

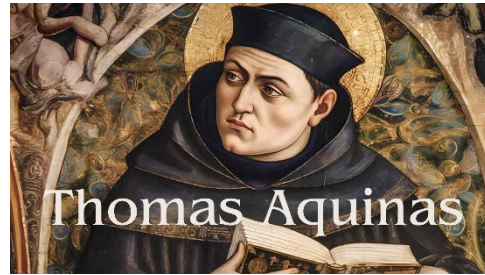
LESSON THIRTY



Thomas Aquinas

- Aquinas was the greatest of all the schoolmen. He was born in the castle of Roccasecca, near Aquino, in the territory of Naples (southern Italy), the youngest son of a Lombard noble.
- Against the wishes of his family, in 1244 he joined the new religious order of “preaching monks” called Dominicans.
- However, Aquinas’s family were so opposed to his decision that they kidnapped and imprisoned him in Roccasecca castle for over a year to try to force him to change his mind.
- They even hired a young woman of beautiful appearance but dubious morals to enter his prison cell and attempt to seduce him.
- Aquinas resisted all temptations and his family finally gave up and allowed their obstinate son to join the Dominican order.
- He studied at the universities of Naples, Paris and Cologne (north-western Germany).
- At Cologne, Aquinas’s teacher was the illustrious German Dominican schoolman, Albertus Magnus.
- Albertus was one of the most important Western champions of Aristotle’s philosophy, writing commentaries on all Aristotle’s works. Albertus and his pupil Aquinas became lifelong friends.
- From 1252, Aquinas taught theology in Paris, and from 1261 he was part of a traveling papal college teaching in various Italian cities.
- He became a famous lecturer during his lifetime, but it was only after his death that the Church recognized Aquinas’s greatness as a theologian.
- He never finished his masterpiece of systematic theology, the *Summa Theologiae*, because towards the end of his life (in December 1273) he abandoned writing entirely.
- When asked why, he replied that everything he had written seemed like a “piece of straw.”

Aquinas & Philosophy



- Aquinas's theology was based on his attempt to reconcile Catholic teaching with Aristotle's philosophy.
- Human reason, Aquinas taught, could discover much that was true about the world and even about God.
- Aristotle's philosophy was the supreme achievement of human reason, the best amount of the universe that humanity's unaided intelligence could give. Divine revelation did not overthrow this philosophy, but brought it to perfection by revealing truths like the Trinity which human reason alone could never have discovered.
- So, for Aquinas, Aristotle's philosophy laid the foundation for a rational knowledge of the universe; divine revelation then built the temple of Christian truth on that foundation.
- Aquinas's distinction between humanity's rational understanding of the world, and God's revelation which perfected that understanding, corresponded to what Aquinas called the two realms of "nature" and "grace."
- Nature was human nature as created in Adam – complete in itself, but subject to potential tension and conflict between the impulses of the body and the soul, and between emotion and reason within the soul.
- To enable Adam to keep his body in perfect obedience to his soul and emotion in obedience to reason, Aquinas held that God added to Adam's nature an extra gift of "supernatural grace" or "original righteousness."
- The fall left him a "natural man;" Adam still possessed all the natural powers and faculties of human nature, but the loss of the gift of original righteousness left him without the ability to keep the body in proper subjection to soul or emotion in subjection to reason.
- All humanity was involved in this fall of Adam – Aquinas taught the imputation of Adam's guilt to all his offspring, because Adam was the head and source of the human race.
- Fallen in Adam, human beings have kept all their natural powers, but they have entirely lost the gift of original righteousness, which has resulted in an absence of harmony between body, soul, emotion and reason. This, Aquinas said, has gravely weakened our capacity for virtue.
- It was Aquinas's understanding of the fall which enabled him to ascribe such a high ability to the natural human mind, even in a pagan like Aristotle, to discover so much truth about the universe and God.
- Aquinas wrote a large number of books. His two masterpieces were the *Summa contra Gentiles* (Handbook against the Pagans); and the *Summa Theologiae* (Summary of Theology).

