regardless of where I am or if I am). There’s nothing in the pillar that affects where I am in relation to it. The pillar doesn’t need me to be where it is (= no real relation); but my father does need me to be my father (= real relation). In light of all this, what does it mean to create? Why is creation proper to God alone? That is, why is creation the primary effect of divinity? (Recall the relationship between eternity and creation, which we examined previously.) How does creation from nothing (SCG II.16) ultimately support God’s freedom to create? “When” was creation? Was there time before creation?
Oct 16  

2. Creation, The Freedom of God, and Divine Graciousness

- ST I.13.7; I.19.3—5 & 10 [QoG, pp. 152-156; 221-227; 236-237]
- ST I.44.4 [website]
- SCG I.37—40; I.75; I.86—88

**ONLINE ASSIGNMENT:** By the end of the week, I’d like you to fill out the midsemester feedback form found on the website for today’s class.

**Reading Guide:** Why does God create? Does anything cause God to create? If not, is it ultimately an arbitrary act? Does creation add anything to God? Why does Aquinas say that God is not really related to the world (I.13.7)? Last class, Aquinas said that creation must be understood as a relationship between God and creatures. Now, Aquinas wants to say that that relationship is not a “real” one from God’s perspective, but it is a real one from the perspective of the creature. So: apply this distinction to God vs. the world. For example, Does God need the world? Does the world need God? Why is God “the most perfectly liberal giver” (I.44.14)? And how does this point relate to what St. Thomas is saying about the freedom of God’s will in I.19.3 & 10 and in SCG I.88? In what sense is God free? and in what sense is God not free? What is this notion of ‘diffusion of goodness’ that comes up in SCG I.37 & 75 (you might look back at Barron, pp. 107ff)? In I.44.4, how does Aquinas connect God as source of all things to God as goal of all things?

MIDSEMESTER BREAK

Oct 28  

3. Divine Goodness, Happiness, and Beauty

**Reading Guide:** How does Aquinas connect what’s good with what exists (Q. 5)? How does he then use that point in Q. 6 to argue for God’s goodness? Can there be anything which is completely evil? How does God’s goodness follow from God’s omniscience? (reread SCG I.95, which you originally read for October 4). How does Aquinas relate goodness to desirability (see ST I.5.1 where Aquinas quotes Aristotle)? How does Thomas use this point as a bridge from God’s activity as creator to God as supremely good? Where is the end (or telos) of the universe found (I.103.2)? Pages 83-85 of the reading from Fr. Barron should help you on these last two questions. And note how these issues assemble into what Barron calls on p. 84 “the Thomistic theme of the return to the source.” What makes Aquinas conclude that God must be supremely happy (see I-II.3.1)? What is God so happy about? How is human happiness related to divine happiness? How does St. Thomas think it true to say that God is beautiful? In SCG II.2, Aquinas wrote: “All beautiful attributes showered throughout the world in separate drops flow together whole and complete, and move toward the font of goodness. When we are drawn to the graciousness, beauty, and goodness of creatures, we ought to be born away to the One in whom all these little streams commingle and flow.” (Sister Madeleva called beauty the most tangible manifestation of divinity, “God’s visibility.”) How does creation witness to what Barron calls “the wild fullness of the divine beauty” (p. 137)? What’s the relation between creation and beauty? What relationship comes out in I.5 & I-II.27 between God’s goodness and God’s beauty? (See especially I-II.27.ad 3 on this.) Note that the beautiful must be apprehended by the cognitive faculty. There are some very interesting things going on in these passages. Aquinas wants to make a case for God as Cosmic Beauty. But (recall I.14.8), God is also Cosmic Artist. (In SCG II.24.5, Aquinas writes, “Now, as Aristotle says, ‘art is the reason concerned with things to be made.’ All created things, therefore, stand in relation to God as products of art to the artist.”) And so from Beauty, comes the beauty of creation as artistic product of God.

