

## **Bible Study Summary: St. Thomas Aquinas' First Way (The Argument from Motion)**

### **With Background on the *Summa Theologiae***

#### **Introduction**

One of the greatest theologians in the history of the Church is St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). A Dominican friar, priest, philosopher, and Doctor of the Church, Aquinas sought to demonstrate that faith and reason are not enemies but partners in the search for truth.

His most famous work is the *Summa Theologiae* ("Summary of Theology"), written between 1265 and 1274. It was intended as a systematic guide for students of theology, presenting Christian doctrine in a clear and organized way.

The *Summa* follows a distinctive format:

1. A question is posed.
2. Objections are presented.
3. Aquinas gives an authoritative response.
4. He answers each objection.

This method teaches believers not merely what to think, but how to think.

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#### **Where the First Way Appears**

In Part I, Question 2, Article 3, Aquinas asks:

##### **"Whether God exists?"**

He then offers what have become known as the **Five Ways**, five philosophical arguments demonstrating the existence of God through reason.

The First Way is called:

#### **The Argument from Motion**

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#### **Understanding Motion**

When Aquinas uses the word "motion," he means more than physical movement from one place to another.

Motion means:

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## **The change from potentiality to actuality.**

For example:

- An acorn has the potential to become an oak tree.
- Water has the potential to become ice.
- A child has the potential to become an adult.

Motion is the process by which something that could be becomes something that is.

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## **Aquinas' Argument**

The argument unfolds in several steps.

### **Step 1: Things Are Moving**

Aquinas begins with an observation:

Things in the world change.

This is obvious to everyone.

Plants grow.

People age.

Water freezes.

Stars move.

Nothing controversial here.

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### **Step 2: Whatever Is Moved Is Moved by Another**

A thing cannot give itself a characteristic it does not already possess.

For example:

- Wood can potentially become hot.
- Fire is already hot.
- Fire causes the wood to become actually hot.

The wood cannot make itself hot if it is not already hot.

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Something actual must cause the potential to become actual.

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### **Step 3: There Cannot Be an Infinite Regress**

If every motion requires a mover, we must ask:

"What moved the mover?"

And then:

"What moved that mover?"

Aquinas argues that if there were no first source of motion, there could be no motion now.

His example is similar to a series of train cars.

If every car is being pulled by another car, but there is no engine, the train never moves.

There must be an originating source.

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### **Step 4: Therefore There Must Be a First Unmoved Mover**

Aquinas concludes:

There must exist a being that causes motion without itself being moved by another.

This is what he calls the **Unmoved Mover**.

And this being, he says,

"Everyone understands to be God."

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### **Biblical Foundations**

Although Aquinas develops a philosophical argument, Scripture supports the same truth.

#### **Exodus 3:14**

"I AM WHO AM."

God reveals Himself as pure existence, dependent on no one.

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#### **Acts 17:28**

"In him we live and move and have our being."

Everything that exists depends upon God.

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### **Colossians 1:16-17**

"All things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

Christ sustains all creation.

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### **Hebrews 1:3**

"He sustains all things by his powerful word."

Creation continues because God continuously upholds it.

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### **Common Misunderstanding**

Many people think Aquinas is asking:

"Who started the universe?"

That is not exactly his argument.

The First Way is not primarily about what happened long ago.

It is about what is happening right now.

Aquinas is asking:

### **Why is anything changing at this moment?**

His answer:

Because all finite things depend upon an ultimate source of actuality that is itself uncaused and independent.

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### **Spiritual Reflection**

The First Way is not merely an intellectual exercise.

It teaches us something profound about God.

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Everything around us is changing:

- Our health changes.
- Relationships change.
- Governments change.
- Cultures change.

But God does not change.

As Scripture says:

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8)

Because God is the Unmoved Mover, He is utterly reliable.

Because He is not dependent on anything else, we can depend completely on Him.