- The *Summa contra Gentiles* was intended to enable Christians to present Christianity to non-Christians, such as Jews and Muslims and to refute their errors.
- The *Summa Theologiae* was a systematic theology – one of the greatest ever written.
- He arranged the *Summa* in the form of a disputation. It was divided into three parts: God and creation; human nature, sin and virtue; Christ salvation and the sacraments.
- Aquinas looked at 512 disputed questions and divided each question into a number of articles or points of inquiry. Matters of theology, philosophy, morality, and politics came under Aquinas’s scrutiny.
- He began each point of inquiry by presenting evidence which seemed to oppose his own view – philosophical arguments, quotations from the Bible and the early Church fathers. Then he offered a reason or quotation for the view he favored. Next, he presented detailed arguments for this view. Finally, he responded to the arguments against his own view and disproved them.
- By this method Aquinas tried to give a complete account of the question he was dealing with. Aristotle was the philosopher he quoted most often – Aquinas referred to him simply as “the philosopher.”
- Among theologians, Augustine of Hippo was his favorite. Although Augustine had been a Platonist and Aquinas was an Aristotelian, Aquinas still had a high regard for Augustine and tried to combine many aspects of Augustine’s theology with Aristotle’s philosophy.
- Aquinas’s theology became particularly famous for three things:
- **First**, Aquinas claimed that the existence of God could be proved by reason. Anselm of Canterbury, of course, had made the same claim, but Aquinas rejected Anselm’s proof.
- Because Aquinas had embraced Aristotle’s philosophy, he believed that all human knowledge arose from our experience of life in the outward physical world.
- **Second**, Aquinas taught that all our knowledge of God is through analogy. This meant that whatever we say about God, our language refers in the first place to created things.

In Aquinas’s own words, “God surpasses human understanding and speech. The person who knows God best is he who recognizes that whatever he thinks and says falls short of what God really is.”¹

- Aquinas’s theory that we can know God only through analogy has remained controversial down to our own day.
- **Lastly**, Aquinas was the first Catholic theologian to offer a full account of the doctrine of transubstantiation.
- By the 11th century, the view that had prevailed in Catholic Europe was that the bread and wine of the mass were entirely transformed into the flesh and blood of Christ.

- In the 12th century, Hildebert of Tours invented the word “transubstantiation” (change of substance) to describe this view, and the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 officially sanctioned both the word and the view it signified.
- Aquinas used the philosophy of Aristotle to give a theological explanation of what happened when the bread and wine were transubstantiated.
- Aristotle had distinguished between the “substance” and “accidents” of an object. What Aristotle meant by substance was the inner reality that gives any object its particular form and identity. This inner reality of substance is not physical, and the bodily sense of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell cannot grasp it; only the mind can perceive a substance by the intellectual power of reason.
- Substance, then, is this non-physical inner reality of an object which controls its outward form.
- The accidents, by contrast, are the various physical properties, dimensions and qualities which make an object appear the way it does to our bodily sense.
- Because accidents are physical, they are grasped by the senses; they are those aspects of a thing which we see, hear, touch, taste and smell.
- So, in the case of any object, we have a basic inner something (the substance) which the mind alone perceives and an outward form presented to us through physical qualities (the accidents), which are grasped by the bodily senses.
- Aquinas applied this reasoning to the bread and wine of the eucharist (communion). When the priest pronounced the words, “This is my body, this is my blood,” the substance (the non-physical inner reality) of the bread and wine are miraculously changed into the substance of Christ’s flesh and blood.
- However, the accidents of the bread and wine (the physical form, taste and smell) remained the same; as far as human bodily senses were concerned, they were still bread and wine.
- According to Aquinas, the bread and wine of the eucharist do *not* become the flesh and blood of Christ *physically*. This is because physical qualities, which can be seen, touched, tasted, are what Aquinas called accidents, not substance.
- The bread and wine remain physically bread and wine in all their visible and touchable qualities (accidents). But accidents are only the outward form of an object; its substance – its innermost truth and essence – is non-physical, and is therefore not something which the bodily senses of sight, touch, or taste could ever grasp.
- For Aquinas, substance is a mysterious invisible reality, lying beyond the realm of the merely outward and physical. It is this invisible, untouchable, inward essence of the bread and wine which (Aquinas argued) is changed into the equally invisible, untouchable, inward essence of Christ’s body and blood.
- The substance of the Savior’s flesh and blood in the eucharist is seen and grasped by the mind, not by the senses – in this case, seen and grasped only by the believing mind, by an act of faith.

