ACT 2 SCENE 1


AT RISE: The monks enter, first the Franciscans, then Brother Robert, then the other Dominicans.

JOHN
(Quietly, not wishing to be overheard)
Brother Robert…?

ROBERT
Yes?

JOHN
You spoke with Albert earlier?

ROBERT
I did.

JOHN
Has it…changed your outlook at all?

ROBERT
In a way…

JOHN
What way?

ROBERT
I told you before that I am but a weak vessel.

JOHN
I thought we had calm those fears. You’re ready. Thomas is just a man.

ROBERT
I am weak, but the Holy Spirit is a powerful force.

JOHN
Yes…
ROBERT
Alone I am not Thomas’s equal, but now I know I am not alone.

JOHN
Of course not.

ROBERT
Now I’m sure that God is with me.

JOHN
I’m relieved to hear you say that.

(Everyone rises as the afternoon divine office begins, invoking God’s blessing on their activities. A lone voice chants the office, with the Brothers responding in chorus.)

VOICE
Alma mater Ecclesia, Christi fundata sanquine, sceptra conscendit grandia, novi Doctoris lumine

BROTHERS RESPOND IN CHORUS

VOICE
Ipse tamquam imbres mittet eloquia sapientiae, suae, et palam faciet disciplinam doctrinae eius: collaudabunt multi sapientiam eius, et usque in saeculum non delebitur.

BROTHERS RESPOND
Iustus ut palma florebit in domo Domini. Sicut cedrus Libani multiplicabitur.

(All settle into their chairs. BROTHER PAULO remains standing.)

PAULO
Welcome brothers. God’s blessing be with you all as we begin our quaestio disputata, today in the form of quodlibet – question as you wish. We extend a special welcome to our honored guests: emissaries from our gracious King Louis and His Grace Bishop Etienne Tempier. We are especially honored to have in our presence the most revered intellect of our Dominican order, who has traveled a long way to be with us: Brother Albertus Magnus.

MARCOS
Brother Paulo, this is an insult!

PAULO
What?…
MARCOS
We have given pride of place in this introduction to Brother Albert, and while all of us have great respect for Brother Albert, it is the Bishop who should be given the highest honor in our introduction. Your holiness this was a disgraceful oversight…

PAULO
Brother Marcos, I certainly meant no offense. But the introductions were done properly. From King, to Bishop, to Brother, just as is appropriate. If Brother Albert’s introduction was too elaborate I ask forgiveness from our Franciscan and secular friends, but please understand that to our order Brother Albert is beloved as a father and a scholar. Forgive our brotherly indulgence. Now let us move on the quod libet.

MARCOS
Brother Paulo.

PAULO
Yes, Brother Marcos.

MARCOS
Is it not true that in defiance of all university traditions Brother Thomas has been offered a dispensation from today’s quod libet?

PAULO
Brother Marcos, as you well know…

ROBERT (rising)
Perhaps, Brothers, we should put the question directly to Brother Thomas. (Paulo sits. Thomas stands.)

Brother Thomas, is it true that you have been offered a dispensation?

THOMAS
Yes.

ROBERT
And yet you are here. I take I then that you have refused the dispensation and you wish to proceed with the quod libet.

THOMAS
Yes.
ROBERT
The Brother Paulo with your permission I’d like to pose the first question to Brother Thomas.

PAULO
Question as you wish, Brother Robert.

ROBERT
Brother Thomas…

THOMAS
Yes?

ROBERT
What is the nature of man?

THOMAS
Man is a creation of God.

ROBERT
Indeed. Let me be more precise. What is the nature of man’s soul to his body?

THOMAS
The soul is the form of the body.

ROBERT
The form of the body? What does that mean?

THOMAS
May I provide an example?

ROBERT
Very well.

THOMAS
Reginald, hand me the knife. (REGINALD produces the knife from his robe and gives it to THOMAS, who holds it aloft for all to see.) Behold the knife!

ROBERT
Brother Thomas, do you intend to discuss man’s soul by brandishing a weapon?

THOMAS
Yes, but you needn’t fear. It’s the properties of the knife that are relevant, not its potential to intimidate.
ROBERT
I see. Well, in that case please continue.

THOMAS
The knife has two properties. It is matter and it is form. The matter refers to the substance of which it is made. In this case...a rather cheap iron. But this substance is not the true essence of the knife. After all, we could make a knife out of some other substance, such as bronze or even stone.

ROBERT
And very likely produce better knife!

THOMAS
Quite true.

ROBERT
So if matter is not the essence of the knife than what is?

THOMAS
The form that is impressed upon the matter. (Raising the knife higher) Note well the shape of the blade, the sharpness of the edge, the roundness of the handle, the relationship of the blade to the handle...all of these things constitute the form of the knife. The form makes the knife what it is. It permits the knife to be used as an instrument of cutting. Without it, this simply is not a knife. So it is with man. Man is matter – a body. Man is form – a soul.

ROBERT
So man is both matter and form, body and soul. But what about the relationship between these things? How are body and soul related to one another in man?

THOMAS
Man is a composite of body and soul, matter and form.

ROBERT
This notion of a composite, this is an idea unique to Aristotle -- correct?

THOMAS
No, not entirely.

ROBERT
But good Brother Thomas, you must acknowledge that our long-standing tradition passed on to us from no less an authority than Augustine himself was not man as a composite of body and soul, but man as a soul using a body -- imprisoned even -- awaiting the death of the body so as to allow the blessed release of the soul.
THOMAS

The nature of the soul and body is an issue that has been discussed by numerous authorities over the centuries…

ROBERT

No, no Brother Thomas, don’t recite a page from your latest Summa on this. I can show quite succinctly the flaw in this whole manner of thinking. Hand me the knife.

THOMAS

Very well, Robert

ROBERT

(Holding the knife before audience)
Look at this knife. Aristotle and Thomas would have understand it by reducing it to matter and form. But everything important is lost in this decomposition.

THOMAS

What Robert? What is lost?

ROBERT

The very meaning of the knife. Did our Lord use this knife when he broke bread on his last night with his disciples? Or was it thrust into his side as he hung gasping for his final breath.

THOMAS

Robert, you’re confusing…

ROBERT

What does this knife mean to us? What significance does it hold? What’s most important about the knife is lost in the rush to tear into its constituent pieces. As it is with the knife. So it is with man. The very soul of man is lost with Aristotle.

THOMAS

Robert, your plea drips with passion, but it is a passion born out of ignorance.

ROBERT

Ignorance?

THOMAS

What you speak of is not lost with Aristotle. It is one of his most fundamental concepts. The final cause – the purpose of things.

ROBERT

Aristotle’s final cause…buried amidst a haze of Aristotelian causes and properties.
THOMAS
Buried only to those who do not make the effort to understand him.

REGINALD
And is this not precisely why Thomas is here today. To help us properly understand the great Philosopher. Brother Paulo, is Robert making speeches or is he questioning Thomas?

PAULO
Brother Robert if you have more questions then please pose them.

ROBERT
Very well...Brother Thomas, can you more clearly specify what you mean by the composite nature of man’s body and soul.

