

Einstein, Aquinas, & Jesus

Albert Einstein talked about Thomas Aquinas and also the “luminous figure of the Nazarene.” Where were his words recorded? In the October 26, 1929 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post* (TSEP), an American magazine which informed Americans for 72 years, and in a book that was published about a year later written by the same person who interviewed Einstein in the *Post*. George S. Viereck was the interviewer.



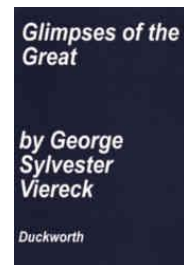
Let's start with Einstein's words about Thomas Aquinas. Viereck referred to "Gilbert Chesterton" (aka G.K. Chesterton) in the *Post* article. G.K. apparently told the interviewer that Einstein's "theory of relativity merely confirms the cosmology of Thomas Aquinas." Einstein was delighted that he had "reached the same conclusion as the comprehensive mind of that great Catholic scholar."

"Gilbert Chesterton told me that, according to a Catholic writer in a Dublin Review, your theory of relativity merely confirms the cosmology of Thomas Aquinas."
"I have not," Einstein replied, "read all the works of Thomas Aquinas, but I am delighted if I have reached the same conclusions as the comprehensive mind of that great Catholic scholar."

Albert believed that objects (e.g. planets) affect the fabric of space and time. In the book, *Introduction to Saint Thomas Aquinas*, by Anton C. Pegis (The Modern Library, 1948), we learn that Aquinas talked about the heavens, the earth, and time. Page 258 gives a translation of Thomas' words, "Things are said to be created in the beginning of time, not as if the beginning of time were a measure of creation, but because together with time the heavens and earth were created" (p. 258).

Regardless of whether this translation of Aquinas was confirmed later by Einstein's theory, they do serve to challenge many even today who think angels and dinosaurs preceded Adam and Eve in time by millions of years. Thomas Aquinas seems to be saying that time, along with space and matter, began at "the beginning." IOW, before the heavens and the earth, there was no time. Whether Einstein was saying that may be disputed, but this seems to be what Aquinas was saying.

As referred to above, the interviewer in the *Post* article wrote a book published in 1930 and titled, *Glimpses of the Great*. In it, he quotes Einstein, "I am not an Atheist ... The human mind, no matter how highly trained, cannot grasp the universe. We are in the position of a little child, entering a huge library whose walls are covered to the ceiling with books in many different tongues. The child knows that someone must have written those books. It does not know who or how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child notes a definite plan in the arrangement of the books, a mysterious order, which it does not comprehend, but only dimly suspects. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of the human mind, even the greatest and most cultured, toward God. We see a universe marvelously arranged, obeying certain laws, but we understand the laws only dimly. Our limited minds cannot grasp the mysterious force that sways the constellations."



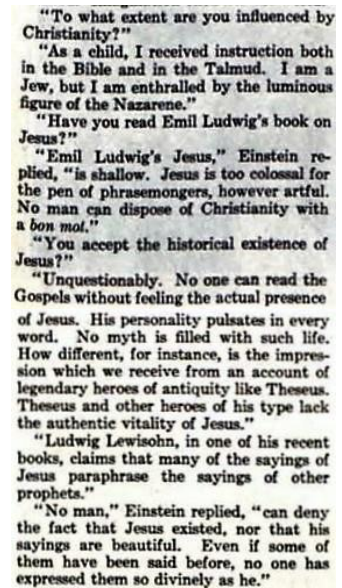
These words of Einstein seem very much in harmony with Paul's words in Rom 11:33, "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!" Isaiah quotes Yahweh, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways

higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Is 55:9). Psalm 92:5 says, "How great are your works, Yahweh! Your thoughts are very deep."

There are other quotations by Aquinas further on, but let us now consider Einstein's words about the One he referred to as the "luminous figure of the Nazarene."

In the *Post* article, Viereck asked Einstein, "To what extent are you influenced by Christianity?" Einstein answered (you can see his words in the clip to the right), "As a child I received instruction both in the Bible and in the Talmud. I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene."