B. Thomistic Ethics, Grace, and Knowledge of God

Oct 30 * 1. Thomistic Ethics and Human Happiness

* Barron, *Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master*, pp. 147-149, 159-184
Reading Guide: We’re really dealing with three concepts here: God, good, and the ultimate end or purpose to human life. Obviously, these concepts overlap for Aquinas, and how they overlap is what links theology and ethics (God and good) for St. Thomas. Today we move from a consideration of divine happiness to an examination of human happiness. These two will be related for Aquinas, not surprisingly. How does Fr. Davies explain the way in which human beings differ from non-human animals? What does Thomas Aquinas mean by the “ultimate end”? How are human beings ‘wired’ for God (see Barron, p. 149)? How do we become what we most love? That is, how is our identity affected by what we pursue? As you’ll see in the coming classes, this link between who we are and what we love will be absolutely crucial for Aquinas’s account of the moral life and, especially, for Aquinas’s account of the moral life in relation to God. In this regard, what does Davies mean when he says that for Aquinas, “concrete actions reflect our characters or settled personalities”? What’s a habitus? Where does Aquinas think perfect human happiness is to be found? Why can it only be found there? (The online Freddoso piece gives you some nice cliffnotes to the reading from the ST for today.) What are some of the candidates for happiness that Aquinas rejects? In what, ultimately, does human happiness consist? Because of this, can we attain happiness through our own power? Although happiness for Aquinas is primarily a matter of the intellect (I-II.3.4), in what way is the rightly-ordered will necessary for happiness (I-II.4.4)? Is it possible to be happy in this life (see I-II.5.3)? What’s the relationship between understanding God and human happiness (see ST I-II.3.8)? More specifically, how do human beings become partakers in the divine happiness (SCG III.51)? And in light of the need to understand God, can human beings attain happiness solely through their own efforts (SCG III.52)? Aquinas writes in ST I.43.4.ad 1 (not assigned!), “In a generous way, God communicates the divine self to creatures for their enjoyment.” How does this passage fit in with the ideas expressed in the other readings for today? (Note: The handout with SCG III.16-17 on it also has questions 18-20 on it, which you’ll need for the following class.)
Reading Guide: What are the cardinal virtues? And how do they differ from the theological virtues? What are the two kinds of happiness St. Thomas discusses in I-II.62.1? How is faith based upon trusting in God and God’s Word? Did Jesus have faith? How are the theological virtues acquired? How do faith and hope differ from charity? How does Aquinas understand friendship? How can human beings be friends with God (I-II.65.5; II-II.23.1)? How does friendship produce likeness between friends (ST I-II.27.3; SCG III.18-20.2)? This is a very significant point in light of the issues we’ve been discussing: if friendship brings about a likeness or similarity between friends, and if God is supremely happy (as we have seen Aquinas argue), then human friendship with God brings supreme happiness. Related to all this, how is charity the “form” of faith (II-II.4.3)? With this linking of charity and faith, we have the coming together of intellect (in ST II-II.4.2, Thomas says that “to believe is an act of the intellect”) and the appetite or will (in II-II.24.1, Aquinas says that “charity is in the will as its subject”). How is charity something “created in the soul” (II-II.23.2)? And what does Aquinas mean when he says that it’s “caused in us by infusion” (II-II.24.2)?

Nov 6

3. How Do We Know God? Philosophy and Theology

- ST I.1.1—2, 4—9; I.12.1, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13 [QoG, pp. 3-6, 7-17; 113-115, 122-125, 132-137]
- SCG I.7
- Bruce D. Marshall, “*Quod Sit Una Uetula*: Aquinas on the Nature of Theology” [handout]
- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: John F. Boyle, “St Thomas Aquinas and Sacred Scripture”

Reading Guide: In his encyclical from October, 1998, entitled *Fides et Ratio* (Faith and Reason), Pope John Paul II began by saying, “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.” He goes on to say that “In Aquinas’s thinking, the demands of reason and the power of faith found the most elevated synthesis ever attained by human thought, for he could defend the radical newness introduced by Revelation without ever demeaning the venture proper to reason.” How does Thomas Aquinas distinguish theology and philosophy? How do they come together and how are they separate? (The Marshall essay should be helpful here.) What is “sacred doctrine”? and why does Aquinas call theology a “science”? In ST Q. 1, where does the science of theology start (= take its principles from)? and where do the other sciences begin? In light of the limitations of natural reason, why does St. Thomas even bother with reason in the service of theology? (See Barron, pp. 37ff. on this as well.) What is the highest authority
for Aquinas (I.1.8), and why is it the highest authority? Why can’t the truths of reason be opposed to the truths of faith (SCG I.7)? In I.12.4 & 5, what does Aquinas say we need to have knowledge of God? How is human knowledge of God in an important sense borrowed knowledge? Where does charity come in here (I.12.6)?

2nd Paper Due by 12:00 noon on Friday, Nov. 7th at 116 Spes Unica.