THOMAS
Certainly. May I have my knife back? (Robert returns the knife to Thomas. Thomas raises the knife above his head.) Let us return to the knife. Both the matter and the form are necessary requirements for the existence of the knife. (Pause, he begins a slow deliberate pace about the hall.) Let us pose some questions. Can the knife exist as matter only?

ROBERT
No, you already made that clear. The knife must have a form impressed on the matter.

THOMAS
Correct. You’re a quick student, Robert. But we can also ask if the knife can exist as form only?

ROBERT
It would seem not.

THOMAS
Correct again. The form of the knife must be realized in some substance, otherwise it will not serve to cut or severe or pierce, which are essential functions of a knife. When is the last time you cut something with the idea of a knife?

ROBERT
Are you saying that an idea has no power?

THOMAS
An unexpressed idea has no power! Even an idea must be realized somehow. Just as the knife’s form must be realized in some substance, so the idea must be spoken or written or somehow formed in something. Otherwise, no idea! No knife! (THOMAS’s gentle meandering has landed him before a small wooden table. In an uncharacteristically dramatic gesture, he rams the knifepoint into the table, sticking it in firmly).
ROBERT
Fine. Fine. But we’re not discussing ideas or knives. We’re discussing man’s soul.

THOMAS
As it is with the knife, so it is with man. Man is a soul realized in flesh. The two elements are interwoven and necessary.

ROBERT
Interwoven and necessary...therefore equal in value? The soul does not transcend the body in importance or holiness? Or is it the body that transcends the soul in holiness?

THOMAS
The two must integrate. To argue that one is holier or more important than the other is to denigrate one. But God created them both. The physical world is as much God’s creation as the spiritual world. To say that one is holy and the other base, and therefore one should be valued and the other scorned, is to take half of God’s creation and deem it polluted.

ROBERT
That is a radical departure from our traditions.

THOMAS
No. Christ was both flesh and spirit, fully human and fully divine, not one or the other, but two elements in communion. So it is with man’s body and soul.

ROBERT
Our Savior taught us to live for the spirit and not for the wants of the flesh.

THOMAS
Indeed so. And I have never taught otherwise. But our Savior also tells us that the proper destiny of man is to know God.

ROBERT
To know God through prayer and contemplation.

THOMAS
Through all aspects of his creation. Prayer, contemplation – yes. But also from revelation, from reason, and from nature. God has given to man a body which is capable of seeing, hearing, touching, and tasting his creation and a soul that is capable thinking about his creation. The two must work together to learn about God and to come to know him better.

ROBERT
So this composite of body and soul, they work together in your view to provide us with knowledge of God. Body providing sensory information and soul providing the reasoning capacity to understand that information. Is this correct?
THOMAS
Yes, man’s intellect requires sensory inputs. These inputs form the basis for our thought and reasoning. This is how we learn, how we form universal principles, how we draw conclusions. Through this learning we grow in wisdom and in knowledge of God.

ROBERT
Thomas in your writings you have, in fact, developed an entire physical theory of how sensory information forms the basis of our thinking. Something you refer to as the “interior senses.” Is this correct?

THOMAS
No, it is not my theory. I have discussed and in some modest ways elaborated on a well-accepted theory of brain functioning handed down from ancient authorities…

JOHN
Pagan authorities, Aristotle…Galen. I am familiar with this theory of the interior senses…it has been the source of many heresies and is not be uncritically accepted without…

THOMAS
Brother John if you are as familiar with the theory as you say then you would also know that it has been well-received by authoritative Christian teachers as well as pagans. Bishop Nemesius and Augustine himself both discussed the theory quite extensively and favorably. As with all ancient theories it…

JOHN
But neither Nemesis nor Augustine were so blindly committed to an Aristotelian view of the world that they failed appreciate the hazards…

REGINALD
Brother Paulo once again those who wish to attack Thomas do so without even allowing him to explain fully his ideas. If this is to be a constructive exchange then…

PAULO
My patience has truly worn thin. Now the Brothers have raised a question concerning the theory of the interior senses. Whether we agree or disagree with such a theory we should at least allow Brother Thomas the opportunity to explain it!

ROBERT
I concur fully. Thomas…the theory.

THOMAS
In his De Anima, Aristotle identified a number of intellectual functions such as sensation, imagination, and memory. Originally the Philosopher placed these functions in the heart, but later, the renowned physician Galen located them in the brain. Physicians following Galen identified the ventricles of the brain as the precise location of these functions.
ANTONIO
Why the ventricles?

THOMAS
Galen taught that the ventricles were connected to the sensory and motor nerves. The same animal spirits flows through all of them. Thus, our ability to understand and respond to sensory information must dependent on the functioning of these ventricles. Since Galen, every educated authority, Christian and non-Christian alike, have agreed that the ventricles are indeed where important intellectual functions take place.

ROBERT
What functions?

THOMAS
Sensation, movement, and memory. There are three ventricles each with a different function.

ANTONIO
And is this your view of the theory?

THOMAS
Not exactly. I, along with Brother Albert and most other commentators, have espoused the model proposed by the Arab, Avicenna. He claims that the first ventricle is for sensation and imagery. So should I close my eyes I can still, if I am so inclined, bring to mind an impression of Brother Robert’s distinguished countenance even though the sensory species of his face is no longer impressed upon my eyes.

ROBERT
A pleasing image at least!

THOMAS
Quite! Now the second ventricle is where the faculty of estimation resides. It is here that we can make evaluations of images or tie associations to them. So it is here that a sheep may judge a wolf to be dangerous and because of that association, run away from it. And finally, it is in the very last ventricle in the back that all these evaluations and associations can be stored for later use. The last ventricle is for memory.

ROBERT
So we could say that from front to back these ventricles are involved in sensation, association, and memory.

THOMAS
Again, you’re a good student Robert. Yes, a bit oversimplified but reasonably accurate.
ROBERT
What about the soul Thomas? What is left for the soul to do if sensation, association, and memory are housed in the ventricles?

THOMAS
The soul is the seat of reason. The ventricles themselves are not active agents of reason. The soul, with its reasoning power, uses the ventricles to learn and to understand.

ANTONIO
This is a false and dangerous theory.

THOMAS
What danger?

ANTONIO
All of man’s intellect must be part of his rational soul. But this theory claims that evaluation, association, and memory are not faculties of the rational soul, but functions of the perishable body.

THOMAS
Brother Antonio, do we agree that the rational soul is divine gift, unique to man?

ANTONIO
Of course.

THOMAS
Then I answer your objection with the following: If we assign such faculties as association, evaluation, and memory to the rational soul then these faculties should be present in man alone, and utterly absent from all other creatures.

ANTONIO
That’s true, is it not?

THOMAS
No, not at all. Both reason and observation contradict this. Brother Antonio have you ever trained a dog?

ANTONIO
Yes. Most of them learned more quickly than the students around here.

THOMAS
Maybe that’s true because you can beat a dog with a stick to rid it of unwanted behavior.

ANTONIO
It focuses the mind.
But is it not the case that after only a few blows the dog retreats from the mere presence of the stick with no need for further beating? Does this not show that the dog has, indeed, associated the stick with pain?

