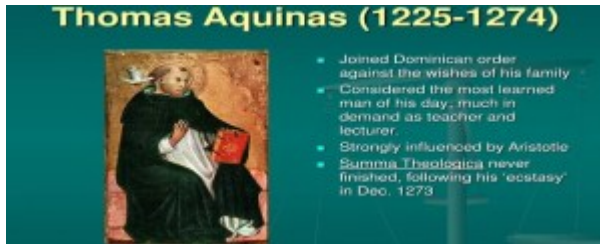


# The Influence of Thomas Aquinas – By Former Priest Richard Bennett



This is a transcription of a podcast on the [Berean Beacon website](#). It's an interview with a radio host named Ralph on a program called, "Heart of the Matter." Ralph interviews former Roman Catholic Priest Richard Bennett who discusses the influence of Thomas Aquinas, the forerunner to Liberation Theology, and its eventual manifestation in modern socialism.

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**Ralph:** When I spoke about Roman Catholic social and economic policy, I couldn't help but spend some time explaining as best I could how the teachings of a man named Thomas Aquinas are the foundation of the Roman Catholic Church's socialistic teachings on economics, private property rights, and government social policy. But Thomas Aquinas has deeply influenced the Roman Catholic Church in more areas than just those named. He has had and is having an influence outside the Roman Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic world as well. To help us understand the Roman Catholic Church better, I believe it would be helpful to understand Thomas Aquinas better. We need to understand the Roman Catholic Church because that church is the greatest enemy of our gospel faith and to billions of souls that there is.

Richard Bennett is my guest today. Richard was born in the Republic of Ireland and currently lives in Texas. Richard was born into a Roman Catholic family. He was raised as a Catholic. As a young man, he studied for eight years to be a priest. He studied the traditions of the Church. He studied philosophy. He studied the teachings of Thomas Aquinas. He studied some Bible as he puts it from a Catholic standpoint, and then in 1963 at the age of 25, Richard was ordained a priest in the Dominican order, if I remember correctly, and then he finished the study of Thomas Aquinas and Rome.

Now on past programs, we've spoken with Richard about his time as a priest. It's a very, very interesting testimony that he has and the different things he got involved in, but we're not going to talk about that today.

You see at the age of 48 years old, the Lord saved Richard by grace alone through faith alone, and Christ alone. And we have him on the program today because he is very well qualified to help us with our subject matter. Richard, I want to thank you for being on The Heart of the Matter again with us.

**Richard Bennett:** Great to be with you, Ralph.

**Ralph:** Well, we will see how much we can get in here and we trust that the Lord will use it mightily in His cause and of course for the salvation of souls as well. But when I say in His cause, I'm saying to stand against this false religion, this false Christian religion, this counterfeit called the Roman Catholic Church.

Now, let's just let's just start right out with the main subject. Thomas Aquinas, who is he? Who was he? Can you explain this to the listeners?

**Richard Bennett:** Thomas Aquinas was a genuinely brilliant man with an extraordinary intellect. He's been called the Doctor Angelica, the angelic doctor. I finished at the university called the [Angelicum in Rome](#), Italy. It was called the Angelicum because it was called after the angelic Doctor Aquinas. He was born most probably in the year 1224 and the date of his birth is 1274. He had been born into nobility. His education began with the Benedictine monks at the famous Monte Cassino in Italy where he first contacted the philosophy of Aristotle. He joined the Dominican order as you said the same order that I was in myself and it was there that he began to be interested in Aristotle. And when he wrote his famous *Summa Theologica*, which he finished writing in 1273 or was completed after him. He died four months after finishing his writing of the *Summa Theologica*. It was based on some things in the Bible, Catholic tradition, the decrees of the Pope, and the one he called "The Philosopher." He didn't even name him. He just presupposed that everybody knew who the philosopher was, and it was Aristotle.