- Because substance is not physical, it is also not local – not contained in a space. Aquinas therefore, by defining the change in the eucharist as a change of substance, ruled out any belief in a local presence of Christ in the space occupied by the bread and wine.
- According to Aquinas, then, those who take part in the eucharist are not eating the physical body and blood of the Lord, but the substance (the non-physical essence, the inner reality) of His body and blood.
- This inner essence of a thing, which our senses can never perceive was – in Aquinas’s thinking – more real than mere physical qualities and dimensions.
- Aquinas also developed the view that the entire flesh and blood of Christ were present both in the bread and in the wine.
- So, it did not matter if laypeople only ate the bread, and did not drink the wine; they still received the whole of Christ in the bread. This taking of the bread alone by the laity, while only the priest drank the wine, was quite a late development in the Western Church.
- It became widespread only in the 13th century, and seems to have grown out of a fear that the blood of the Savior would be dishonored if any of the wine were split.
- Similar fears led to the use of a special wafer instead of ordinary bread: the wafer did not crumble, so no transubstantiation bits of Christ’s body could fall on the floor and be trodden on.
- Aquinas’s mighty intellect offered the fullest explanation of various other doctrines and practices (particularly in regard to the sacraments) that had come to prevail in the Western Church.

Aquinas brought out very clearly the distinction between the mass as a sacrament and as a sacrifice:

“This sacrament is at the same time both a sacrifice and a sacrament. It has the nature of a sacrifice to the extent that it is *offered*, but it has the nature of a sacrament to the extent that it is *eaten*. Therefore, it has the effect of a sacrament in the one who eats it, but the effect of a sacrifice in the one who offers it, or in those for whom it is offered.” (*Summa Theologiae*, Part 3, question 79, article 5)²

- In other words, the mass had a twofold aspect. When people ate the wafer, it was a sacrament, feeding the believer by means of Christ’s very flesh and blood.
- But, in the Western medieval Church, the congregation hardly ever ate the wafer at a celebration of mass; normally, they just watched the priest celebrating it.
- So, for ordinary Catholics, their normal act of worship at mass was looking at the wafer, rather than eating it.
- So, when Aquinas distinguished between the mass as a sacrament and as a sacrifice, his point was that even when the congregation did not eat the wafer, the mass still had value, because the priest was offering a sacrifice.

- The mass (so to speak) “tapped into” and took hold of Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice on the cross, making that past sacrifice present in all its power. The result was that the mass washed away the sins of those for whom it was offered.
- This enabled Aquinas to explain theologically how a priest could offer a mass both for the living and the dead – for those still on earth and for the souls in purgatory. In the case of souls in purgatory, offering masses for them would apply Christ’s sacrifice to them, thus helping to pay off their debt of sin and hastening their progress to heaven.
- Rich people often left legacies in their wills to pay for priests to say masses for their departed souls, in order to secure for them a swifter release from purgatory. Masses for the dead were called “requiem” masses from the Latin prayer *requiem in pace*, rest in peace.

Aquinas & Sin

- Aquinas also worked out in detail the difference between “mortal sins” and “venial sins.” The Church had long held that there was a distinction between more serious and less serious sins, relying on texts such as I John 5:16-17,

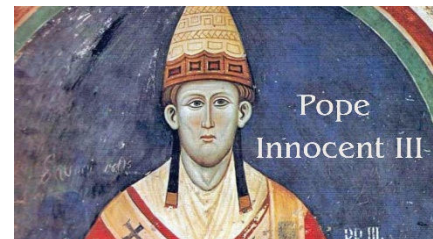
“If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life – to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.”

- The Church’s age-old system of penance applied to the more serious sins, and the patristic era had experienced several controversies over whether serious sin (murder, idolatry, fornication) after baptism could be forgiven and if so, on what terms.
- For the Western Church, Aquinas now gave a fresh, clear and decisive shape to this approach to sin and penance.
- To serious sin he gave the name “mortal sin.” This was a sin that “killed” the soul – turned it away from God as its true, thus destroying the soul’s inner principle of spiritual life.
- By contrast, a less serious sin was a “venial sin.” Venial means pardonable. This was a sin that only “wounded” the soul; such a sin did not actually turn the soul away from God, but it did bring spiritual disorder into the soul’s life.
- Aquinas suggested “speaking a careless word” and “laughing too much” as an example of venial sins.
- Because mortal sins killed the soul, there was nothing the soul could do by its own resources to restore itself; only divine grace could bring it back to life.
- God bestowed this grace through the sacrament of penance, unless circumstances prevented the repentant sinner from confessing his mortal sins to a priest.