Nov 11

4. The Five Ways

◆ Fergus Kerr, “Theology in philosophy: Revisiting the Five Ways” [handout]
◆ Barron, Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master, pp. 62-75
◆ ST I.2.1—3 [QoG, pp. 20-27]
◆ ST I.46.2; II-II.1.1 & 4; II-II.2.4 [website]
◆ ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: The Five Ways: an outline of Aquinas’s arguments from ST I.2.3
◆ ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: View a depiction of St. Thomas in Sacred Heart Basilica at Notre Dame

Reading Guide: Does Aquinas think that God’s existence can be rationally proven? What does Kerr say is the “standard view” of the Five Ways? What (more theological) view does he put in its place? What does Kerr say was behind the renewal of the study of Aquinas in the 19th century, and how does this come out in Thomas’s depiction in Sacred Heart Basilica (whose cornerstone was laid in 1871)? Why is Romans 1:20 important for Aquinas? Why, ultimately, does Aquinas think that God exists? How does what Aquinas says in I.46.2 affect your understanding of what’s going on in I.2.3, especially in the first of the 5 ways? And how does Aquinas characterize faith in II-II, especially in relation to what reason can prove and what its limitations are (II-II.2.4)? Can there be faith and knowledge of the same thing (II-II.1.4)? What significance does Fr. Barron draw from Thomas’s frequent appeals to the phenomenon of motion? In particular, how does Barron’s understanding of movement as spiritual movement help him clarify what’s going on in the 5 ways? What does Barron think that the 5 ways really show? (Note: There’s a nice exposition of the 5 Ways in easily understandable terms available through the course website for this day.)
C. Jesus

Nov 13  Trinity and Incarnation: Jesus as our Way to God

◆ *ST* I.28.1—4; I.30.1; I.34.1.ad 3; I.40.1; I.45.6—7; III.1.1—2; III.2.9; III.75.1 [website]
◆ Fr. Aiden Nichols, O.P., excerpt on Christ from *Discovering Aquinas* [handout]

**Reading Guide:** You can’t really understand what Aquinas is saying about Jesus (or where in the *Summa* Aquinas discusses him) without first attending to the trinity. And you can’t really understand what Aquinas is saying about the trinity without attending first to the earlier questions of Part I of the *Summa* on divine simpleness, knowledge, will, etc. In what sense are there real relations in God (ST I.28.1-2)? How does Aquinas put three persons in God without compromising the divine simpleness that he struggled so hard to defend in the opening questions of Part I of the *Summa Theologiae*? (Look also at ST I.40.1 on that.) One of the things he’s doing here is making God’s knowledge into the divine Word (or Son) and God’s love into the Spirit (see I.28.4). This also has a parallel to the incarnation. How, according to III.1.1 is the incarnation the perfect joining of God’s power (will) and love? (Barron will help you here.) In what way is the whole trinity spoken in the Word (I.34.1.ad 3)? Which person(s) of the trinity create (I.45.6)? And how is the trinity somehow imprinted on each creature (I.45.7)? How does the friendship theme then emerge in Aquinas’s discussions of the incarnation (III.1.2) and of the Eucharist (III.75.1)? Along these same lines, in ST I-II.108.4, Aquinas refers to Jesus as “our wisest and greatest friend.” On p. 50, Barron says that “Jesus Christ also discloses what the human being should look like in the presence of God.” In light of this, why does Fr. Nichols say that Thomas deals with Christology “in third place”? Why does Nichols say that the incarnation was a fitting way for God to repair the relationship between creator and created? Why is the union of two natures in Christ the “greatest of all unions” (ST III.2.9)?
IV. Comments and Criticisms: Three Examples

A. Aquinas and Women

Nov 18 * 1. Thomistic Texts on Women

◆ Susanne M. DeCrane, excerpt from *Aquinas, Feminism, and the Common Good* [handout]
◆ ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: Marie I. George, “What Aquinas Really Said About Women”
◆ Elizabeth A. Clark and Herbert Richardson, “Thomas Aquinas and the Scholastic Woman” [handout]
◆ ST II-II.26.10 [website]