I suppose so. Even a dumb animal eventually..

How did the dog do this? With a rational soul?

Of course not. A dog does not have a rational soul.

Right, but he does have the power of association. And what about memory? All of us here have enough experience with animals to know that they remember things. Augustine himself commented on how the fish in the Bulla Regius had learned to swim on the side of the fountain nearest the walkway in hopes of getting a morsel or two from passersby. Obviously these fish were remembering something. Do fish have a rational souls?

Therefore the ventricles and the faculties they perform are similar in man and in animals, is this what you are saying Brother Thomas?

Yes, this is what Galen taught, and it has been accepted by authorities after him and confirmed by observation and reason…

And how eagerly you embrace this thinking, Thomas – all too eagerly! A consistent theme in your writings is the debasement of man to the animal level. Why you have asserted that marriage in man is similar to the nesting behavior of birds and makes us just slightly better than dogs!

I have pointed out similarities in human an animal behavior, but I have never denied man’s unique position before God, Brother Antonio.

But is it not possible Thomas, that the similarities we see between animals and humans are brought about by the actions of different structures – by the ventricles in animals but by the rational soul in humans?
THOMAS
It may be possible, but again reason and observation argue against it.

ROBERT
How so?

THOMAS
Most of us here have had some experience with those unfortunates who by illness or injury have lost some powers of their intellect. Robert, are you familiar with the writing of Bishop Nemesius on this subject?

ROBERT
No…what does the good Bishop say on the matter?

THOMAS
Hmm…it’s required reading in my class. Bishop Nemesius discusses a famous case of a man who suffered from an inflammation in his brain. In a crazed state he began throwing glass vessels out the window of a weaver’s shop, but in doing so he correctly named each vessel as it was tossed. Now, as I always ask my students, what intellectual faculties suffer impairment in this man? Robert would like to venture a guess?

ROBERT
His ability to evaluate his actions…to exercise self-restraint…do I pass, good teacher?

THOMAS
Good enough! But his behavior also shows that some faculties remain in tact, such as his sensory capacity and his memory. By the same token though, many of are familiar with opposing cases where a blow to the head has affected memory or sensation, but left other faculties in tact. All of this shows that in man, as with animals, these functions are housed in physical structures, and when certain structures suffer injury specific faculties are impaired, but others remain unhindered.

ROBERT
You concluded then, Thomas, that reason, observation, and authority provide you with the basis for teaching that the interior senses are present in man, just as they are in animals, and that they house such faculties as association, imagination, evaluation, and memory. And that these faculties are not part of the man’s rational soul, but are part of man’s physical, perishable body.

THOMAS
Yes.

ROBERT
(Quickening the pace)
But what happens at death? Is not the body lost to soul? For it is the soul which is
immortal, not the body.

THOMAS

Yes.

ROBERT

Thomas, I know you are a man of great faith and you, of course, believe that upon death each man will be judge according to his actions by a just and righteous God.

THOMAS

Yes.

ROBERT

And this, of course, is a fundamental teaching of our Church, of our faith…that individual souls must stand before God and receive just reward or just punishment for their thoughts and deeds.

THOMAS

Yes.

ROBERT

Do you not see the danger, Brother Thomas? Do you not see the precipice that your teachings have brought you…brought us to?

THOMAS

There is no precipice, Robert. The dangers are only in your imagination.

ROBERT

No, Thomas. I see clearly. It is you who are blind.

THOMAS

You are afraid.

ROBERT

You are dangling on an edge between heaven and hell, Brother Thomas, and you have dragged the Church along with you! I’m a brave voice calling you back.

THOMAS

No speeches, Brother Robert. State your objection.

ROBERT

(Opening the Bible, grand pronouncement)

I read to you from the Gospel of our Lord according to St. Luke chapter 16 beginning verse 19 “there was once a rich man, who dressed in purple and the finest linen, and feasted in great magnificence every day. At his gate covered with sores lay a poor man
named Lazarus, who would have been glad to satisfy his hunger with the scraps from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs used to come and lick his sores. One day the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades where he was in torment he looked up; and there far away was Abraham with Lazarus close beside him. ‘Abraham my father’ he called out, ‘take pity on me! Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my tongue, for I am in agony in this fire.’ But Abraham said, ‘Remember, my child that all the good things fell to you when you were alive, and all the bad to Lazarus; now he has his consolation here and it is you who are in agony. But that is not all, there is a great chasm fixed between us; no one from our side who wants to reach you can cross it, and no one may pass from your side to us.’ ‘Then father,’ he replied, ‘will you send him to my father’s house, where I have five brothers, to warn them, so that they too may not come to this place of torment?’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them.’ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he replied, ‘but if someone from the dead visits them they will repent.’ Abraham answered, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets they will pay no heed even if someone should rise from the dead.’” (ROBERT closes the book and pauses a moment. Then turns to THOMAS.) This passage of sacred scripture describes a judgement does it not?

THOMAS

Most certainly it does.

ROBERT

And we can take it as authoritative pertaining to our own judgement at the end of life can we not, Thomas?

THOMAS

Yes.

ROBERT

Does this story not clearly indicate that the rich man remembers who he is? He remembers that he had good things in life and that the poor man Lazarus had nothing. He remembers that he has five brothers and that they, like him, take no pity on the poor.

THOMAS

Yes.

ROBERT

Does this parable not show that upon death the soul retains knowledge of its own past? Does it not show that the soul remembers?

THOMAS

Yes, yes…the soul remembers.

ROBERT

And is it not true that the soul must remember who it is or the entire doctrine of
individual judgment is placed in jeopardy?

THOMAS
I have never taught otherwise.

ROBERT
But such a teaching is contradicted by your earlier steadfast assertion that memory is a faculty of the body, not the soul! How can the soul remember when memory is housed in the third ventricle of the brain, a point you vigorously defended with reason, observation, and authority. You want me to state my objection Brother Thomas, well here it is: I submit Thomas that your theory of the interior senses is directly at odds with scripture. One cannot hold that memory is a physical faculty and yet at the same time concur with the doctrine of individual judgement.

THOMAS
Reply to the objection: Brother Robert, you confuse philosophy with theology.

ROBERT
I’m confused?

THOMAS
We evaluate philosophical issues, such as the faculties of the rational soul, based on reason, and I have provided my reasons for why the rational soul possesses certain faculties and does not possess others. But the doctrine of individual judgment is a theological truth. We accept theological truths on faith, not based on reason.

ROBERT
So there are two truths then, Thomas: one base on reason and another based on faith?

THOMAS
No, of course not. The fact that our reasoning does not lead us all the way to a theological truth only shows that man’s reasoning is limited, but it does not show our reasoning is faulty. Beyond the limits of man’s reason is mystery, divine mystery. The manner of soul’s remembering is a mystery, beyond human understanding. The soul remembers, but I do not know how. Where reason ends, faith begins!

ROBERT
Brother Thomas, you seek to cover a multitude of sins by invoking faith at last possible moment. You find yourself at the end of your reason, with the truth still far beyond your reach.

