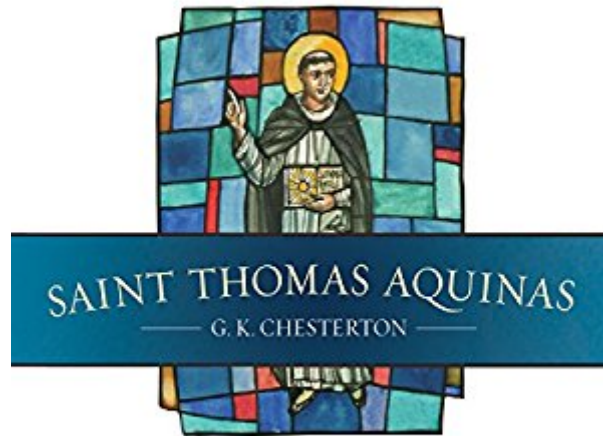


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Saint Thomas Aquinas



READ BY DEREK PERKINS

UNABRIDGED



Synopsis

"You call him a Dumb Ox; I tell you that the Dumb Ox will bellow so loud that his bellowing will fill the world." (Albertus Magnus) Dubbed the "Dumb Ox" by his classmates for his shyness, Saint Thomas Aquinas proved to be possessed of the rarest brilliance, justifying the faith of his teacher, Albertus Magnus, and sparking a revolution in Christian thought. Chesterton's unsurpassed examination of Aquinas' thinking makes his philosophy accessible to listeners of any generation. Etienne Gilson, the 20th century's foremost authority on Aquinas, has said of this work, "I consider it as being without possible exception the best book ever written on Saint Thomas. Nothing short of genius can account for such an achievement."

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 5 hours and 27 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Blackstone Audio, Inc.

Audible.com Release Date: November 19, 2015

Language: English

ASIN: B01868ODGO

Best Sellers Rank: #171 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Biographies > Saints #627 in Books > History > World > Religious > Christianity #645 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Churches & Church Leadership > Church History

Customer Reviews

I read this book as a sophomore at Georgetown in a class on St. Thomas taught by Fr. James V. Schall, S.J. (whose own books are well worth reading). The power of Chesterton's words overwhelmed me--here was a delightful man who was so connected to rock-bottom reality that he could shape metaphors whose insights dazzled and multiplied for page upon page. Two or three times Chesterton penned a sentence in this book that literally made me wince in pain; not because I disliked what he wrote, but because the sentence overwhelmed me with the truth it conveyed so powerfully (and perhaps also because I knew I would never in my life write such a magnificent sentence). A Southern Baptist by upbringing, I had long before college decided that Christianity was useful in keeping the stupid masses in line, but we smart folks had science and didn't need such myths. After two years of reading in the "Great Books" at college, this arrogance had faded, and I

began to toy with the idea that Christianity was far more reasonable and even noble than I had thought. But I wasn't sure whether it was in fact true. Then in this book Chesterton reiterated Aristotle's classic philosophical argument that reason tells us there must be a First Mover which set the world in motion. Chesterton added that it is reasonable to deduce that a First Mover must have willed to make that first move, and a being with a will is a person; so the First Mover is a personal God. That logical point hit me hard, and changed my life. After a few more years of intense reading (and almost as intense procrastinating), I was received into the Roman Catholic Church--the same Church into which Chesterton's prodigious, joyful intellect impelled him. (He had been raised in the Church of England.

I first read this book 5 years ago when taking an undergraduate course in mediaeval philosophy. At that time I was only passingly familiar with Chesterton and, despite faithful attendance in class, only noddingly familiar with Aquinas. Since that time I have come to understand both men in more depth, and since that time this little book has grown and shimmered until, much to my surprise, it has become one of my favourite books of all. All of the usual caveats about Chesterton's writing apply here: he cannot resist a digression, he cannot resist an alliterative allusion, he cannot resist a pun. He is so full of life that he is constantly threatening to spin out of control. He is not a scholar, he is not writing a sober appraisal, he is probably not sure of most of the biographical details of his subject (in his own autobiography, which has much the same candid dearth of dates and details, he commented that if he had denied such careful treatment to St. Thomas and St. Francis how could he justify it for himself?). In spite of these defects, the book is a triumph. Toast it with your best wine. Chesterton, for me, is the embodiment of "A Man in Full"; he is the polar opposite of C.S. Lewis' "Men without Chests". He is so full of good sense, penetrating insight, sound moral judgement, and the joy of life that it is all spilling out in every direction. Anyone who has read his book of literary criticism on Dickens will understand what I mean: this is criticism in an old key; it is appreciative criticism; it is an encounter with a writer by an entire man, and not just by a theory. It is wonderfully refreshing. I don't know of anyone writing today in a similar vein.

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