So a man of brilliant intellect but a man who based a lot of his looking for truth and declaring truth on a pagan philosopher who lived 300 years before Christ Jesus. So a man who was utterly abject when it came to the basis of truth because he looked to a pagan philosopher as one to teach truth, and he intermingled that with teaching the Catholic Church and the scriptures. So it was a very dangerous mixture of a pagan philosopher of Catholic tradition with scripture that has been lethal and has been quite dangerous ever since. In the 21st century, he is having a very big influence on people across the world.

**Ralph:** So Thomas Aquinas born 1224, maybe 1225, died 7th of March 1274, a doctor of the Catholic Church, but not just any doctor of the Catholic Church. Let's talk a little bit about the authority that his teachings claimed and do claim. Let's talk a little bit about how the Pope and all the popes from the time of Aquinas on and the bishops of course, the teaching magisterium, what sort of authority and force do they give the writings of Thomas Aquinas? Is he just another doctor of the church or what do they say?

**Richard Bennett:** No, he's *the* doctor. That's why he called Dr Angelicus. He's the angelic doctor of the Catholic Church. For example in 1923, Pope Pius XI declared that "Aquinas was to be the guide to be followed in higher studies by younger men," by young men training for the priesthood. That was the official teaching of the Catholic Church way before 1923 and it was always been the teaching of the Catholic Church going back to somewhat later after his death. He wasn't recognized immediately as the angelic doctor but not long after his death, he was recognized as the seminal and the principal doctor of the Church by which people in the Catholic Church were to learn. So

he has been right through Roman Catholic history and it's interesting in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the official teaching of the Catholic Church that was published first of all in 1994 and is easily found on the internet and of course the books are widely disseminated across the world in different languages. The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives in footnotes and actually gives some quotations from the writings of Thomas Aquinas.

So the 20th century shows how the papacy has unleashed on the world the teachings of Aquinas and it has come right into the 21st century. So this man's authority is very strong in the Catholic Church. It widely publicizes his writings and urges people to read them and makes known his teachings with the authority that is supposed to be in the Roman Catholic Church.

**Ralph:** Now of course Richard, it would be a mistake to assume you know everything that's ever been written or done in the Roman Catholic Church. We can put you on the spot. I mean you're so well versed in the history of the Church and so well studied and we appreciate a great deal how you make use of that knowledge. But did the Council of Trent also uphold the authority of these teachings of Thomas Aquinas? Do you know anything about that?

**Richard Bennett:** As far as I can remember in my readings of the Council of Trent, I think it's many many times, but I do not like to say things unless I can fully document them.

**Ralph:** And that's very wise and we would encourage everyone to have the same approach to any subject and certainly when we're talking about the Roman Catholic Church.

The reason I brought this up is I have a quote from Leo the 13th. It's from a very very reliable source and I will share it. I just wanted to check with you first.

Leo the 13th said,

"The Fathers of Trent made it part of the order of conclave to lay upon the altar, together with sacred Scripture and the decrees of the supreme Pontiffs, the Summa of Thomas Aquinas, whence to seek counsel, reason, and inspiration." – Source:

[https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_04081879\\_aeterni-patris.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris.html)

Now would you say, Richard, that the conclusions and the teachings reached by Thomas Aquinas would be considered by all the popes, or at least some of the popes maybe, as being beyond debate? I mean, has it reached that level of authority with at least some of the popes?

**Richard Bennett:** It was beyond debate. We accepted it. If Aquinas had said it, that was that was enough authority. I had studied him for four years in my preparations for the priesthood I finished at the Angelicum University in Rome. So once Aquinas said it, that was final enough.

He was and still is hard to understand in different places and so we had a lot of trouble trying to decide just what was said. And you will notice that you can find materials easily on the Internet. Sometimes it's very difficult to make out what he has said but yes indeed it was and still is endorsed and accepted as absolute truth by the pontiffs and by the official teaching of the Catholic Church, and nobody actually ever debated and said that the finest was wrong in this or that.

**Ralph:** Many people, certainly non-Catholics, wouldn't know that. Maybe since we've been talking a little bit about his influence on you or in your training to be a priest you could talk a little bit more about that. Apparently, you studied him a great deal and so you're coming from a position of being able to address the issues we're involved in. I think it was very important that we established his authority because we're going to be then talking about his impact in a little while. Tell us a little bit about your training to be a priest and how you were exposed to these teachings.