THOMAS
It is natural and proper for man to reason. Reason is a gift from God…

ROBERT
Corrupt reason is the sin to be corrected.
THOMAS
…and the Philosopher teaches us how to avoid corruption in our reasoning. Robert, is man’s nature good or is he irredeemably corrupt?

ROBERT
Am I being question or you?

THOMAS
Very well, I’ll answer my own question. Man’s nature is good, but it is not divine and it is not perfect. Faith and revelation draw reason forward to greater perfection, sometimes in difficult and mysterious ways. But we must have faith that those ways are true. Faith and reason complement each other, they do not contradict.

ROBERT
No, now I ask you Thomas—if traveler chooses to take one path and not another and later finds himself hopelessly lost, where did he make his mistake: in very last step he took or thousand miles before when he choose his path?

THOMAS
The analogy does not fit…

ROBERT
You are that that unfortunate traveler Thomas, and sadly, the Church is following you. Your fatal error was in choosing to follow Aristotle and now your intent on making it the Church’s error as well.

THOMAS
No, no – the church follows Christ, not me!

ROBERT
Man’s reason is limited, but it can also be faulty when it follows the wrong master.

THOMAS
There is only one divine master, Brother Robert, all the rest are mortal and flawed. But it is our lot as mere men to learn as best as we can from these flawed and mortal masters. We try to assess their value from the soundness of their logic, the breadth of their knowledge, the compelling nature of their thought. (Appealing to the audience) On all these counts does anyone here who has honestly read his works find the Philosopher wanting?

ROBERT
Wanting yes, because he did not know of our traditions.

THOMAS
Brother Robert, you accuse me of betraying the Augustinian tradition. But what
truly is our tradition? Is it one of closing our eyes to wisdom simply because it is derived from pagan sources? Did Augustine teach us such? Did he reject the Platonists because the Academy was in Athens and not Jerusalem? Indeed he did not! If we sincerely see our Christian faith as the culmination of man’s wisdom then we must be willing to engage all forms of that wisdom. And sometimes we must simply struggle to understand how that wisdom could possibly fit with what we know to be true from our faith. There is great value and wisdom in the Philosopher and I for one will not go back, Brother Robert, but struggle forward.

JOHN
A most spirited defense, Brother Thomas. But it leaves me to wonder if your faith has been more firmly placed in a long-dead pagan philosopher than in our Lord!

REGINALD
Brother Paulo, I think Brother John has transgressed the line of decency. All of us who know Brother Thomas know him to be a man great faith and piety. Let us keep our discussion civil.

ROBERT
But faith in what? Brother John has a worthy point. I mean no offense, Brother Thomas. But you say that faith begins where reason ends. Some of us believe that faith is the beginning and the end of all. It seems to me that you follow Aristotle and only where he stops do you take up the cross of Christ. Maybe this is why your reason is incomplete.

PAULO
Brothers we are not here to cast accusations…

JOHN
Let me offer an apology to Brother Thomas. I did not mean to cast an accusation. I only meant to say that sometimes we can become too attached to our teachers. Sometimes that clouds the mind.

PAULO
…let us remember humility and respect, Brothers.

ROBERT
Brother Thomas, perhaps Brother John has gone too far. (To the crowd) Our disagreements with Thomas are intellectual and I for one would never call into question another Brother’s faith. In fact, I know beyond all doubt that Brother Thomas’s faith is deep and profound. I…I was not going to mention… but maybe in light of what has transpired, to put an end to all questions on this matter let me read something:

(ROBERT produces a few papers from the pocket of his robe and begins to read off of one of them.)
I adore you devoutly, O hiding Deity.

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THOMAS
What…? Where…?

ROBERT
(Without looking up, continues.)
Who beneath these symbolic signs are truly hidden.
To you my heart submits itself entirely,
Since to contemplate You is entirely inadequate.
   (Pause, he folds the paper very deliberately and puts it back in his pocket.)

Now, my friends that eloquent expression of complete, childlike faith was written by
none other than Thomas himself. I know that he would prefer that these poetic
compositions not be displayed publicly. So I will not go on. And I ask for Thomas’s
forgiveness for having revealed but a small portion of one, but I want to make absolutely
certain that everyone here knows the depth of this man’s faith. (Renewing the assault)
However, what is undeniable from this verse is that Thomas admits that the mind, and
therefore, reason, is an inadequate means of approaching God. Thomas, your own words
highlight the folly of reason!

PAULO
This is disgraceful! This is precisely why we never should have conducted this quodlibet.
A man authors volumes and volumes of meticulously constructed argumentation only to
have it ignored in place of a few lines of weary, ill-considered verse. Who among us in
some sleepless night has not scribbled a few lines of emotive praise to our Lord? It has its
place. But is it no bases for an academic discussion. Brother Robert this is a shameful,
pathetic ploy!

THOMAS
(Weakly, almost pleading)
Just a few simple lines of verse. Of no great consequence. (Trying to compose himself)
I thank Brother Robert for his passionate defense of my faith. But you misunderstand the
poem. It was…just a poem…

ROBERT
But there is truth in it, Thomas. Truth that your heart knows but your mind refuses to
accept. Just as the poem says, Thomas – the mind cannot know God. The mind fails
when seeking God. Isn’t that what you have found?

THOMAS
No, there is great wisdom in the Philosopher.

ROBERT
But your own pen betrays you, Thomas!
THOMAS
No, these things can be reconciled. Truth cannot contradict truth. Reason and poetry both reach for God…

ROBERT
They contradict, Thomas! You can’t defend them both! Do you deny the truth of your poems or the truth of your reason? You can’t have them both!

THOMAS
They do not contradict…

MARCOS
(Joining in the attack)
It is as Robert has said all along and Thomas’s words confirm – only the heart can truly know God. That is why Aristotle fails, Thomas. Because he is all mind and no heart.

JOHN
Aristotle misunderstands the true nature of man. Isn’t that what you now realize, Thomas!

THOMAS
No.

JOHN
Isn’t that what you have known all along but were unable to admit openly. These poems are a cry from your heart, Thomas. Listen to them!

THOMAS
No, you misunderstand…

ANTONIO
Aristotle has no love, Thomas. He cold, his God is cold.

THOMAS
Aristotle teaches wisdom – to help us know God!

ANTONIO
Our first obligation is to love God, Thomas. That is our purpose. We cannot know him unless we love him first.

THOMAS
Are you accusing me not loving my God?

MARCOS
You love a pale, lifeless God of Reason. Aristotle’s god!
Brother Marcos…

THOMAS

ROBERT
No, no! You have abuse reason, Thomas. That is the accusation. And in doing so you have dragged the Church into error. You have put all of us in mortal danger.

THOMAS
It is a struggle but we will find our way, we are not lost…

ROBERT
You are lost. (Waving the poems at THOMAS). You admit as much here! You’re lost in Hell and you would have us all follow you there!

THOMAS
Lost in Hell, no, no! I am not lost. You misunderstand!

ROBERT
If a man’s eye is the source of his sin, then we are taught that he should gouge it out. If a man’s hand is the source of his sin then we are taught that he should cut it off. If the mind smothers all that is beautiful and wondrous about who we are then we must cut it out, throw it off. We must not let it destroy our hearts. As it has done to you, Thomas.

