

Between Thomas and Thomism(s): Exploring the Significance of Thomas Aquinas for Evangelical Thought

While the influence of Thomas Aquinas on Western theology is beyond dispute, his legacy is contested. In current evangelical studies, there is a kind of love story with Thomas, especially as far as his theological metaphysics is concerned. What should we make of this entire discussion? Are Thomas and Thomism(s) the same? What does evangelical thought need to be aware of regarding the strengths and dangers of Thomas Aquinas? How can Rome's chief doctor be a reference point for evangelical theology? Surveying current literature and debates, this session will try to assess the different and nuanced appropriations of Thomas and Thomism(s), seeking to come to terms with what is at stake for evangelical thought.

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Introduction

I. Which Thomas?

- A. The extension of his work

- B. The selectivity of his use

II. Which Thomism(s)?

- A. Different Roman Catholic schools of interpretations

- B. Different appropriations of Thomas in 16th-17th century Roman Catholic and Protestant Thought

- C. 19th century Neo-Thomism

D. *Aeterni Patris* (1879): “the chief and master of all towers”

III. Thomas and Thomism in the 20th Century

A. The Roman Catholic *Nouvelle Théologie* and *Ressourcement*

B. Thomas at Vatican II

C. 20th century Evangelical criticism of Thomas

D. Trends in present-day Evangelical enchantment with Thomas

IV. Where Do We Go from Here?

A. Thomas = Roman Catholicism?

1. Certainly, Thomas has been fully appropriated by Rome
2. Certainly, Thomas is behind many non-biblical developments in Roman Catholicism
3. Certainly, Thomas laid the theological framework that is typical of Roman Catholicism, i.e. the nature-grace interdependence and the Christ-church Interconnection
4. Certainly, Thomas is behind the anti-evangelical teachings of Trent, Vatican I, and Vatican II (e.g. justification, authority, Mary)
5. Certainly, Thomas is used to advance the cause of present-day Roman Catholic ecumenism

B. Toward a Systemic View of Thomas

1. Learning from history: Protestant limited uses of Thomas are possible (like any other Medieval theologian)
2. Exercising discernment: even the “safer” aspects of Thomas (e.g. Trinity) are related to his more problematic aspects (e.g. salvation, Mary)
3. Approaching Thomas as a whole: his thought has a high degree of internal coherence; once you concede one point you will find it hard not to embrace the whole.