

Immigration Lessons for President Trump from Thomas Aquinas

I am grateful to *The Imaginative Conservative* for publishing Fr. Dwight Longenecker's reasoned [defence](#) of President Trump's executive order placing a ninety day moratorium on immigration from countries deemed to pose a terrorist threat to the United States. I am grateful also for a recent essay by John Horvat II in which Mr. [Horvat discusses what Thomas Aquinas says](#) on the thorny topic of immigration. Both of these essays have served as catalysts for my own thoughts on the topic of immigration in general and President Trump's executive order in particular.

Little needs to be added to Fr. Longenecker's upbraiding of the media for their rabidly irrational response to the President's executive order and for the callous calumny to which journalists have succumbed in discussing it. One can only hope that reasonable people will respond to the media's irrational rants by switching the channels on their TV, by switching the newspapers that they read, or, best of all, by turning to websites such as *The Imaginative Conservative* for a balanced perspective.

Leaving Fr. Longenecker's essay to speak for itself, let's turn to the quotations from Thomas Aquinas that Mr. Horvat discusses in his essay.

"Man's relations with foreigners are twofold: peaceful, and hostile," St. Thomas states, "and in directing both kinds of relation the Law contained suitable precepts." With insightful and incisive realism, Thomas Aquinas does not begin with the "nice" idea that we should all be "nice" to each other. He knows that we are called to love our neighbor and to love our

enemy. This is a given. The point is that some foreigners are peaceful towards us and some are hostile. It is prudent to know which is which and to respond accordingly. It might be prudent to open our doors to immigrants who are "peaceful," if their entry into the country serves the common good; it is, however, imprudent to open our doors to those who are "hostile," especially those who might plan terrorist acts after they arrive. Initiating a moratorium on immigration from countries in which a significant portion of the population are hostile to the United States, until such time that an effective vetting procedure is put in place, enabling the "hostile" to be sifted out from the "peaceful," makes absolute sense, not merely pragmatically but morally. Doing nothing would make the President culpable should one of these "hostile" immigrants carry out a terrorist attack within the United States. The President's failure to act would be a sin of omission.

St. Thomas also distinguishes between the two types of foreigner within a host society: the newcomer (*advenam*) and the traveler (*peregrino*), the former being what we would now call an immigrant and the latter what we would now call a tourist. In both cases, says St. Thomas, citing Scripture, the foreigner must be treated with the dignity due to him as a human person. In other words, we must love him as our neighbor. There can be no question of a Christian hating the immigrant or treating him unjustly.

Thomas then discusses the question of citizenship, agreeing with Aristotle, whom he cites, that citizenship should not be conferred automatically upon the immigrant but should only be granted after a period of time judged prudent, presumably after a period of assimilation. "The reason for this," he continues, "was that if foreigners were allowed to meddle with the affairs of a nation as soon as they settled down in its midst, many dangers might occur, since the foreigners not yet having the common good firmly at heart might attempt something

hurtful to the people.” Here, St. Thomas is showing due deference to the host culture, which has a right to protect its way of life from immigrants seeking to impose a radically different worldview. It is implicit that St. Thomas is insisting that immigrants to a host culture are duty-bound to assimilate to the culture and not seek to impose the culture from whence they came. In seeking to be accepted by a host culture as newcomers they are expected to respect that culture which, in practical terms, necessitates assimilation and integration. There can be no question, for instance, if we follow St. Thomas’ line of reasoning, that Muslim immigrants should not have the right to impose Sharia law on their communities, if it contradicts or contravenes the law of the host nation. The imposition of such law results in the balkanization of the culture into ghettoized factions, which are hostile to each other, as can be seen all too clearly in many parts of the world.

As usual, it makes sense to consult the great sages if one wants to know how to judge the actions of one’s leaders. There are few sages greater than St. Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor, whose place as a theologian and a philosopher are preeminent in Christendom. It certainly makes more sense to turn to Thomas Aquinas than to turn to the *New York Times* or CNN!

St. Thomas, in his wisdom, shows us that President Trump’s executive order is just and that it conforms to right reason. The President can learn from the Saint that he can act in good conscience in seeking to ensure that the nation he has been elected to govern is safe from “hostile” immigrants who might become terrorists in our midst. Sadly, there are many Christian leaders, following false guides and forgetting the wisdom of the saints and sages, who could learn from St. Thomas Aquinas that their own response to the President’s executive order is not in conformity with sound Christian teaching.

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