

# He paved road to understanding Aquinas

By C.S. Morrissey  
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Ralph McInerny (1929-2010) was a great teacher who, in his writings, showed me the way to understand St. Thomas Aquinas. There is so much for which I am grateful to him.

I could speak about all the many technical details I learned from Ralph, the many clarifications for rightly understanding St. Thomas's work, work that has been such a blessing for the Church, but there is one thing above all for which I am thankful, something that I learned from Ralph.

Ralph wrote in *Art and Prudence* that some "may think that the days of the influence of Thomas Aquinas are behind us. They are wrong."

After all, Pope Pius XII affirmed in *Humani Generis*, "As

we well know from the experience of centuries, the method of Aquinas is singularly pre-eminent both for teaching students and for bringing truth to light; his doctrine is in harmony with divine revelation, and is most effective both for safeguarding the foundation of the faith and for reaping, safely and usefully, the fruits of sound progress."

In my own teaching I strive to benefit my students according to the dictum of Pope John XXII, who said in 1318, "St. Thomas illuminated the Church more than all other teachers. It profits a man more to spend one year with St. Thomas's books than to spend the whole time of life with the teaching of others."

From Ralph I learned to understand how what the Popes have said is true. Ralph was passing

on what he had learned from that great Thomist of the 20th century, Jacques Maritain (1882-1973). In *Art and Prudence* Ralph had also stipulated, "if Thomas is to play a central role in Catholic intellectual and cultural life, this will only be in the way laid down by Jacques Maritain as he recounts the story of the Thomistic Study Circles."

Here is that one thing above all for which I am grateful. In the Statutes of the Thomistic Study Circles Maritain wrote, "Every member must be bound by a private vow to devote himself to a life of prayer. In that way this group of diocesan priests and lay people will have at the base of their activity a profound gift of self to God." Maritain asked that "members include in their intentions that of intellectual reparation."

He observed in his Statutes, "God is in our time especially offended by them [intellectuals.] Therefore it is necessary that intellectuals devote themselves in a special way to giving God the homage refused Him by modern philosophers and at the same time intercede for those who are the willing or unwilling victims of error."

With so many others, I thank Ralph for interceding for me. In his memory, may we offer God



**RALPH McINERNY**  
Those who say Aquinas's influence is past "are wrong."

the homage that Jacques Maritain likewise lived out by cultivating Thomism, and may we thereby fan the flames of holy devotion in the hearts of our students.

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