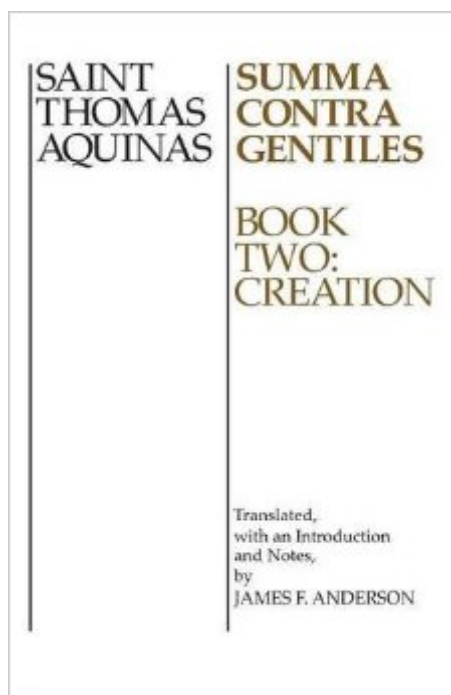


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Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Two: Creation



Synopsis

The Summa Contra Gentiles is not merely the only complete summary of Christian doctrine that St. Thomas has written, but also a creative and even revolutionary work of Christian apologetics composed at the precise moment when Christian thought needed to be intellectually creative in order to master and assimilate the intelligence and wisdom of the Greeks and the Arabs. In the Summa Aquinas works to save and purify the thought of the Greeks and the Arabs in the higher light of Christian Revelation, confident that all that had been rational in the ancient philosophers and their followers would become more rational within Christianity. This exposition and defense of divine truth has two main parts: the consideration of that truth that faith professes and reason investigates, and the consideration of the truth that faith professes and reason is not competent to investigate. The exposition of truths accessible to natural reason occupies Aquinas in the first three books of the Summa. His method is to bring forward demonstrative and probable arguments, some of which are drawn from the philosophers, to convince the skeptic. In the fourth book of the Summa St. Thomas appeals to the authority of the Sacred Scripture for those divine truths that surpass the capacity of reason. The present volume deals with God's freedom in creation, his power as creator of all things, and the nature of man, particularly the unity of soul and body within man. Book 1 of the Summa deals with God; Book 3, Providence; and Book 4, Salvation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Thomas Aquinas was an extraordinarily systematic thinker and writer. Because of this, one of the best ways to comprehend "Summa Contra Gentiles" is through consideration of its structure. At the

highest level, it consists of 4 books, with the third book in two parts, on account of its length. The titles of the five volumes are as follows: Summa Contra Gentiles: God, Summa Contra Gentiles: Creation, Summa Contra Gentiles: Providence, Part I, Summa Contra Gentiles: Providence, Part II, Summa Contra Gentiles: Salvation. Each volume is formally divided into about 100 short chapters. A typical chapter gets its title from some proposition that is to be affirmed, or in some cases refuted. Each paragraph is an argument in support (or denial) of that proposition. The chapters are themselves ordered so that the later chapters build on what the arguments in the earlier chapters have established, and it is this arrangement of chapters that constitutes the real structure of "Summa Contra Gentiles". Although in his later "Summa Theologica", Thomas formalized the higher-level structure of his writing, he did not do so here, which somewhat complicates any presentation of this structure - the book titles are so high level that they give little feel of the work, and the chapter titles so numerous that the reader is easily overwhelmed by a list of them. In order to give the reader some sense of the overall work, I've prepared an outline of the work that (hopefully) is short enough to be readily comprehensible and long enough to give the reader an understanding of what topics are covered and in what order. This outline is presented below:

1.0 Summa Contra Gentiles: God
1.1 Intention of the Work (1 - 2)
1.2 Truths of Reason and Revelation (3 - 9)

The first volume of "Summa Contra Gentiles", "God", concerns the existence and nature of God. Although that volume requires the reader to know a certain number of technical philosophical terms, it does not otherwise require of him a great deal of contextual knowledge to appreciate. This volume, the second volume in the work, "Creation", is more demanding. When the reader reaches the chapters concerning the intellect, the reader may well feel in reading it that he has come in on the middle of a long and complex argument. The reason that he may feel this way is because that is what he has done. The center of the controversy is Aristotle's analysis of the intellect. His exposition on that point was not successful if we measure success by the ability of intelligent careful readers to come to a shared understanding of what he thought. Thomas's part in these controversies are the heart of this, the second volume of "Summa Contra Gentiles". While the best thing that the reader could do to prepare himself to read this book would be to be well-read in Aristotle in general (and his "De Anima" in particular), that may not be possible for all readers. Therefore, as an aid to readers, this review will present the key terms in the controversy and what they meant (at least what they meant to Thomas):

Sensible - objects of sense - things that can be seen, heard, felt, tasted or smelled. Individual houses would be sensible. Contrast with "intelligible".

Intelligible - objects of reason - things that can be understood, but not sensed. The concept of "house" would be

intelligible. Contrast with "sensible".

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