



St. Francis of Assisi & St. Thomas Aquinas (2 Books)

G.K. Chesterton

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This volume contains 2 must-read Biographies by the amazing English thinker G.K.Chesterton, one of the smartest people of the 20th century. The biographies are of two of the main figures of Christianity: ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI & ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. The result is an extraordinary portrait of two extraordinary people, as only G.K.Chesterton could have been capable of doing. St. Francis is one of the most popular saints and one of the most misunderstood. Chesterton says the world appreciates the saint but not the sanctity. Chesterton describes Francis' transition from being a soldier and fighter to being a builder and a reformer. He describes Francis as troubadour and a clown of God, singing and dancing for his Lord. Finally Chesterton probes deeply the saint's mysticism. The amazing thing about mysticism is how physical it is. Everything in the story of Francis is palpable. He gives away all his possessions to the poor, including the clothes off his back (and also, somewhat unwisely, all his father's possessions, too.) He hears the voice of Christ speaking to him from a crucifix hanging on the wall in the Church of St. Damian, asking to rebuild the church, and immediately gathers stones and starts to repair the building. He wears a rag, with a rope for a belt. He embraces poverty the way other men embrace wealth, he hungers after fasting the way others hunger for food. He embraces not only all men and women as his brothers and sisters, but all creatures great and small. After achieving a spiritual depth that would have been more than enough for the rest of us, Francis rushes farther, deeper. He disappears into a cave to be alone with God. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. Then he could be compared with other saints or theologians, as mystic rather than dogmatic. For he was, like a sensible man, a mystic in private and a philosopher in public. He had "religious experience" all right; but he did not, in the modern manner, ask other people to reason from his experience. He only asked them to reason from their own experience. His experiences included well-attested cases of levitation in ecstasy; and the Blessed Virgin appeared to him, comforting him with the welcome news that he would never be a Bishop. Similarly, we might compare the Thomist scheme with others, touching on the points in which Scotus or Bonaventura differed from it. There is no space for such distinctions here, beyond the general one; that St. Thomas tends at least relatively to the rational; the others to the mystic; we might almost say the romantic. In any case, there was certainly never a greater theologian, and probably never a greater saint. But saying that he was greater than Dominic or Francis, would not (in the sense needed here) even hint at how great he was.

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