

# How to Study Being the Letter of St. Thomas Aquinas to Brother John de Modo Studendi

(a.k.a. The 16 Precepts for  
Acquiring the Treasure of Knowledge, by St. Thomas Aquinas)

*Lecture read at the Inauguration of Studies  
for the year 1944 - 1945 in the Dominican Priors  
of Hawkesyard and Blackfriars, Oxford*

Brother John, most dear to me in Christ: Since you have asked me how one should set about to acquire the treasure of knowledge, this is my advice to you concerning it: namely, that you should choose to enter, not straightway into the ocean, but by way of the little streams; for difficult things ought to be reached by way of easy ones. The following, therefore, is my advice to you concerning your way of living:

- I urge you to hesitate before speaking, and to hesitate before visiting the common room;
- Hold fast to the cleanness of your conscience;
- Do not cease from devoting time to prayer;
- Love your cell by making constant use of it, if you want to be admitted into the wine-cellar;
- Show yourself to be lovable to everybody, or at least try to do so; but be very familiar with nobody, for too much familiarity breeds contempt and introduces factors which retard study;
- Also, do not in any way get yourself involved in the doing and sayings of outsiders;
- Avoid aimless meanderings above all things;
- Do not fail to follow in the footsteps of saints and of sound men;
- Do not heed by *whom* a thing is said, but rather *what* is said you should commit to your memory;
- What you read, set about to understand, verifying what is doubtful;
- Strive to put whatever you can in the cupboard of your mind, as though you were wanting to fill a vessel to the brim;
- Seek not the things that are too high for thee.

Follow in the footsteps of that blessed Dominic, who, while he yet had life for his fellow-traveller, brought forth and produced foliage, blossom, fruit—fruit both serviceable and astonishing—in the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts. If you shall have followed these steps, you will be able to attain to whatsoever you have a mind. Fare you well!”