Further down, he said, "Emil Ludwig's Jesus is shallow. Jesus is too colossal for the pen of phrasemongers, however artful. No man can dispose of Christianity with a *bon mot*!" When asked, "You accept the historical existence of Jesus?" Einstein answered, "Unquestionably! No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life."



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"As a child, I received instruction both in the Bible and in the Talmud. I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene."
"Have you read Emil Ludwig's book on Jesus?"
"Emil Ludwig's Jesus," Einstein replied, "is shallow. Jesus is too colossal for the pen of phrasemongers, however artful. No man can dispose of Christianity with a *bon mot*."
"You accept the historical existence of Jesus?"
"Unquestionably. No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life. How different, for instance, is the impression which we receive from an account of legendary heroes of antiquity like Theseus. Theseus and other heroes of his type lack the authentic vitality of Jesus."
"Ludwig Lewisohn, in one of his recent books, claims that many of the sayings of Jesus paraphrase the sayings of other prophets."
"No man," Einstein replied, "can deny the fact that Jesus existed, nor that his sayings are beautiful. Even if some of them have been said before, no one has expressed them so divinely as he."

I had indicated above that I wanted to quote more from Thomas Aquinas. Two things stood out in the book I went through concerning Thomas. First, he quoted Scripture as authoritative often. This was encouraging to see. Some people of the modern age view experience as the only way to know anything, but Thomas wrote that "it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation" (p. 4).

Amen! Let us all realize that God has a book out; we all should study it. How often do you read a chapter from the Bible prayerfully? Ask the Lord to help you understand.

Second, in reflecting explicitly on the Lord Jesus, Thomas wrote, "Our Lord says, I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (p. 176). He was referring to Jesus' words in John 14:6, but his writings on the whole seem to be rather sparse relative to the Person of Jesus. The Apostle Paul, by way of contrast, in his letter to the Ephesians, referred to Jesus on average every third verse. There are 255 verses and 94 references to Jesus, Christ, or Lord. I'm not aware that Paul ever referred to Aristotle, but Thomas refers to Aristotle with some frequency.

I'll admit that compiler Anton Pegis may have been selective and no doubt Thomas referred to Christ in other parts of his *Summa*, but what I read seemed sparse concerning the Person of Jesus.

Something I appreciated about Thomas was his statement on p. 27, "This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist, and out of it produce good." Many critics of God criticize Him for allowing evil, but Thomas' words serve as a corrective to that arrogance. The Bible gives many examples of God's turning evil around for good. Joseph (Genesis) experienced rejection and evil from his brothers, etc., but the Lord turned Joseph's rejection around for the good of Israel—saving it during famine years. The cross of Christ is the supreme example. Crucifying the King of the Universe was unconscionably evil, but the crucifixion was a prelude to the universe-shattering resurrection of Jesus, God's Son. Many believers will enjoy eternity with Christ because of His triumph over death, sin, and the devil.

Thomas likely encouraged the Roman Catholic Inquisition against proto-Protestants by these words, “With regard to heretics two points must be observed: one, on their own side; the other, on the side of the Church. On their own side there is the sin, whereby they deserve not only to be separated from the Church by excommunication, but also to be severed from the world by death.” He also wrote that “if forgers of money and other evil-doers are forthwith condemned to death by the secular authority, much more reason is there for heretics, as soon as they are convicted of heresy, to be not only excommunicated but even put to death” ([Summa, II-II, Q.11, art.3](#), cf. <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3011.htm#article3>). I believe the Inquisition murdered many precious people whom I will meet in heaven.

We live in an evil world, but God is accomplishing His purposes. Many Jews were slaughtered by a man who wanted to impose survival-of-the-fittest (practical evolution) on the whole world. The Germans were, in his mind, the most fit. Einstein, a Jew, was pretty fit, however, at least mentally. Thomas had some good things to say—and some not so good. Protestants, too, are far from perfect. May Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, etc. all come in faith to the “luminous” Lord Jesus and trust His teachings. May there be a wonderful ingathering of people from every tribe into Christ’s Kingdom—not compelled by sword but by truth and love. The Luminous One died to save sinners and came alive again to rescue people from death, sin, and hell. May you and I both trust in His shed blood and receive His Righteousness. That is what qualifies people for heaven—NOT their mythical “good” works. Jesus did it all. Trust Him.