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### **Discussion Questions**

1. What examples of "motion" or change do you see in everyday life?
  2. Why does Aquinas believe that something actual must cause change?
  3. How is the First Way different from simply saying, "Everything has a cause"?
  4. What does God's title "I AM" reveal about His nature?
  5. How does believing in God as the Unmoved Mover strengthen our trust during times of change?
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### **Key Takeaway**

St. Thomas Aquinas' First Way begins with a simple observation: things change. From that observation, he reasons that all change requires a cause, and that the chain of causes cannot continue indefinitely. Therefore, there must exist a First Unmoved Mover—One who causes all things to exist and act while depending on nothing else.

For Aquinas, this First Unmoved Mover is not merely a force or principle, but the living God revealed in Scripture: the One in whom all things live, move, and have their being.

create a bible study guide on other christian religions, when they were formed, how they were formed and the major differences from catholicism

## **Bible Study Guide**

### **Understanding Other Christian Denominations**

#### **History, Origins, and Major Differences from Catholicism**

##### **Purpose of This Study**

This study is not intended to criticize or attack other Christians. The Catholic Church recognizes that all baptized Christians share a real, though imperfect, communion with the Church through Baptism. This guide seeks to understand how various Christian communities arose throughout history and how their beliefs differ from Catholic teaching.

As Catholics, we are called to speak the truth with charity (Ephesians 4:15), recognizing the faith and sincerity of many Christians while also understanding the fullness of Catholic teaching.

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#### **I. The Early Church (33 A.D. – 1054 A.D.)**

##### **The One Christian Church**

Jesus founded one Church upon the Apostles, especially upon St. Peter.

##### **Matthew 16:18-19**

"You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church."

For the first thousand years, Christians throughout the world remained united in one Church, though cultural differences existed between East and West.

Characteristics of the early Church included:

- Apostolic succession
  - Seven sacraments
  - Eucharistic worship
  - Devotion to Mary and the saints
  - Authority of bishops
  - Recognition of the Bishop of Rome (Pope)
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#### **II. The Eastern Orthodox Church**

### **Date Formed**

1054 A.D.

### **How It Formed**

The event known as the **Great Schism** divided Christianity between East and West.

Contributing factors included:

- Cultural differences (Greek East vs. Latin West)
- Political tensions
- Disputes regarding papal authority
- The "Filioque" controversy in the Nicene Creed

The churches of the East separated from communion with Rome.

### **Similarities to Catholicism**

- Apostolic succession
- Seven sacraments
- Valid Eucharist
- Devotion to Mary
- Saints and icons
- Ancient liturgy

### **Major Difference**

The principal difference concerns the authority of the Pope.

Catholics believe:

- The Pope possesses universal authority over the Church.

Orthodox Christians believe:

- The Patriarch of Rome held a primacy of honor but not universal jurisdiction.

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## **III. Protestant Reformation**

### **Date Formed**

1517 A.D.

### **How It Formed**

The Protestant Reformation began when Martin Luther challenged abuses in the Church and later disputed several Catholic doctrines.

His movement eventually led to separation from the Catholic Church and the formation of Protestant communities.

Core Protestant principles included:

#### **Sola Scriptura**

Scripture alone is the ultimate authority.

#### **Sola Fide**

Justification by faith alone.

#### **Major Catholic Response**

The Catholic Church teaches:

- Scripture and Sacred Tradition together form the Deposit of Faith.
- Salvation comes through God's grace received by faith working through love.

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## **IV. Lutheran Churches**

### **Founder**

Martin Luther

### **Date**

1517 A.D.

### **Main Beliefs**

- Justification by faith alone
- Scripture alone
- Usually two sacraments (Baptism and Eucharist)
- Reject papal authority

### **Differences from Catholicism**

Catholics teach:

- Seven sacraments
  - Faith and works cooperate through grace
  - Papal authority
  - Sacred Tradition alongside Scripture
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## **V. Reformed / Presbyterian Churches**

### **Founder**

John Calvin

### **Date**

1530s–1540s

### **Main Beliefs**

- Strong emphasis on God's sovereignty
- Predestination
- Scripture alone
- Simpler worship

### **Differences from Catholicism**

Catholics reject:

- Double predestination
- Scripture alone

Catholics affirm:

- Human cooperation with grace
  - Sacramental worship
  - Apostolic succession
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## **VI. Anglican / Episcopal Churches**

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**Founder**

Henry VIII

**Date**

1534 A.D.

**How It Formed**

After a dispute with Pope Clement VII concerning the annulment of his marriage, Henry VIII declared himself head of the Church in England.