- Normally, then, penance was necessary to salvation for all who had mortally sinned. Venial sins, by contrast, were forgiven through various means – private prayer, personal acts of contrition, participation in mass, etc.
- Next, Aquinas gave classical expression to the Western Catholic doctrine of the “merits” of the saints and the power of indulgences.
- According to Aquinas, the sins of human beings incurred a twofold punishment: mortal sins deserved eternal punishment, which could only be removed by Christ’s atoning death but all sins, mortal and venial, brought temporal punishment on the sinner.
- Temporal punishment was necessary to purify the souls of the spiritual effects of sin. And if the sinner willingly accepted his temporal punishment, it became a way of proving the sincerity of his repentance and of making compensation to God for the dishonor done to Him by sin.
- This temporal punishment by for sin, Aquinas explained, could be paid off during a person’s earthly life either by the sacrament of penance or by an indulgence.
- But if the believer died without paying all his temporal punishment by penance or indulgences, he had to pay it off by sufferings in the fire of purgatory, because God had given the papacy control over the “treasury of merits.”
- This “treasury of merits” was a central concept of Catholicism in the later Middle Ages; it described acts of obedience, above and beyond what God strictly required, performed in their earthly lives by the saints now in heaven.
- Catholic theologians referred to this “extra” obedience of the saints as their “merits.” The pope, Aquinas argued, could transfer this surplus of saintly merit to souls in purgatory by means of an indulgence, thus paying off their temporal punishment for them and releasing them.
- Thomas Aquinas, along with Augustine of Hippo and John Calvin, is one of three master theologians of the Western Church, in terms of intellectual depth and breadth of his thought and its long-lasting historic impact.
- Even many of the great Protestant theologians of the 16th and 17th centuries drew considerable inspiration from the *Summa Theologiae*, despite their serious disagreements with some of its teaching.
- Aquinas’s theology is known as *Thomism* (pronounced Toe-mizzum from Aquinas’s first name, Thomas). Thomism is still highly influential today, especially among conservative Roman Catholics, but also among some Anglicans and Calvinists.

The Age of Innocent III

- The claims and might of the papacy reached their noon during the reign of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216). If Hildebrand was the more heroic pope, Innocent was the most powerful.
- He did not have so negative an attitude to kings and emperors as Hildebrand had displayed a hundred years before.



- However, Innocent made Hildebrand's lofty view of the papacy as the political and spiritual head of Western Europe into a far more effective reality than Hildebrand himself ever dreamed of achieving.
- Innocent's real name was Lothario Conti. Born in 1160, he belonged to one of Rome's oldest aristocratic families.
- Having studied theology and law at Rome, Bologna and Paris, he became a lecturer at Bologna law school, being made into a cardinal deacon of Rome in 1190. In 1198, at the youthful age of 37, the other cardinals unanimously elected him pope and he took the name Innocent III.

The Papacy in Italy & Europe

- Innocent was the first pope who made the title "vicar of Christ" central to the claims of the papacy. ("Vicar" means a person who stands in someone else's place).
- Previously, popes had claimed that their special position was as the "vicar of the apostle Peter," standing in Peter's place and exercising Peter's supreme apostolic authority.
- Before Innocent III, people normally gave the titles "vicar of Christ" and "vicar of God," not to the pope but to kings, especially the Holy Roman Emperor; it had been part of the Western "sacred kingship" ideal – the king represented God or Christ on earth.
- Innocent was the first pope who positively rejected the old papal title of "vicar of Peter," and the first to refer to himself officially and regularly by the title "vicar of Christ." He declared:

"We are the successor of Peter the prince of the apostles, but we are not his vicar, nor are we the vicar of any man or any apostle; we are the vicar of Jesus Christ Himself."³

- Innocent also took to himself the traditional title of kings and emperors, "vicar of God." He was claiming that he, as pope, was the visible manifestation of Christ on earth, exercising Christ's supreme authority, not just over the spiritual kingdom of the Church, but over all human beings, all earthly kingdoms and even the angels and demons.