**Richard Bennett:** Well, my first training for the priesthood began with a pious year of a year devotional and of different rituals that we did, and meditations, and all of this sort of thing. And then we began three years of study. And we opened the tomes of Aristotle which Aquinas was based on. One of his main sources was Aristotle. We studied Aristotle for three years. All priests must study Aquinas for at least two years, in what the Roman Catholic officially says, the philosophy of Greece, which is presupposed to be Aristotle. So we studied Aristotle for three years. And I still know in Latin many of the things of Aristotle. I can say (speaks Latin) I would say on and on and on. I still know by heart many of the dictums of the philosophy of Aristotle because I memorized it way back then in my three years of study of Aristotle. So Aristotle was known to me and we had studied him in the Latin language.

**Ralph:** If I could just interrupt for a minute and then we'll have you go on. I want to stress, that when you say you studied Aristotle, someone out there might be saying, "Well, maybe they studied them and then compared Aristotle's teachings to the Bible and why Aristotle was wrong." That's not the case, is it?

**Richard Bennett:** No, we studied him because we were told that it was the foundation to what we were going to study later on in Aquinas, and it was foundational to understand like the Catholic Sacraments. We could not understand how a physical thing could give spiritual life if we didn't understand Aristotle, because Aristotle actually established the principle by which a physical thing could communicate or give spiritual life, and later on Aquinas was to use that concept to justify the Sacraments. So it was foundational. We were told to study Aristotle. As young men, we were groaning under the difficulty of studying this philosopher. We were told that this is a foundation is shaping our minds so that later on we can understand Aquinas and later we can understand Sacramental Theology. So we were not rebutting it, we were accepting it.

**Ralph:** All right. So let's just talk a little bit then about Aquinas and some of the things he taught you by studying him.

**Richard Bennett:** For example, Aquinas was based on Aristotle's and the Bible and the teachings of the Church, and of course, there was a mixture that is detrimental to anybody's soul. We do not mix the authority of Scripture with any other authority. He said, for example,

"The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods." (St. Thomas Aquinas, Opusc. 57, 1-4.)

Now that is a horrific teaching, a direct quotation from Thomas Aquinas that Christ Jesus became man that to make men gods, small g, gods. Men are not made gods. There's only one God and that's like it says in Isaiah 43:10b, "before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me."

There is no God but the one true God and we do not become gods because Christ Jesus became man. That is not the right teaching. We by God's grace share in everlasting life and that way we become partakers of the divine nature by the grace of God. But we do not become gods.

The whole idea of becoming God is what is in mysticism. It's in some of the modern charismatic, and of course, it's in the emerging church movement.

So this is just detrimental. It is a diabolical teaching that somehow a man can become God. So this is really detrimental to anybody's study of Scripture. We are convicted that we are sinners before the all-holy God. We cry out to God for his grace. We trust in Christ alone and in that way we share everlasting life in Christ but we are still human. Even as we are glorified in heaven and we shall see Christ as he is we will still be human. We will never become gods and so this is horrendous teaching and it's still having an effect through the emerging church leaders and some of the charismatics at the present day.

So this is just an example of what Aquinas wrote and how lethal and detrimental it is to anybody searching for truth.

**Ralph:** And no one should point to 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 4 which says "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." Of course, this is not talking about receiving the very essence of God but as regenerated men indwelt by the Holy Ghost, we can follow our calling to follow after holiness as God is holy.

But let's go on. Let's talk just a little bit more if you would about the influences of Thomas Aquinas because we are going to be then applying this to other movements. If you wouldn't mind just a little further to share the theology and philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. Because I think something that many non-Catholics wouldn't understand is the influence that the Greek philosophers have on the Roman Catholic church, have had on the Roman Catholic church, and certainly through Thomas Aquinas.