THOMAS
No! No! Man is unity Robert. Body and soul, mind and heart, they are one. I am one. To deny one is to deny half of God’s creation.

ALBERT
Brother Paulo, end this! It has become undignified…these are personal attacks…this is not proper.
  (Angry cries begin to mount. PAULO rises as if to end things, but before he can THOMAS interjects.)

THOMAS
What manner of devil are you, Robert? You accuse me of losing my heart, of dragging the Church into my own Hell. What manner of argument is this? You’re the one who has unjustly dragged out another’s private reflections and use them against him in a public brawl. What of your heart?

ROBERT
It is regrettable…but sometimes we must do things that are…questionable

THOMAS
Questionable? Look at yourself Robert!
ROBERT
when the goal is noble…when the fight is to save the church from error…

THOMAS
Where is your compassion? If Aristotle has hardened me, has your ruthless opposition done any less to you?
ROBERT
No…I did not want to do this…

THOMAS
You have taken my ideas and you have distorted them! You taken my poems and perverted them! You have taken something that was beautiful and you have made it ugly!

ROBERT
I’m sorry it came to this…but one cannot make compromises when…

THOMAS
(Pounding his fist and pointing at Robert)
Compromises! How far do we go before we have compromised our souls, Robert? I have made my mistakes but my struggle has been honest! Let God condemn me if he will, but for you to question my faith, my love of God, my love of the Church…are we schoolboys scratching at each other’s eyes?…Is that part of your fight?

ROBERT
Some actions are necessary…

THOMAS
Cruel actions? Unjust actions? Robert, you have become blind. You’re as blind to the suffering you cause as the rich man who ignored Lazarus? (Out of control) How are you different? I ask you!

PAULO
Enough Brothers! Enough! We are tired. The hour is late. We shall conclude this disputation. We are done. (For a moment the crowd sits in silent disbelief at the abrupt conclusion of the quodlibet. Then slowly they begin to stir, ready themselves to depart.) Let us take leave and rest. May God bless all of you.

(All begin to exit.)

ROBERT
(Attempting to approach THOMAS through the departing crowd)
Thomas…Thomas…I’m am sorry…I wish it hadn’t come to this…(THOMAS does not hear him. The hall falls silent. All have left, except for ROBERT and his FRANCISCAN ALLIES who slowly gathered around him. ROBERT’s hand trembles as he pulls the
papers out of his pocket. He stares vacantly down at them, as he rubs his head in anguish.) My heart…?

(With a please expressions BROTHER JOHN and the other Franciscans gather around ROBERT to congratulate him on a successful performance.)

JOHN
Well done, Robert. The giant is not slain, but his armor is pierced…

MARCOS
he’s teetering…it is only a matter of time now.

ROBERT
(Distracted, poems still in hand)
Only a matter of time…

JOHN
Yes…very soon now…we’ll set things right around here.

ANTONIO
We won’t forget what you have done for us. We’ll make sure things are better for you around here.

ROBERT
Better for me…I thought we were saving the church from error…saving souls…

JOHN
Of course…one thing at a time, Robert.

ROBERT
What have I done? I should speak with Thomas…

MARCOS
No, I don’t think that’s a good idea.

ROBERT
But…he misunderstood. Things got out of hand…some things I shouldn’t have said.

ANTONIO
Nonsense, Robert. You’re presentation was proper, in every respect proper.

ROBERT
No…I was blind…I didn’t see.
JOHN
No…no, you showed proper restraint. If things got out of hand it was entirely on Thomas’s part.

MARCOS
He realized his arguments were faulty and he became defensive. A shameful thing to see in a man of his stature.

ROBERT
You’re going to set things right around here. That’s what it was all about wasn’t it?

JOHN
Yes, Robert. And as I said, we won’t forget what you have done.

ROBERT
No…you won’t forget…

JOHN
You’re tired, Robert. You should rest. I’ll call on you later. We’ll have a drink.

ROBERT
God won’t forget…

(JOHN and the other Franciscans depart. ALBERT approaches)

ALBERT
You’re right, Robert. God won’t forget. Nor will I.

ROBERT
Albert…Albert…I…

ALBERT

ROBERT
It’s not what you think. This isn’t what I intended…I miscalculated…

ALBERT
I showed you those poems in confidence. I thought you were an honorable man. I thought you had some compassion. But there’s nothing there…nothing but ruthless ambition…pitiless pride!

ROBERT
Not pride, Albert! I thought it was necessary, but it went too far.
Too far. Oh, yes, too far…

ROBERT

My intentions were honorable!

ALBERT

So were mine! But I make no pretense of honor now, Robert. I promise you'll regret this day. I’ll use every bit of my influence…You'll pay for the damaged you’ve caused.

ROBERT

I didn't ask for the poems, Albert. You gave them to me

ALBERT

We'll both pay…

(Albert departs leaving Robert alone. He falls to his knees.)

ROBERT (kneeling)

Dear God, what have I done? (Pause.) Confiteor Deo omnipotenti, beatae Mariae…Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa….Did you trick me? When you gave me the poems…I thought they came from you…a sign that you were with me…that my actions were righteous. My heart leapt…my blood stirred…here at last was a way to overcome my failings…a way to match Thomas. You were giving me a way to match Thomas, a way to win. But what have I done? Yes! Yes! There are excesses of reason. I know it! I know it with all my heart! But there are also excesses of passion too. Speak to me! I want only to serve you. Speak to me! Am I wrong? (Only silence. Robert arises and looks at the poems.)

God is silent, Thomas. Just you and I.

END ACT 2

SCENE 1
ACT 2

SCENE 2

SETTING: Thomas’s cell, shortly after the quod libet.

AT RISE: THOMAS is again alone in his cell. He sits quietly on the edge of his small cot, head bowed, hands folded in his lap. After a moment or two, his attention is caught by the bird fluttering about in its cage on the shelf. THOMAS goes over the birdcage and gently pets and mutters softly to the bird. Watching the bird puts his mind at ease from the day’s events. Then PAULO enters the room, rather cautiously. For a while, he just watches THOMAS at the birdcage, allowing him a few moments of solitude. Then he speaks gently.

PAULO

Thomas…?

THOMAS

(Continues to watch the bird)

Yes?

PAULO

Thomas…I want to apologize. I…I should not have let it go on as long as I did. I should have stopped it.

THOMAS

Thank you, Paulo…but it’s not really necessary. Sometimes the questions can be…difficult. It’s to be expected sometimes.

PAULO

Yes, but…well…I’m just sorry that things got…out of control…I should have done better…handling that.

THOMAS

Paulo, my friend, you have handled things just fine. I know things can be complicated for a man in your position. In any event, I was the one who did not handle things well.

PAULO

Oh, no, Thomas. Quite the contrary, up until the very end, I thought you were strong as usual.

THOMAS

Until the very end, yes…you are kind. I made a fool of myself. I wish I had done better job for you and for everyone out there today. I fear I have done our cause no good and maybe, irreparable damage.
PAULO
No…I’m not so sure. Why do you say that?