"The Lord Jesus Christ," Innocent proclaimed, "has established one sovereign [the pope] over all as His universal vicar, whom all things in heaven, earth and hell should obey, even as they bow the knee to Christ."⁴

- This was the doctrine of the pope's "plenitude of power" – that all spiritual and political authority flowed from him.
- From Innocent's reign onwards, then, "vicar of Christ" became the customary title by which the popes both defined and described themselves and their exalted position.
- The political circumstances of Western Europe at that time enabled Innocent to translate these elevated claims into a practical reality.

- The papacy's greatest rival, the Holy Roman Empire, had lost its grip on Italy due to the sudden death of the Emperor Henry VI (1190-1197) in 1197; a war between two rival claimants to the imperial throne, Philip of Swabia and Otto of Brunswick, then plunged Germany into utter confusion
- Innocent abolished the last remaining signs of imperial authority in Rome, winning over the city prefect (the emperor's representative) to swear an oath of allegiance to the papacy.
- By this time, Rome's economy largely depended on the papacy through the business of the papal court (the "curia"); Innocent exploited this fact to secure full control of the city from the Roman aristocracy.
- Having made himself political master of Rome, Innocent then began spinning a steel web of influence over the whole of central Italy, forming alliances with Italian cities against their German governors.
- He also persuaded one of the imperial claimants, Otto of Brunswick, to make concessions to the papacy in Italy in return for papal support in Otto's struggle with Philip of Swabia.
- Innocent recognized Otto as Holy Roman Emperor; Otto promised to never intervene in northern Italy, to acknowledge the independence of the papal states and to give up all imperial authority over the German Church.
- The previous Emperor, Henry VI, had virtually destroyed the papacy's independence by uniting the Empire with Naples and Sicily, thus surrounding Rome with imperial territory and power.
- Innocent was determined to prevent this happening again. He managed to bring Sicily within his grasp when the widow of Henry VI surrendered it to his protection, in order to guarantee the title of her young son, Frederick, to the Sicilian crown.
- By these actions, Innocent re-established the papal states in Italy as an independent political dominion.
- Innocent made his power felt in all three of Western Europe's great monarchies – Germany, England and France.
- In Germany, as we saw, rival claimants to the throne, Philip of Swabia and Otto of Brunswick, had split the Holy Roman Empire. Innocent had backed Otto in return for pledges of papal independence in Italy.
- Otto's rival Philip was assassinated in 1208, and Innocent crowned Otto as Emperor in 1209. However, no sooner was the crown on Otto's head than he promptly broke his promises to Innocent and marched his troops into Naples.
- In a cold fury of indignation, Innocent excommunicated the treacherous Otto and recognized Henry VI's son Frederick as Emperor, after first making him promise to give up the Sicilian throne as soon as he had mastered Germany.
- Innocent then headed the first great conflict of international military alliances in European history: he supported Frederick and King Philip Augustus of France against Otto of Brunswick and King John of England.

- In 1214 the papal alliance won a decisive victory at the battle of Bouvines (now Belgium).
- Frederick, Innocent's candidate, was settled on the German throne as the Emperor Frederick II (1210-1250).
- The end result of these conflicts was the permanent weakness of the Holy Roman Emperor's authority.
- In a disputed election to the archbishopric of Canterbury, Innocent intervened to set aside John's candidate and appoint one of his own cardinals, the Englishman Stephen Langton to the position in 1207.
- John refused to accept Langton. Innocent threatened to place England under an "interdict" – that is, to forbid all English clergyman to perform any of their sacramental or spiritual functions until King John submitted.
- John swore he would expel all the clergy from England if Innocent dared to do this. Innocent dared and placed England under an interdict in 1208.
- For four years England went without any Church services. Still John refused to submit or accept Langton as archbishop.
- In 1212, Innocent used his ultimate weapon: he excommunicated John, released all English nobles from their oath of loyalty to him and summoned the other kings of Europe to dethrone John in a crusade.
- John gave in. His submission was as groveling as his defiance had been proud: in 1213, he surrendered his entire kingdom to Innocent – England became property of the pope.
- John also promised to pay a special annual tax to the papacy and he accepted Langton as his archbishop of Canterbury.
- Innocent removed the interdict which had, by now, put a stop to all religious services in England for six years.
- Innocent also humiliated the French monarchy. In 1193, the king of France, Philip Augustus, had married the 18-year-old Ingeborg, sister of King Canute VI of Denmark.
- But almost immediately afterwards, Philip lost interest in Ingeborg, forced his French bishops to cancel the marriage and had the unfortunate girl locked away in a nunnery.
- Innocent took up Ingeborg's cause after becoming pope in 1198. When Philip contracted a second marriage with Agnes of Meran, Innocent responded by placing France under an interdict in 1200, in order to force Philip to repudiate Agnes and be reconciled to Ingeborg.
- At first Philip refused, but when Agnes died he submitted to Innocent, released Ingeborg from her imprisonment and took her back as his wife.

