**A Quiet Light: Historical and Literary Introduction**

**The Author: Louis de Wohl (1903-1961)**

* German, born to Catholic parents of Jewish descent.
* Trained as a banker, he however wrote popular stories in German until the rise of Nazism when he left the country and relocated to England.
* There, he began publishing books on astrology and was hired by MI5 to use astrology to predict Hitler’s movements and lead a counter Hitler propaganda effort in America, predicting Hitler’s defeat through astrology
* MI5 was later embarrassed by him and sought to distance themselves from de Wohl.
* Shortly after the war, de Wohl experienced a full conversion into the Catholic church and began to write religious books, detailing the lives of the saints.
* Spent the remainder of his life dedicated to a mission of working for the glory of God by bringing the lives of the saints to everyday people.

*“Thus in a way my career started at the end of the war. What it was that I wanted to write about became clear to me very soon. I had seen the terrifying effect of a false ideal. Millions of Germans fell for the dynamic charlatanism of Hitler, they tried to ape him, to become little Hitlers themselves. And there is no country where people do not look up to some one and try to imitate him or her. Most people want to be led, if only by some outstanding example in this field or that. Therefore much depended upon these examples. Now what would be the examples that God would wish us to follow? Christ, of course. But then, Christ was not only a Man, He was also God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity; and how could Mr. Smith hope to imitate Him?*

*Perhaps that was the main reason why the Church taught us to venerate the saints. They were all human, and many of them had to combat all kinds of faults to reach sanctity in the end. I began to read books about the saints. Soon I realized that most of them were written by devout people-mostly priests and nuns-for devout people. I could not imagine that anyone living at the outer fringe of the faith, to say nothing of a non-religious person, would read them. Yet it was exactly that type of person who needed a saint's example and guidance more than anyone else.”*

**The Subject: St. Thomas Aquinas (b. 1225-1275)**

* Born in the castle of Rocca Secca, near Aquino, Italy
* Schooled from the age of five at a nearby abbey, Monte Cassino
* Born to a family of the Italian nobility and cousins to the emperor, Frederick II
  + Father: Landulph, count of Aquino
  + Mother: Theodora countess of Aquino
* Thomas was of a large and bulky build
* Nicknamed “dumb ox” by fellow students because of his silence in the classroom
* Ran off to join the Dominican order of monks at age nineteen
* Dominicans ~ also called Order of Preachers, were known for their intellectual tradition, combating the spread of heresy at the time
* Studied at the University of Paris, under Albert the Great
* Leader of new intellectual movement called Scholasticism which revived classical (Greek and Roman literature and philosophy) in the universities and attempted to wed philosophy and reason to theology, the Queen of the Sciences.
* Later in life, as a teacher at the University of Paris, his lectures were so popular that it was impossible to find a hall large enough to accommodate all the people.

* Responsible for reviving Aristotle and integrating his teachings with Christianity.
* Wrote *Summa Theologica*~ 3000 page treatise covering a broad scope of theological subjects. In it, he insisted that human beings all had the capacity for rational thought leading to truth, but that divine revelation corrected and guided our natural understanding, freeing it from the errors inherent in our sin nature

**Lasting Influences of Thomas Aquinas on Western Culture**

* Led to a resurgence of theology in the Middle Ages and beyond. He is still considered to be one of the foremost theologians, crucial for the development of Christian thought.
* Even outside the Church, particularly his concepts of ethics, natural law, and just war theory, Aquinas’ ideas continue to shape intellectual culture and matters of policy today.
* Many argue that Aquinas “created the conditions by which modern science became possible” (Beattie). His revival of Aristotle directly led to the Enlightenment.

**Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor**

* Thomas was his 2nd cousin
* Born in Sicily
* Patron of the arts and sciences and philosopher in his own right
* Founder of the University of Naples
* Fluent in French, German, Italian, Greek, Latin and Arabic
* Nickname: *Stupor Mundi* or “The Marvel of the World”
* Viewed the faith as a means to an end: to control his Empire
* His worldview was essentially a “libertine materialist”—welcomed views from all religions
* Excommunicated twice under Pope Gregory—first for postponing his declared intention to go on a Crusade and secondly, for going on a crusade after he had been excommunicated
* Crowned himself King of Jerusalem after negotiating the city from Muslims
* The whole city was excommunicated for harboring the excommunicated King
* Frederick returned to Italy after his territories were threatened by papal forces.
* Innocent IV formally deposed Frederick and declared a crusade against him.
* Frederick dies in 1250, requesting absolution on his deathbed

**Thomas Aquinas’ Context: High Middle Ages**

* Feudal way of life with the castle at the center
* Rising middle class~ growing optimism
* Power struggle between Pope and Holy Roman Emperor
* Period of the Crusades
* Rise of the mendicant orders like Franciscans and Dominicans
* Rise of universities, centered around monasteries~ education only for privileged
* Revival of Greek and Roman thought
* Spread of troubadours led to the rise of literature and song in vernacular languages
* Rise of Gothic style cathedrals
* Rise and development of codes of chivalry