THOMAS
I lost my composure. I began hurling unfounded accusations. It was unforgivable.

PAULO
Well, the whole affair got out of hand, but that was my fault. No, prior to that I think you did quite admirably.

THOMAS
Be realistic, Paulo. My tirade will be seen as a sign of weakness by our opponents. If they are held at bay at all, it will be only briefly. They will be back.

PAULO
Honestly, Thomas…yes, I think you are probably right about that. Our opponents will be back, I’m sure. I spoke to Albert afterwards…his view was quite similar. We’ll just have to keep up the fight…fight harder. I think it is going to be an ongoing battle for some time. But we’ll manage.

THOMAS
Fight harder. Yes…I suppose so.

PAULO
I see you’re tired. I won’t bother you…

No, Paulo, wait.

PAULO
Yes…

THOMAS
Paulo…perhaps it is I who should apologize to you.

PAULO
For what?

THOMAS
For being a coward…all these years.

PAULO
A coward? Goodness Thomas, what are you talking about?
THOMAS
I know what you have done all these years. I know how you have insulated me from all the petty squabbles and political fights so that I could teach and write, without interruption…without distraction…

PAULO
Thomas…it’s not really necessary. I…

THOMAS
I know how they have hated you for it and how you have silently endured their hatred for my sake. I let you suffer without comfort or aid, because I told myself that my work was too important. I worked harder sometimes just to avoid having to stand by you and fight along side you. I was a coward and I’m sorry.

PAULO
Thomas, I…I never thought of it that way…it was role…my purpose…That’s why I was brought here. I understood that from the start. I did it gladly and I will continue to do it. But…well…I appreciate your sentiments, nonetheless.

THOMAS
Your purpose?

PAULO
Yes…my purpose. That’s how I thought of it. God has made the world so we all have our place, our job to do. This was mine…to provide the proper setting so that God’s most brilliant mind to his work. I only hope that I have done it well.

THOMAS
You have. You have created a thing of beauty.

PAULO
I’m not sure I’d go that far.

THOMAS
Oh, I would. Indeed, I would, Paulo. The final cause…it can be beautiful when it is realized.

PAULO
The final cause? I’m sure I have seen that phrase discussed here or there in your writings, but I can’t call to mind exactly what it means.
THOMAS
It is the purpose of things – their final cause. All things have their purpose. Your final cause is the success of Thomas at Paris and by serving your purpose as God intended, you are part of something beautiful.

PAULO
I guess I would like to think of it that way.

THOMAS
There is a beauty in things when they are all acting together as they are meant to, achieving a perfect harmony. A beauty, not just of appearance, but of the soul.

PAULO
A beauty of the soul?

THOMAS
Yes, those of us who lack in physical beauty…that’s often what we are trying to achieve…a beauty of the soul. That’s what you allowed me to achieve…or, at least you gave me the chance to try. (Heartfelt) Thank you.

PAULO
Your quite welcome, Thomas.(The conversations lulls momentarily as PAULO joins THOMAS at the birdcage.) The bird is a beautiful thing as well, don’t you think.

THOMAS
Yes…yes it is. It has the beauty of form and appearance. It is beautiful to the eye.

PAULO
Indeed. The king has good taste.

THOMAS
Why would someone put a bird in a cage, Paulo?

PAULO
Well…I don’t know. To keep it around, I suppose. So that its colors, its song, its…beauty can fill a room.

THOMAS
I image that was the king’s intent when he gave it to me. He wanted its beauty to fill my drab, cramped little space.

PAULO
Yes, I’m sure it was.

THOMAS
I wonder what it is like to be beautiful…in form and appearance…I mean.
PAULO

I don’t know.

THOMAS

Paulo, have you ever watch a bird just soar about the sky, wings outstretched, floating on
the wind…doing what a bird is supposed to do?

PAULO

Well…sure…of course. A wonderful sight.

THOMAS

It is, isn’t it? But it’s a deeper beauty than just the beauty of appearance. It’s a beauty of
purpose as well. The bird…gliding…fitting in perfectly with the wind and the clouds and
the trees as God intended. It’s a beauty of the soul. The beauty you can’t get in a cage.

PAULO

Yes…yes, Thomas…I think I see what you mean. There is something missing when you
put the bird in the cage. There is a kind of beauty that is denied to it. There is something
missing.

THOMAS

Yes…something missing…

PAULO

Thomas, maybe the king needs to gain a better understanding of the purpose of things.
Maybe he sees only the beauty of appearance and misses the deeper beauty. Maybe we
should give him the bird back.

THOMAS

The thought had crossed my mind.

PAULO

(Taking the birdcage)
Thomas, I’ll see to it that the gift is returned promptly to the king. (He turns to leave.
Then stops and turns around) No…Thomas, why don’t you do it? Another lesson from
you should be enough, even for a king, don’t you think? (Giving the bird back to
THOMAS). Don’t be afraid to push him a little. We’ll survive here even if he’s annoyed
for a time.

(PAULO and THOMAS exchange knowing smiles. Then PAULO departs. The
scene goes dark.)

END ACT2 SCENE 2
ACT 2

SCENE 3

SETTING: Thomas’s cell a short time later.

AT RISE: Thomas is discovered. Albert enters.

ALBERT
(Tentatively)
Thomas? Thomas…how are you? (THOMAS ignores him). It can be an ordeal sometimes, the questions. I know, I’ve had my share…

THOMAS
What do you want?

ALBERT
You were strong though, formidable as always. A few of us were a little worried about you…

THOMAS
No, I looked foolish. Rattled and confused. A maddened schoolboy…

ALBERT
No, no…

THOMAS
…but I’m not a schoolboy, am I…not your schoolboy…

ALBERT
What…?

THOMAS
I’m not confused now, Albert…I’m clear…and I’ll make you an argument. Clear and concise…

ALBERT
Right…yes…with the mind my boy, with the mind.

THOMAS
Proposition: Albert the Great has betrayed his student and his old friend.

ALBERT
What? No!
THOMAS

Yes. Oh, have you no reply? For the benefit of your aged ears I’ll state the argument again. Proposition: Albert the Great has betrayed…

ALBERT

I heard you!

THOMAS

Then make a reply. Or have you forgotten how the form works?

ALBERT

I will reply. Objection one: betrayal requires intent. I had no intent. It was…

THOMAS

Answer to objection one: Intent or not, there was deceit…

ALBERT

I was equally betrayed!

THOMAS

Answer to objection one: You deceived me. You showed the poems to Robert after I explicitly told you not to. I trusted you and you violated that trust…that sacred trust!

ALBERT

All right…yes, I showed Robert the poems, but I was not my intention to harm you. I did it to convince Robert that he was wrong about you. He was wrong about Aristotle. He was wrong about everything!

THOMAS

Is that second objection or am I still replying to objection one?

ALBERT

Oh, damn this argument…can’t we just speak plainly as men…as friends?

THOMAS

Are we friends? Proposition: friendship requires respect as equals. But do you listen to anything I say? Do you have any respect for my wishes?