Internal Church Affairs

- Innocent carried out an important series of ecclesiastical reforms. Many of these were aimed at creating a more centralized government of the Church, with the pope as absolute monarch.
- For example, Innocent expanded the system of papal “legates” (ambassadors). These were officials appointed directly by the pope and responsible to him; their function was to oversee Church affairs in different localities and make sure that bishops were carrying out the pope’s policies.
- Innocent also established the right of the papacy to appoint bishops in disputed cases – a right Innocent exercised in the Langton case in England.
- In 1199, he imposed the first general income tax on all Catholic clergy, to be paid to the papacy.
- Innocent’s concern for reforming the Church enjoyed its greatest moments in the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.
- The Council’s reform measures were wide-ranging, dealing with the moral lives of clergy, the importance of preaching and Church discipline.
- The Council, for instance, decreed that all Catholics must confess their sins privately to their priest at least once a year and receive holy communion at least once a year at Easter.
- The most significant decree of the Council had to do with the theology of the mass, for the Fourth Lateran Council gave the first official Catholic definition of the doctrine of transubstantiation. The definition reads:



“There is indeed one universal Church of the faithful, outside which no-one at all is saved, and in which the Priest Himself, Jesus Christ, is also the sacrifice. His body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar, under the appearances of bread and wine, the bread being transubstantiated into His body by divine power, and the wine into His blood, so that we receive from Him what He received from us [flesh and blood]. Thus, the mystery of unity [between Christ and us] is accomplished. Indeed, no-one can perform this sacrament except the priest, properly ordained according to the power of the keys of the Church, which Jesus Christ Himself granted to the apostles and their successors.”⁵

- The Council condemned the teachings of the Waldensians and Cathars. It also demanded that Jewish people, in Christian society, wear distinctive Jewish clothing and live in special Jewish areas of towns and cities, separate from the Christian population.
- This pronouncement of the Council reflected the increasing anti-Semitism that marked Western society in the later Middle Ages.

- This anti-Jewish attitude led to the expulsion of all Jews from England in 1209 and from France in 1306 and then again more effectively in 1394.
- These was a massacre of Jews in Spain in 1391, and the Spanish monarchy officially expelled them in 1492; the Portuguese expelled them in 1496.
- The Jews were not expelled from Germany, probably due to its lack of centralized government, but popular hatred of Jews was probably stronger in Germany than elsewhere in Western Europe; German Christians often massacred German Jewish communities in outbursts of anti-Jewish feeling.
- In 1349, a Christian mob in Strasburg marched the city's entire Jewish community to Strasburg's cemetery and burnt at the stake all who refused to convert to Christianity.
- Christian hostility to Jews was fueled by stories that Jews kidnapped and murdered Christian babies and practiced religious rituals in which they treated the wafer of holy communion with blasphemous mockery.
- There is no reason to think these stories were true; but they do show the shocking social and religious gulf which now existed between the Church and Israel.
- A more down to earth explanation for Christian anti-Semitism was that until the end of the Middle Ages, the Church forbade all Christians to practice usury (lending money for interest). Something the Jews were allowed to do.

¹ 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume II, Needham Nick, page 287

² 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume II, Needham Nick. Page 291

³ 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume II, Needham Nick, page 326

⁴ 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume II, Needham Nick, page 326

⁵ 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume II, Needham Nick, page 331