Thomas Aquinas best-known work is the Summa Theologica. As the title indicates, the Summa is a summing up of all that can be known about Christian theology.

This is the definitive work of Catholic theology and is still studied in all the divinity schools. I had the two-volume set included in the Great Books of the Western World. It isn’t the sort of work one goes to for a little light reading, obviously, but as an exercise in applied classical logic as well as theology, it is one of the most important ever written.

Thomas is important to both mystical and non-mystical traditions within Christianity, and for me the most interesting aspects of the work are where he attempts to deduce the various aspects and attributes of God. This was a popular exercise in the area of natural philosophy, and even
mathematicians with a religious bent, such as Newton and Leibnitz, had a go at it, Newton referring to God in his Principia (his mathematical theory of universal gravitation) as ...an infinite and elastic spirit. And of course Leibnitz is famous for the ontological argument for Gods existence.

In addition, Thomas was also concerned with everyday life and ethics and morality, with a persons natural and supernatural life, countering heretical thinking, and the nature of beauty. He influenced early Renaissance artists such as Fra Angelica, who followed Thomass three canons of beauty: immaterial purity of form, luminous clarity of color, and harmonious beauty of proportions, and Angelicas paintings are really meditations upon these three principles, in some ways not so different from the way Peruginos paintings (Leonardos teacher) were sometimes meditations on spatial geometry.

Finally, you may know the story that when Thomas was in school, he was very quiet in class and so his fellow students thought him dull. But at the conclusion of one class when the teacher gave the final exam, he was the only one with the right answer. Sort of reminds me of those stories about Einstein. :-) All of which just goes to show you that you cant judge a book by its cover--nor the Summa Theologica, too, I might add.

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