Reason Meets Faith

Trace a connection between Aquinas and Renaissance humanism

9-12.WC.31 "Explain humanism and describe how Thomas Aquinas's writings influenced humanistic thought and fostered a balance between reason and faith."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two phrases that explain humanism, circle two phrases showing how Aquinas used reason and faith, and number two statements that connect his writings to later humanistic thought.

An Earlier Voice in a New Conversation

1. Imagine a scholar in a fifteenth-century Italian city opening an ancient Roman speech. Rather than treating it as a relic, she asks how its language could help citizens speak clearly about public life. Renaissance humanism encouraged the study of Greek and Roman writing, especially history, poetry, rhetoric, and moral philosophy. Humanists believed education could develop people's abilities to judge, communicate, and act responsibly. Many remained devout Christians, so humanism did not simply replace religion. Its focus on human learning and choices, however, made the study of earthly life an important part of education.

2. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas wrote in a different setting: the medieval university. In works such as the *Summa Theologiae*, he posed questions, considered objections, and answered them with arguments. Drawing on the Greek philosopher Aristotle, Aquinas held that people could use observation and reason to discover truths about the natural world and moral life. He also held that divine revelation taught truths reason alone could not discover, such as the Trinity. For Aquinas, sound reasoning and genuine faith could not ultimately contradict each other because both came from God.

3. A Renaissance reader could find support in Aquinas's work for taking human thought seriously without abandoning Christian belief. His arguments helped establish that examining nature and asking disciplined questions need not threaten faith. This balance made room for thinkers to value human intellectual ability alongside religious commitments, a connection that could foster humanistic thought. Yet Aquinas was not a Renaissance humanist: his main project was systematic theology, while humanists often preferred classical language, history, and moral writing to the universities' formal debates. Humanism had several sources, including renewed access to ancient texts, not just Aquinas's influence.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the humanists described in the passage use classical writing to develop human abilities?

2. What could reason discover, according to Aquinas, and what did revelation teach that reason alone could not? Why did he think reason and faith could agree?

3. How could Aquinas's writings help a later thinker value human learning while remaining committed to faith?

4. Why does the passage connect Aquinas to humanistic thought without calling him a Renaissance humanist?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a Renaissance town council debating whether to fund a school that teaches classical texts and practical subjects. Write five sentences explaining what a humanist might value, how someone influenced by Aquinas might use reason and faith, where their views could meet, and why Aquinas should not be called a Renaissance humanist.

ANSWER KEY

Reason Meets Faith

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.WC.31

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two phrases that explain humanism, circle two phrases showing how Aquinas used reason and faith, and number two statements that connect his writings to later humanistic thought. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the humanists described in the passage use classical writing to develop human abilities?	**They studied Greek and Roman works to develop people's ability to judge, communicate, and act responsibly.**
2	What could reason discover, according to Aquinas, and what did revelation teach that reason alone could not? Why did he think reason and faith could agree?	**Reason could discover truths about nature and moral life. Revelation taught truths such as the Trinity. Aquinas held that sound reasoning and genuine faith could agree because both came from God.**
3	How could Aquinas's writings help a later thinker value human learning while remaining committed to faith?	**His arguments treated observation and disciplined questions as ways to seek truth without threatening faith, supporting confidence in human thought alongside religious belief.**
4	Why does the passage connect Aquinas to humanistic thought without calling him a Renaissance humanist?	**His defense of reason could foster humanistic thought, but he wrote earlier and focused on systematic theology. Renaissance humanists often emphasized classical language, history, and moral writing instead.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A humanist might support the school because classical speeches and histories could help students speak clearly and make responsible choices. A council member influenced by Aquinas could use reason to weigh the school's costs against the benefits of education. That member might also see faith as a reason to care for neighbors through teaching. Both could value the development of human abilities without treating learning as a threat to religion. Aquinas should not be called a Renaissance humanist, since he wrote earlier and focused on systematic theology rather than classical rhetoric.

Accept explanations that connect Aquinas's defense of reason with human learning while preserving a role for faith. Students should distinguish his medieval theological project from Renaissance humanism rather than describe him as its founder.