Reading Guide: What do these difficult texts do to your evaluation of St. Thomas’s theology? How does he approach questions of gender in light of some of the categories we’ve seen him using in other contexts thus far? How does Thomas use his Aristotelianism to categorize women? Should one’s father or one’s mother be loved more (ST II-II.26.10)? What were the consequences he saw of female ‘fragility of mind and will’? How are some of those consequences still manifest in today’s Church and in wider society? Susanne DeCrane takes up the latter issue and discusses Thomas’s anthropology which makes women fundamentally passive in relation to the more active male. What implications does this raise for gender roles? Are there elements of Thomas’s anthropology that DeCrane thinks “worthy of retrieval”? Why? Which parts of Aquinas’s presentation of God should in DeCrane’s view be rejected by feminists? And which parts hold real possibilities for development along feminist lines? How is it that “the conception of God as good prizes qualities traditionally associated with the male who was the paradigm of Aquinas’s anthropology”? Criticism about God’s “nonrelationality to the created world” is something we will look at in more detail in coming classes. Marie George also tries to put what Aquinas said about women in a wider context by presenting what St. Thomas said about the need for a diversity of perfection in the universe. Why is this important in his view? And does the context George lays out do anything to soften your concerns of what Aquinas is saying about women?
2. Aquinas and Feminist Theology

Sr. Elizabeth Johnson, “One Living God: She Who Is” (ch. 11 from She Who Is) [handout]

**Reading Guide:** Why is theological speech about “this nonrelational God” something that “invites widespread repugnance today”? How, in Johnson’s view, is the denial of divine relation to the world in tension with a feminist perspective? How did even Aquinas admit that relationality is somehow at the heart of divinity? Why does Johnson’s feminist perspective reject both classical theism and pantheism? What is panentheism and why is it an acceptable third possibility for feminism? How do metaphors “gleaned from women’s existence” point towards a panentheistic perspective? How does the notion of God as pure being come back into play here as something that “can also be expressed in female metaphor with the appellation SHE WHO IS”?

B. Aquinas and Evil

1. A God Who Suffers?

Sr. Elizabeth Johnson, “Suffering God: Compassion Poured Out” (ch. 12 from She Who Is) [handout]

**Reading Guide:** How does Sr. Elizabeth criticize the ‘apathetic’ God of classical theology? How is the problem made worse when impassibility is combined with the traditional notion of omnipotence? How is the suffering of Jesus typically incorporated into this picture? Why have many recent theologians “rejected the classic idea of the impassible, omnipotent God, finding it both intellectually inadequate and religiously repugnant”? Where do you come down on this question? What theological benefits does Johnson see in placing suffering in God? And how does this move complement women’s experience and biblical metaphors of the divine feminine? Even if you agree with Aquinas that there are good reasons why a supremely powerful (ST I.25) and supremely good (ST I.6) God can still exist in a world with innocent human suffering; how can it be that a God who is supremely loving (ST I.20) remains supremely happy (SCG I.90 & ST I-II.3.1) when the innocent are in pain? Do you see anything in the readings by Barron and St. Thomas that either speaks to Sr. Elizabeth’s objections or perhaps even makes them stronger?
2. Responses to a Suffering God

- ST I. 19.9 [QoG, pp. 234-236]
- ST I.47.1-2; I.48.2 [website]
- Fr. Michael Dodds, O.P., “Thomas Aquinas, Human Suffering, and the Unchanging God of Love” [handout]
- Fr. Herbert McCabe, “The Involvement of God” (excerpt) [handout]
- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: Thomas G. Weinandy, “Does God Suffer?”

Reading Guide: What points is Aquinas making about the lion in I.19.9? Where does inequality come from? And why is it there? In particular, why does Aquinas say in I.48.2 that the “perfection of the universe requires that there should be inequality in things”? What are the consequences of these points for how the natural world works and for how we understand where evil comes from? What we saw coming out of Sr. Elizabeth Johnson’s work is a criticism of the impassible God of classical theology—the impassible God of Thomas Aquinas. In response to this God, Johnson (and many others) affirm the theological benefits of a God fully involved with the world, and therefore fully capable of suffering right along with it. Today we consider some responses to this line of thinking. Both Dodds and Goetz point out the theological disadvantages of placing suffering directly in the divine nature. What disadvantages do they see? How for Dodds does Aquinas finesse some of these questions in his discussion of the suffering and death of Jesus? And why does Goetz say that advocating a God who suffers “ironically, raises the question of whether God is in the last analysis even love, at least love in the Christian sense of the term”?  (The Weinandy essay complements the other essays for today. You might look especially at §§4-6 of this piece.) Are you more impressed with the advantages or disadvantages of placing suffering in God? That is, which position better addresses the problem of evil: to say that God suffers with the victims of the world, or to say that God does not—or cannot—suffer?
C. Aquinas and the Search for Truth