ALBERT

Of course I do…

THOMAS

Then how could you do this to me? You gave Robert the very knife he used to stab me in the back.
ALBERT
Reply to the proposition: Remember why I came here. Unity…right? That was my job. Everyone was counting on me. I was supposed to create unity.

THOMAS
I put my heart into those poems. My anguish…my doubts.

ALBERT
Everything was falling apart. Everything that we had accomplished was crumbling. You were crumbling. Something had to be done.

THOMAS
So you sacrificed me…you sacrificed our trust…our friendship.

ALBERT
I couldn’t just stand idly by as it all collapsed around me. I could see the problem. It seemed clear enough…Robert…misunderstood…he misunderstood Aristotle, he misunderstood you. That was the whole reason for his break from us.

THOMAS
Oh, Robert understands just fine, now. After you showed him all my weaknesses. All my doubts about reason…about God!

ALBERT
You told me he was an honorable man. That’s what everyone told me. He was a scoundrel! I never suspected he would…

THOMAS
Albert, no! No! I warned you. I told you that no one would understand them. I warned you what they would do. But you wouldn’t listen to me.

ALBERT
You’re right, Thomas I should have listened, but…so much was at stake…we needed unity…it seemed necessary at the time…

THOMAS
…a necessary compromise, Albert is that what it was? One of those compromises we must sometimes make for greater cause.

ALBERT
Well…no…

THOMAS
Oh, no, of course not. We don’t make compromises now do we, Albert? How did you put it…? Good judgement…right? The good judgement to do what is needed…that’s what you called it.
ALBERT
I was put in a very difficult position here. Everyone was counting on me.

THOMAS
So where was your good judgement, Albert? You’ve destroyed me with you good judgment.

ALBERT
No, no Thomas, don’t speak that way. We’re still strong…our cause is still strong. We’re the two greatest minds of our time. They’re all pitiful fools compared to us. We’ll keep fighting them…

THOMAS
With what? What do I have left to fight with?

ALBERT
Thomas…Thomas…you’re the most admired scholar in all the world…

THOMAS
You don’t see it do you? You old fool, you can’t even see it! You can’t see how you’ve destroyed me!

ALBERT
What…what have I done?

THOMAS
The most admired scholar in the world…. I’m an empty shell, Albert. I’m a fraud. And now, thanks to you, Robert showed the whole world what I really am.

ALBERT
A fraud?

THOMAS
Oh, I talk a good game, Albert. Any student of yours can do that much.

ALBERT
It’s not just talk…

THOMAS
No, it’s reason, isn’t it? But Robert’s right. When you push through all the tortured language and all the convoluted arguments where are you? Have you found God? No…no you haven’t found anything. I haven’t found anything.

ALBERT
No, no…Robert proved nothing…
THOMAS
Oh, yes…I fended him off well enough. Mystery…that’s what I said. Where reason ends we are left with the glorious mysteries of divine. Yes, that sounds good. It can even win the day…except not today…right, Albert? You saw to that. You showed them that even I didn’t really believe what I say.

ALBERT
It was trickery. Robert's trickery and he will not get away with it…

THOMAS
Unmask the brilliant Thomas. Show them all what he really believes. Show them all who he really is…just a whining schoolboy…a bellowing dumb ox!

ALBERT
No Thomas!

THOMAS
That’s all I am. All I ever was.

ALBERT
No, Thomas that's not true…Thomas, you’re my friend…we’re allies…(weakly) you and I…

THOMAS
They twisted my poems. They distorted my ideas. It was beautiful once but now there's nothing left of them. Nothing left of me. It's all empty and ugly. What am I to do? Answer me, Albert!

ALBERT
I don’t know…

THOMAS
With what am I to keep up this fight? What is left? I am weary of Aristotle…he is cold to me. My poems they have killed before my eyes. What is left? What tools do I have left to find God?

ALBERT
Thomas…I don’t know. I had answers before, but…you were a boy…you’re not a boy and I’m…I’m not what I once was either…

THOMAS
How do I find God now, Albert? How do I find, God?

ALBERT
I don’t know. Thomas…(long pause)…I don’t know.
(ALBERT’s words hit THOMAS hard. He has always had the answers before. Not anymore. Long pause.)

THOMAS
Finally...a question that you cannot answer...

ALBERT
Thomas, we were once the two greatest minds in the world. This was our moment. What has happen to us? What have I done?

THOMAS
Our moment...yes, I was going to set the Church...set the world...on the proper path...the culmination of all man's wisdom...what wisdom?

ALBERT
You’re right, you know. The world of boys is simpler....The snares and compromises of the world of men...How far do we go before we compromise away our souls? I once thought I had the good judgement to know. I...(Pause, slow sigh)...I came here because I thought I could help. I have only made things worse. I’m getting old...my judgement...Thomas, I want to be of help but I fear...maybe you would be better off without me. Maybe the battle is easier fought...alone, without an old fool to clean up after. Thomas, I’m sorry...

THOMAS
Yes, Albert I’ll go on. Weary and stumbling...but I’ll go on.

ALBERT
(Mumbling, not really listening to THOMAS anymore.)
I thought I could help. I came here...Albert the Great (mocking laughter) Albert the Great. No, just...Albert the Old. Thomas, forgive an old man...please.

THOMAS
Albert, we’re both very tired. I think we both just need some rest.

ALBERT
Once we were so confident...you and I. God was with us...the two greatest minds of all Christendom. God called us forward...called our minds forward...toward himself...all motion is toward God. (Last desperate attempt to be THOMAS’s mentor). Thomas...don’t lose your confidence. God’s still calling you. I’m old...I should retire and step aside. I don’t hear God anymore. I was fooling myself. I’m not up to this anymore. There’s a time when we are boys, a time when we are men, and a time when we are old men. This world of men...it’s not for me anymore. I should be smart enough to at least see that much. You go on. You’ll be fine.

THOMAS
I'll be fine...
ALBERT
No, no…it’s better that way, I think. I’m more a burden now than anything else. But, yes…yes, of course, rest is a good idea. This has taken a toll on both of us. (He turns to depart. Then turns back.) Thomas, can you forgive an old man for making such a mess of things?

THOMAS
Forgive you? Don't ask that…please, Albert.

ALBERT
Thomas…? Can't you forgive an old man…your old friend…?

THOMAS
To forgive one must be sincere - no? (Pause) …not yet…

ALBERT
(Pleading)
Thomas?...(Turns to leave, then stops short) Thomas…be careful. Your enemies…if they sense weakness and they think their time is short…they could become desperate…dangerous. Be careful, my friend. Well, then…good bye and God bless.

(ALBERT departs)

THOMAS
(Softly, to himself)
And you as well, my friend.

(There is a long pause as THOMAS sits in sullen silence. In the distance a monk begins chanting the evening office.

CHANTING VOICE
Adest dies laetitiae, quo Thomas Doctor inclitus fit civis caeli curiae, bina corona praeditus. Ora pro nobis beate Thoma. Ut digni efficiamur promissionibus Christi.

(REGINALD enters. He is inappropriately boisterous.)