**Richard Bennett:** Well let me explain that as he drew from Aristotle, he drew from Aristotle one of the famous principles that he himself declared emphatically and that principle was, "Nothing is in the intellect which was not first in the senses." That is a direct quotation from Aquinas which goes back to Aristotle. Now this idea that the intellect gets all its information first from the senses and that the senses reveal to the intellect truth. This is the human rationale that by experimental data we can know intellectual truth and be sure of it. That is the horrific base on which so many people go astray. They look to their intellect to give them truth and they count on their intellect to bring them the truth that they need to be right with God and to know what is right and what is wrong in life. The basis of truth is the scripture alone and experimental data as it communicates with the intellect can give us information, but it doesn't give us truth. This is the horrific assumption of Aquinas going back to Aristotle that has devastated so many at the present day and is influencing heavily such as Brian McLaren, Tony Jones and Alan Jones, leaders of the emerging church movement.

In my first 14 years as the priest, I was altogether 22 years as a priest mostly on a small island off the coast of Venezuela called Trinidad. I did come from Ministry two or three times to Canada and the United States, particularly to Seattle but I was mostly in the West Indian context and in parish work.

In my parish work as a priest, I presupposed what I had been taught about truth from Aquinas. I presupposed that it was the Bible plus our intellect and what we derived from the senses plus what we learned from such great philosophers as Aristotle. I presupposed that was my basis. So when I was searching, I was still holding that this was the basis of how we knew things.

So when I baptized babies, when I gave people absolutions in the confession box, even though it grieved me that I saw people came back with the same sins, and as I was some years into the priesthood, I saw that the babies I baptized were growing up just as wicked as the others around me. I lived mostly in rural areas where we could see people easily and we'd know those families where we had baptized children.

While I could see evidently that these sacraments were not working, because I presupposed that physical things could give spiritual life, I was taught by Aristotle and Aquinas and my Catholic Church that it must be true even though evidently from experience and as I see it all around me it's not working. So I was really damaged in those 14 years, particularly when I started after a very serious accident in 1972 to search out the scriptures of what true salvation was because I didn't hold for the scripture alone and I was still damaged by the philosophy of Aquinas and his purported basis of how we knew truth. My searches in the scripture really didn't add up to anything because my foundation was wrong. It wasn't based on scripture alone.

So those first 14 years as a priest were really damaged because of my presupposition that Aquinas was right and that Aristotle was right. It was only in 1979 when I was visiting Seattle in the United States that I discovered a Strong's Concordance and began reading what the Bible says about the Bible. And I was amazed at how clearly Christ Jesus said scripture cannot

be broken, and what the Apostle Paul said not to think beyond what is written, and all scripture is given by inspiration of God and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness, and on and on, that the Apostle Paul that also said. And when I began to study what the Bible says about the Bible I began to say well the Bible is what is true, and to the law and to the testimony, if you do not speak according to this word there's no light in them. (Isaiah 8:20) That was one of the scriptures that I was reading.

If we do not have the Bible as the only authority, we're footless. I didn't begin to see that as a priest till 1979, and that changed my outlook particularly as I went back to Canada and came back to Trinidad. Then, in my last seven years, I was trying as desperately as I could to hold to the authority of scripture alone, and then I had a foundation, and I had jettisoned to a great extent the philosophy and the theology of Aquinas.

So my first 14 years as a priest were heavily influenced by Aquinas but in my last seven years by God's grace I came to the true authority that shows us by the scripture alone. As Christ Jesus said, scripture cannot be broken.

**Ralph:** And then he brought you out of that church and out from under the condemnation of the law and saved your soul.

**Richard Bennett:** Amen, amen, praise be to His glorious Name.

**Ralph:** And of course what we're hearing is that the Roman Catholic Church, at least in your case, and I think probably you would say in the training of other priests, actually puts more emphasis on Aquinas and the Greek philosophers than they do on the authority of the Bible.