Dec 4 * 1. Pope Benedict XVI on Faith & Reason

◆ ST II-II.2.10 [website]
◆ ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: Pope Benedict XVI, “Address at the University of Regensburg”
◆ Thomas G. Guarino, “The God of Philosophy and of the Bible: Theological Reflections on Regensburg” [handout]

Reading Guide: What can natural reason know of God according to St. Thomas? What can natural reason not know of God through its own powers? Where do the limitations of natural reason in theology lie? That is, what things can only be known with divine help? Can reason supplement (that is, add to or enrich) faith? What connection is Pope Benedict drawing between reason and the nature of God? Why is he drawing it? How does the pope define theology? What historical implications does he say that the convergence of faith and reason had for the world? What historical developments then led to the marginalization of reason from faith and theology? What benefits would come to the modern age, according to the pope, by “broadening our concept of reason and faith”? The Regensburg address was very controversial because of Benedict’s remarks about Islam. Was the controversy justified in your view?

Dec 9 * 2. Contemporary Application: Thomas’s role in the search for truth in the Catholic college of today

◆ Alasdair MacIntyre, “Catholic Universities: Dangers, Hopes, Choices” [handout]

Reading Guide: Alasdair MacIntyre is one of the leading moral philosophers in the world. He now teaches at Notre Dame. His essay is by someone who takes Aquinas very seriously and who reflects in light of that allegiance on what a Catholic college or university should look like in our time. What is “true enlargement of mind” according to Cardinal Newman? What is the “essential theological dimension” of such an integrative function? What are the marks of an educated mind? What is the fragmentation in learning and in academic disciplines that MacIntyre is worried about, and how does he think Aquinas would help relieve this fragmentation? What criticisms of contemporary philosophy and theology proceed from these worries? What are the “two alternative directions for Catholic universities”? and how does Aquinas figure in here? What does MacIntyre think the role of the liberal arts is? And
how is he critical of “that very large number of American students who approach higher education believing that its overriding purpose is to get them some already identified kind of job, the achievement of which will be a mark of worldly success”? Now, step back a bit. How does Saint Mary’s College measure up to MacIntyre’s characterization of a Catholic college? How is it susceptible to MacIntyre’s criticisms? And what resources does it have to sustain the hope he hints at towards the end of his essay?

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**Conclusion**

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**Dec 11**

**Taking Stock: The Summa & St. Thomas**

(or: ‘Why this course has an ending but The Summa doesn’t’)

- ST II-II.109.1 [website]
- Fr. Thomas O’Meara, O.P., “Aquinas in Africa” [handout]

**Reading Guide:** How is the Aquinas in Fr. O’Meara’s essay a proponent of diversity? Evaluate the portrayals of Thomas’s influence in MacIntyre’s essay vs. O’Meara’s. Are these two different Aquinases? Or are they compatible?—Why is it significant that the Summa is mostly ethics (see ST II-II.109.1)? That is, what’s the link between the pursuit of truth and the human moral adventure?—And how does that affect St. Thomas’s understanding of the relationship between reason and revelation? Finally, why is it important that the Summa remained unfinished? As McCabe’s sermon shows, we end the course where we began, with the question: “What is God?”

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**Final Paper Due by 12 noon on Wednesday, Dec. 17th at 116 Spes Unica**
Stay Tuned for the 2009 Symposium on St. Thomas Aquinas,
on January 28, 2009,
with lecture by Fr. John Jenkins, C.S.C.,
President of the University of Notre Dame
Name (as you wish to be called in class):

Hometown:

Year in school:

Local address:

Local phone (or cell) #:

E-mail address (Be sure to provide the one you use most often, since this is the address I will use for any course-related correspondence with you):

What is (are) your major(s)?

What would you like to do or be when you leave college?

What other courses will you probably be taking this semester?

Any extracurricular activities, sports, or hobbies?

What other Religious Studies courses have you taken in college? Please also indicate the professor who taught the course.

What Philosophy courses have you taken in college? Indicate the professor.
Have you ever studied Thomas Aquinas before? If so, where and how?

Unless this is a requirement for you, why did you select this particular course? How do you see it relating to past or upcoming studies?

What do you hope to get out of “Aquinas’s Search for God”? More specifically, fill in the blank: “I’ll consider this course a big success if _____."

Is there anything else that you think I should know about you or your background that would help me teach you better in this class? Also, it might help me in my teaching if I had a sense of the way in which you learn best. Any ideas or help on this one?

Do you have any other questions/comments/concerns about this course or its content? I’ll get back to you as soon as possible either in person or via e-mail.