Pope highlights harmony between faith and reason in Saint Thomas Aquinas

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HARMONY BETWEEN REASON, CHRISTIAN FAITH

VATICAN CITY, 2 JUN 2010 (VIS) –

In today's general audience held in St. Peter's Square, Benedict XVI continued with his catechesis dedicated to the great saints of the Middle Ages, speaking on St. Thomas Aquinas, called the "Angelic Doctor" for the elevated nature of his thought and the purity of his life".

The Pope explained that Thomas was born around 1225 to a noble family in Roccasecca, Italy near the Abbey of Montecasino. He was sent to the University of Naples at a young age where he first became interested in Aristotelian thought and felt a call to the religious life.

In 1245 he went to Paris to study theology under the guidance of St. Albert the Great who held this student in such esteem that he was asked to accompany him to Cologne, Germany to open a centre for theological studies.

"Thomas Aquinas, at St. Albert the Great's school, carried out a task of fundamental importance in the history of philosophy and theology as well as for history and culture", the Pope said. "He studied Aristotle and his interpreters in depth" and "commented on a great part of Aristotle's works, discerning what was valid in it from what was doubtful or refutable, demonstrating its consonance with the facts of Christian revelation, using Aristotelian thought with great breadth and intelligence in presenting the theological writings he composed. In short, Thomas Aquinas demonstrated that a natural harmony exists between reason and the Christian faith".

"His great intellectual endowment brought him again to Paris to teach theology. That is where he began his monumental literary output: commentaries on the Sacred Scriptures and the works of Aristotle along with his masterpiece, the Summa Theologiae".

"There were a few secretaries who assisted in drafting his works, among whom was Reginald of Piperno [...] who was bound to him by a fraternal and sincere friendship characterized by great trust and reliance. This is a characteristic of the saints", the pontiff observed. "They cultivate

friendship because it is one of the most noble manifestations of the human heart and holds something of the divine within it".

In 1259 Thomas Aquinas participated in the General Chapter of the Dominicans in Valenciennes, France to establish the order's constitutions. On his return to Italy, Pope Urban IV charged him with composing the liturgical texts for the feast of Corpus Christi.

"St. Thomas has a profoundly Eucharistic soul", the Pope affirmed. "The beautiful hymns that the liturgy of the Church sings to celebrate the mystery of the real presence of the Body and Blood of the Lord in the Eucharist are due to his faith and theological wisdom".

In Paris, where he returned in 1269, a great number of students followed his courses, but the "Angelic Doctor" also dedicated himself to preaching to the people, who listened with attention. "It is a great gift that theologians know how to speak with simplicity and fervour to the faithful. The ministry of preaching, on the other hand, also helps those who are experts in theology to develop a healthy pastoral realism and enriches their research with stimulation", the pontiff remarked.

In the final months of his life, St. Thomas -- who died in 1274 at the Abbey of Fossanove, Italy when he was heading to Leon to participate in an ecumenical council -- confessed to his friend Reginald of Piperno that, after a divine revelation, he considered his work as "so much straw", writing nothing further afterwards.

"It is a mysterious episode that helps us understand not only Thomas' personal humility but also the fact that all that we are able to think and say about the faith, as elevated and pure as it may be, is infinitely surpassed by the greatness and beauty of God who will reveal himself to us in the fullness of paradise," Benedict XVI concluded.