**Richard Bennett:** Well, I wouldn't say put more, but they put them together

**Ralph:** Well, let's talk a little bit about how Aquinas – it's such a huge subject and we want to get of course to the Emerging Church Movement and we will, we have time, but I want to just talk a little bit about how Aquinas has influenced the Catholic Church, the Catholic world so to speak, the Catholic culture. Certainly, we've heard how it's influenced one lone priest, but I've done quite a bit of reading, not near as much as you I'm sure on Aquinas, and some of his writings regarding private property, ownership, regarding social policies of governments, and so on. And one of the things I've learned is that he really has what we would call a communistic view of property. He talks about how property is common. In fact, I have a quote from his *summa*. He says, "In cases of need all things are common property." So that there would seem to be no sin in taking another's property for need has made it common.

Now Richard, I don't know if this would be so or not but was Liberation Theology influenced by the teachings of Aquinas?

**Richard Bennett:** It was *highly* influenced by Aquinas. That quote that you gave is actually re-quoted by the official teaching of the Catholic Church in the Vatican Council to document where they say it is not a sin for somebody

in need to take from the property owners. That is the whole basis of Liberation Theology. I was into Liberation Theology as a priest, in my first six years as a priest, not exactly the whole of the six years but principally four of those beginning years as a priest when I was in a very quite well-known town in Trinidad on the coastline called Mayaro where a lot of rich people came from the city and from the oil town of Point of Pier and they came there to their luxurious beach houses. And I saw the poor shacks of the ordinary people around and I saw how destitute the ordinary people who are these rich people from the oil town of Point of Pier and from Port of Spain and I began researching Jose Miranda, Juan Luis Secunda and others of the leading people of Liberation Theology, and I saw there was the famous principle of Aquinas that you could take from the property of others when in need. And I could see that I had people in need all around me, and I began teaching Liberation Theology from my Catholic pulpit. I had some very rich people from the oil town and from Port of Spain and they got a little bit annoyed or quite annoyed at some of my preaching, and then some of the poor people around the town were very happy when I was speaking.

I continued in that movement, and I got so deeply into the movement that I actually applied it. At one stage I took a court case against the government minister that he was charging for bribes to get things done in his department of government, and I tried to begin a court case against a doctor because he was a government doctor and he was charging money because a young girl had broken her wrist while he was supposed to be paid by the government, he was charging also the family, and he wouldn't do the operation unless he got money. So I was taking a court case against him actually because of my involvement in Liberation Theology.

I was threatened with a machete, and a gun, and my life was threatened, and I nearly lost my life in trying to live out the principles of Liberation Theology, and the principle of Aquinas that it was right, that you could in times of need, take from somebody's property if you were in need.

So it's something that I know really well and I'm actually writing a paper on in the next four months. I should publicize it, the political principles on which the Roman Catholic Church is based.

**Ryan:** Well now we're coming to a subject that is currently weighing heavy on your heart I know Richard, clearly the influence of Thomas Aquinas has reached far beyond the Roman Catholic Church and the world and Catholic world. Let's deal with the [Emerging Church Movement](#).

**Richard Bennett:** The Emerging Church Movement is based heavily on this whole idea that from experience and from what was achieved through the senses, we can come to know God and be united with God. Some of the Emerging Church leaders actually quote and laud Aquinas. For example, one of the famous Emerging Church leaders is called Alan Jones. He has a group called Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. On page 149 of his book, he mentions Aquinas. I'd like to read exactly what this Emerging Church leader says about Aquinas a direct quotation from page 149 of his book called *Re-imagining Christianity*.

Thomas Aquinas got up each morning as if we're studied a pagan



philosopher named Aristotle and found his thought absolutely congenial and appropriate for creating and constructing Christian theology. Why was he never afraid of this conjunction? He was never afraid because fruit from whatever source is from the Holy Spirit.

And so Jones presupposes that fruit is from the Holy Spirit even if it is a construction of man's own mind.

That man is an Emerging Church leader, and I have analyzed that whole *Re-imagining Christianity* on our webpage, [bereanbeacon.org](http://bereanbeacon.org)

For more of what Richard Bennett has to say about the Emerging Church Movement, please see: [Catholic Mysticism and the Emerging Church](#)