

VISIO



DIVINA

*The Wisdom of Contemplative Vision*

**INDEBTED**

*Thomas Aquinas*

This poem of deep mystery and intimate knowing between Thomas Aquinas and God is said to have come from his mystical experiences late in life. It describes a voice speaking mysteriously to his human heart—and perhaps to all human hearts. It is answering an earlier question that asked by the inquiring mind of Thomas himself, and a question that perhaps we have also asked. It seems to be a small portion of a longer dialogue between Thomas and the divine heart concerning questions about existence itself.

Toward the end of his life, Thomas Aquinas had a series of mystical visions in which he saw realities that exceeded his earlier academic discoveries. Thomas had spent his whole life asking and answering questions using the power of reason and was considered a genius of that type of inquiry. During these explorations over a lifetime he had reached many brilliant conclusions philosophically and theologically, many of which remain important to this day. Perhaps, however, in his deliberations he had missed something vital about the nature of God and the destiny of the human soul. This later poetic exchanges seems to have opened a new window going straight to the heart of a hidden and unknown mystery whose depths he had not yet explored.

As short as this poem is, it discloses a startling viewpoint and divine admission far beyond what we might imagine. The bottom line is this: God is apologizing to humanity for the experience of human suffering as though it is an ordeal set for humanity by the divine Will.

In this exchange, astonishingly God is asking us for our forgiveness instead of the reverse. For whatever reason, God knows that we have become separated, and it appears that God is also acknowledging responsibility for that separation, exactly opposite to our usual doctrines. In addition, God acknowledges that the separation between us has caused humanity great pain and suffering. This recognition and subsequent apology in some startling way puts God in debt to us! It is just here, perhaps, where the mystery opens into even deeper levels of meaning.

It is difficult for us to measure the profundity of this mystery. In the concluding question God is asking if we can both grasp the meaning of these words and understand the debt that is owed humanity. The question is, of course, what is that debt? Why might God be indebted to us? Could we possibly imagine this? If we could grasp this idea and accept these words of apology, how would that change our point of view and our theology?

*Thomas Aquinas (Around 1225 to 1274) was an a Dominican friar, priest, and theologian of the Catholic Church. His **Summa Theologiae** became a masterpiece of Medieval thought and theology in the scholastic tradition. His main argument was that reason is found in God and thus he argued his theology in a reasoned way. Toward the end of his life he had two great mystical experiences after which he considered everything he had previously written to be ‘straw.’*

## Reflections on Image and Text:

1. *Mystics throughout the ages have quietly and sometimes secretly entertained mysteries such as the ones expressed in this poem. What is your immediate response to these words and God's reported admission? How do you respond to the questions already raised in the reflection?*
2. *This point of view is certainly a reversal of the way we have typically understood the broken relationship between humanity and God. Do you find this confusing? How would you explain this relationship?*
3. *How would you explain the separation between humans and God?*
4. *Would you be willing to accept an apology from God? Does that sound far-fetched to you? Would it change anything inside of you?*
5. *What might God's debt to humanity be? How might God repay the debt?*
6. *What do you notice when you look at the images? Journal your reflections and discoveries.*
7. *One of the images is personal. It is of Sinetayehu, a friend in Ethiopia who was orphaned as a very young child and who suffered greatly. He managed to survive, and has felt many of the sentiments in this poem. He has told me not only of his deep suffering but also the surprising nearness of God he feels. When you look at this illumination, what does it suggest to you?*

## A Place for Notes and for Journaling your Answers:

*This reflection, text and its illumination have been provided by Alison Hine and Lynn Bauman as a means for contemplative prayer and spiritual vision.*

# LECTIO DIVINA

*The Contemplative Reading of a Sapiential Text*

*T*he Beloved One spoke,

“Forgive me, my dear,  
for the suffering  
our separation has caused you.

If I said,  
I am indebted to you,  
could you understand it?”

—Thomas Aquinas  
found in  
Daniel Ladinsky's  
*Love Poems From God*

*Contemplating*  
**THE ILLUMINATIONS**