**Similarities**

Some Anglican communities maintain:

- Liturgical worship
- Bishops
- Traditional prayers

**Differences**

Most Anglican bodies:

- Reject papal authority
- Allow practices not permitted by Catholic teaching, varying by province

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**VII. Baptist Churches****Origins**

Early 1600s

Often associated with John Smyth and later English Separatists.

**Main Beliefs**

- Believer's baptism only
- Congregational governance
- Scripture alone
- Symbolic understanding of Communion

## **Differences from Catholicism**

Catholics teach:

- Infant baptism
  - Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist
  - Sacramental grace
  - Apostolic authority
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## **VIII. Methodist Churches**

### **Founder**

John Wesley

### **Date**

1700s

### **Main Emphases**

- Personal holiness
- Evangelization
- Christian service
- Methodical spiritual disciplines

### **Differences**

Methodists generally:

- Do not recognize papal authority
  - Have different understandings of sacraments and apostolic succession
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## **IX. Pentecostal Churches**

### **Date**

1906 (Azusa Street Revival)

### **Key Figure**

William J. Seymour

### **Main Beliefs**

- Baptism in the Holy Spirit
- Speaking in tongues
- Healing ministries
- Strong emphasis on personal conversion

### **Differences from Catholicism**

Catholics affirm:

- Gifts of the Holy Spirit
- Healing prayer

However, Catholics differ concerning:

- Church authority
- Sacraments
- Apostolic succession
- Eucharistic theology

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## **X. Non-Denominational Churches**

### **Date**

Mostly 20th Century

### **Characteristics**

- Independent governance
- Bible-centered preaching
- Contemporary worship
- No formal denominational structure

### **Differences**

Most reject:

- Apostolic succession
  - Papal authority
  - Sacramental theology
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## **Key Catholic Distinctives**

### **1. Apostolic Succession**

Catholics believe bishops are successors of the Apostles through an unbroken line of ordination.

#### **Acts 1:20-26**

Matthias succeeds Judas.

#### **2 Timothy 2:2**

Paul instructs Timothy to pass on authority.

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### **2. The Papacy**

Catholics believe Christ established Peter as the visible head of the Church.

#### **Matthew 16:18-19**

#### **John 21:15-17**

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### **3. The Seven Sacraments**

1. Baptism
  2. Confirmation
  3. Eucharist
  4. Reconciliation
  5. Anointing of the Sick
  6. Holy Orders
  7. Matrimony
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Most Protestant communities recognize only Baptism and Communion, while some view them as symbolic ordinances.

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#### **4. The Eucharist**

Catholics believe:

The bread and wine truly become the Body and Blood of Christ.

**John 6:51-58**

**1 Corinthians 11:27-29**

This remains one of the most significant differences between Catholicism and most Protestant communities.

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#### **5. Scripture and Tradition**

Catholics believe Divine Revelation comes through:

- Sacred Scripture
- Sacred Tradition

Both are authentically interpreted by the Church's teaching authority (Magisterium).

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#### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why is understanding Church history important for Christians?
  2. What events led to the Great Schism and the Protestant Reformation?
  3. Why does the Catholic Church place such importance on apostolic succession?
  4. How does the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist differ from many Protestant views?
  5. How can Catholics engage in respectful dialogue with Christians of other denominations?
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#### **Conclusion**

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While Christianity today includes many denominations, Catholics believe that Christ founded one Church and that the fullness of the means of salvation subsists in the Catholic Church. At the same time, the Church recognizes many elements of truth and sanctification in other Christian communities and encourages prayer and dialogue for the unity that Jesus desired:

"That they may all be one." (John 17:21)

A Catholic study of other Christian traditions should lead not to pride, but to gratitude for the gift of the faith and a renewed commitment to Christian unity in truth and charity.