REGINALD
Brother Thomas, it was smashing. All the students agree that you were brilliant. An inspiring success. They’re out in the streets right now celebrating on your behalf. Any chance you might come out and join us?

THOMAS
They thought I was brilliant, did they? (Pause) No, no thank you Reginald. I don’t think I’ll be joining you. I’m rather worn from the whole affair.

REGINALD
Oh, yes, of course. It was a brutal encounter. I can see you’re tired. I’ll leave you alone to recover.

(REGINALD turns to leave)
Reginald…?

Yes…?

One more lesson to teach you…

What’s that…?

Be careful not to admire your mentors too much. They’re just men. We can’t always follow them too closely. Don’t follow me too closely. (Then THOMAS continues as if he had not said anything remarkable). I was thinking of going to the chapel for a little prayer.

REGINALD
(Still a bit shocked)
Of course, Brother Thomas, …yes. But wait, before you go, let me go out and cast some straw about on the walkway to the chapel. I was noticing earlier that there was still some ice on it and I wouldn’t want you to fall.

THOMAS
Thank you, Reginald.

(REGINALD departs. Alone again, THOMAS slowly walks over to the birdcage. For a few moments he serenely watches the bird inside the cage. He gently pokes and prods at it, getting it to ruffle it feathers and flutter about. Then he whispers) Aves volunt sed homines cogitant.

(THOMAS departs. The mournful chanting of the evening office can still be heard in the background.

CHANTING VOICE
(The stage goes dark.)

END ACT 2 SCENE 4
ACT 3

SCENE 5

We return to 1277 and REGINALD writing at the desk. Behind him we once again see the birdcage. It is, however, open and empty.

REGINALD

(Slowly, in pace with his writing.)
And so we are left with only questions. Why, in the midst of his prime, does God still the voice of his most gifted advocate? Why does a saint suffer condemnation? Is reason a pathway to God or is the heart smothered along the way? (REGINALD pauses and looks at the empty birdcage.) The king never got his bird back. Thomas gave it to me and I gave it back to God.

(Lights up on a black robed monk, presumably REGINALD, holding an open bird cage aloft, staring at the sky, presumably at the bird flying away. From a distance another monk is seen calling out to REGINALD)

OTHER MONK

Brother Reginald. Brother Reginald. It is a message from the Abbey at Fossa Nuova. It’s Friar Thomas…he’s dead.

(Light remains on the scene. From the desk we hear REGINALD’s voice as he continues writing.)

REGINALD

I watched the bird as it flew away. Gliding with the wind in and out of the clouds, perfectly at home in the sky, fulfilling the purpose God intended for birds. I saw Thomas’s soul fly away with it. (Pause) It was beautiful.

(A long pause. Then a sudden change. Lights up on ROBERT continuing to read his writ of condemnation.)

ROBERT

Proposition 219: On the use of reason and its relationship to faith and revelation in regard to the discernment of truth. It is hereby held that grave error has been committed when either through intent or accident it is taught that reason alone can suffice to understand the nature of God or when in conflict with doctrines of faith, the conclusions of reason can be taken as authoritative…

(Lights up on REGINALD again at the desk.)

REGINALD

You got your way didn’t you, Robert. Well, at least for now. (Pause) The final cause...nothing can be completely understood unless one knows its purpose. (Pause, dipping his pen) A fraud – these condemnations. Taking what is beautiful and calling it
obscene. (REGINALD rises from the desk and walks over to ROBERT who has finished reading his writ. They stare at each other momentarily. Then ROBERT hands REGINALD the document. REGINALD returns to the desk and looks momentarily at the document. Then continues writing.) The final cause. I know that birds must fly and that man must think. And I know that debts must be repaid. I know an old man who owes his student a debt.

(Lights up on ALBERT sitting in a regal-looking chair, nodding off. REGINALD walks over to ALBERT, rouses him and hands him the document. ALBERT studies the document momentarily.)

ALBERT

And so it is over.

REGINALD

With Thomas gone they didn’t wait long, did they?

ALBERT


REGINALD

A saint in Hell?

ALBERT

Oh, yes…such is the world’s perversion. Perversion wins over purity sometimes, my boy.

REGINALD

And you will let them kill him? Let them destroy him? Call him dumb ox for all history?

ALBERT

Oh, you know nothing, Reginald. Do you really think any of them -- Robert, or Peckham, or his Holiness Bishop Tempier – had the wits to destroy Thomas?

REGINALD

He's dead for sure.

ALBERT

Miserable midgets compared to Thomas. Bugs at his feet. He was a giant…my giant. None of them could kill him.

REGINALD

Then who?

ALBERT

Only another giant. Why should they kill him when they could have me do it for them? I killed him. Killed reason, killed the church. I did that…Albert the Great.
REGINALD
And will you just let it all die? Let him die…without a fight.

ALBERT
I once had the mettle to fight…but I'm old and sick…

REGINALD
Another compromise Albert? A careful judgment…another clever move in deference to the demands of this world of men. Have we compromised our souls yet, Albert?

ALBERT
Don’t lecture me!

REGINALD
The Dominicans are gathering in Rome to fight these condemnations. They have the will, they have reason, they have truth…but they have no leader…Thomas is dead…

ALBERT
Thomas is dead…and I'm still live. A pathetic shell of a man, but still breathing. What did Thomas teach you about the final cause?

REGINALD
You can never fully understand something unless you understand its purpose.

ALBERT
Why does God let an old, broken fool outlive his brilliant student?

REGINALD
I don’t know.

ALBERT
You were once a promising student, Reginald. What happened? I'll tell you why. I'll tell you the purpose of things. God keeps me here to torture me. Punish me for my betrayal. Why else?

REGINALD
I once looked at you and I saw a great man.

ALBERT
I was once a great man, Reginald.

REGINALD
Is there anything left? Proposition: God keeps Albert alive for one last purpose -- to redeem his condemned servant. One last chance to repay an old debt. One last chance to be Albert the Great. (In his face) Be Albert the Great!
ALBERT

What do you know of growing old?

REGINALD

Damn you! I will tell them you're not well.

ALBERT

I’m not well. I’m old and I’m sick.

REGINALD

Sick, yes. But it’s not a sickness of age. It is a sickness of your rotting soul. A sickness you can cure if only you had the nerve.

ALBERT

You presume to judge me?

REGINALD

No. God will do that, Albert. And how the world judges Thomas is how God will judge you.

ALBERT

My dear, Reginald. How Thomas has you taught well. Far better than I ever taught him.

REGINALD

But who will ever know?

ALBERT

Oh, they will know. They must know. Let me be damned if God wills it. But they will know. I’m old and I’m sick and I’ve made a ruin of everything that’s beautiful in this world! But I’ve still a few painful breathes left in this wretched shell of a body!

REGINALD

We are to Rome then Albert?

ALBERT

(The old giant, roused)

I was once a great man. Reginald!...My carriage. We are to Rome!

(ALBERT THE GREAT marches off. REGINALD rushes back to the desk. He places the pen upright in a holder. He picks up the knife for a moment, smiles, and rams it firmly into the table. He hurries off stage, to catch up with ALBERT.)

END OF PLAY