

BLACKFRIARS

CAJETAN

GIACOMO TOMMASO DEL VIO named Caietanus from his birthplace, Gaieta, died in the autumn of 1534. He had been a Cardinal for the last seventeen years, had been chosen as the Dominican Master General when he was only thirty-nine, and had been employed as Papal legate in Hungary and at the Imperial Diet. His influence upon church policy had been exercised through four pontificates; he had been the councillor of Julius II, the intimate of Leo X, had helped to achieve the election of Adrian VI and had been the minister of Clement VII in the last years of his reign. Much of his public life had been marked by the conventional felicity of that of a high curial official in Medicean Rome; a Neapolitan by birth, barely noble and quite without inherited influence he would seem to have been first marked for preferment by the favour of Duke Ludovico Sforza; he had come to the Roman court as a familiar of the Caraffa, had owed his Cardinalate to the almost personal friendship of Leo X and then slowly earning the confidence of Charles V he had gained the sometimes hesitant support of the Imperialist grouping in the sacred college.

Throughout he had possessed that recognition as a genius so valuable to a Renaissance statesman, for he had shared in precisely those qualities that the men of the Renaissance valued; a subtle sense of words, a fluent scholarship, distinction as a diplomatist due to a careful recognition of the realities of each situation, and a plastic memory, that favourite prodigy of the 16th century. But he had other talents more rare among his contemporaries, less appreciated. He was a great metaphysician, and it is as a metaphysician that he retains significance in European thought, or more precisely as a metaphysician who was by nature articulate, by tradition a Dominican, by training and perhaps by temperament a Renaissance scholar. For it was the combination of these qualities, aided by the

CAJETAN

prestige of his great offices, that best explains his influence on sixteenth century studies; an influence which helped to make possible the dominance of an integral Thomism in the Tridentine movement.

Such dominance seemed an unlikely sequel to fifteenth century speculation. It is true that by the close of that century Thomism was regaining an almost official position in the Church, but Thomism has never been in greater danger than during its official triumphs, and where it was accepted as an hypothesis nominalism remained as a mood. A study of the text books most in vogue during the two generations preceding the reform would suggest as the most common form of ecclesiastical teaching an eclectic philosophy Thomist by attribution, realist by tendency and fundamentally incoherent. The sharp antitheses of the fourteenth century had lost their meaning, it was an age of tendencies rather than of schools, and tendencies fuse as schools disintegrate. Only the revival of metaphysical study could restore reality to the worn scholastic controversies, for in a period when logical technique was perfect, nearly all such controversy had been by origin the inevitable sequel of conflicting systems of metaphysics.

That such a revival took place is to a great extent the work of Cajetan. Through a life of continued action he wrote unceasingly, commentaries on the *Summa*, on Greek philosophy, on the scriptures and over thirty treatises. In his own lifetime he would seem in turn to have been most famous as a dialectician, as a theologian and as an exegete. But the gifts which seem most characteristic of him as a commentator are those natural to a metaphysician come articulate, a sense of the real, an admirable aridity, a freedom from the phrase-making and the imagination-clouded thought of so many of his colleagues; an almost architectural interest in the bare structure of the *Summa* came to save the integrity of the Thomist system in that generation of spatialized concepts and of warm emotions. For it emphasized that that system exactly in so far as it was a system was the rigid corollary of a metaphysical principle

BLACKFRIARS

rather than a loose galaxy of conclusions linked by the authority of a single name.

This fresh emphasis on an intrinsic coherence in Thomism influenced all scholastic politics. Through it Cajetan clarified the opposition to the new Averroists in north Italy and helped to break the alliance between his own order and the Franciscan Scotists. That alliance formed at Paris through a common opposition to the *Nominales* and effective in many northern universities had been always dangerous and often fatal. The great Scotist revival in the next century owed much to Cajetan.

His influence on other systems has been often as efficacious, seldom so indirect. His elaboration of the theory of analogy gave a fresh orientation to the study of knowledge as knowledge; if terminism vanished as a tendency in the sixteenth century it was because it was no longer relevant in a dispute. And almost ironically it was his neo-platonic emphasis on the chasm between created and uncreated being which helped to shatter the fourteenth century traditions of a scholasticized mysticism and led by implication to the conflict between the mystics and the universities in Spain. His influence is still more apparent in means of expression than in ways of thought. There is a wide divergence in method between Cajetan and such contemporary Dominicans as Conrad Kollin and John à Romberch, protagonists of the older learning, scholastics with the fresh exuberance of a late scholasticism, the redundant epithet, the warm antipathy, the slow dialectic convolution. They still retain the spontaneity of medieval prose marked by a sense of phrase rather than a sense of words, that power of vignette which made Capreolus the Froissart of the schoolmen. But his styles are characterized by a Renaissance heritage, the distinction between prose as an instrument and as an art; such of his letters as survive are elaborately classical and even the Latin and the technique of his commentaries are paralleled perhaps suggested by those of Valla upon Sallust, there is the same almost self-conscious neglect of elegance, a gram-

CAJETAN

marian's analysis, the search for the significance of the word before that of the sentence. Yet inevitably his prose reflects as well as illustrates that of the *Summa*, for it has the same object, the bare and clear expression of the thought of St. Thomas even if it is differentiated by the artificiality of self-fettered effort. Its calculated austerity had little in common with such popular theological tracts of the time as *The Philosophic Pearl*, *The Cannine Nuptials* and *The Threefold Wedding*. In style Cajetan was to popularize, perhaps to found, a tradition which was long dominant and never vanquished.

On scholastic method his influence was again almost decisive. The medieval custom by which a commentary upon St. Thomas remained in plan a commentary upon the *Sentences* of Lombard had enabled the Thomist lecturer to keep his course parallel to that of his opponents but, giving scope to almost continuous digressions, it had facilitated that tendency to mistake a generalization for a universal which is the nemesis of Realism. And when once the architecture of the *Summa* had been ignored Thomism could be reduced to a convenient façade. It is characteristic that Cajetan should adopt the newer method of commenting directly on the text and publish his own studies as monographs rather than insert them as corollaries, and in this again he established a convention and left it recognized. For when he died his prestige whether personal or official had already overcome the first opposition to his novelties, and the dominance of his school at Salamanca, its establishment at Alcala had assured their perpetuance. In the centuries that have followed even scholastics who have wandered from his line of thought have attempted to write in the style that he had moulded and with the method he had chosen, and it seems fitting during this centenary to restate an influence on Catholic speculation which has been often ignored and always present.

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