

## CAJETAN—HIS CLAIM TO RENOWN

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TRANSITIONAL periods have ever served to nurture latent genius. As the intellectual and social complexion of an age becomes problematic, there has ever sprung up the tendency to, and ultimately the actual realization of, a reversion to simplicity; not, indeed, to the primitive, but to basic truth. This propensity is manifest in the appearance of a certain few individuals in any crisis who, by sheer strength of intellect, dominate their contemporaries to an astounding degree. Theirs seems to be the uncanny faculty of selecting whatever of good an age has produced and segregating it from the concomitant evil. To them have eventually gone the laurels bestowed upon genius, even though during their span of life they may not have been recognized as such. True, not every age has produced men of this calibre, else many of the social and philosophical theories rampant today would have been still-born. Their continued existence bespeaks the lack of sufficient discernment at the moment of their conception.

James de Vio flourished in a transitional period and even though it can not be said that he radically changed his era, he did, nevertheless, influence it considerably. By focusing attention upon truth while discountenancing the current half-truths, which were even more insidious than complete falsehood he rendered signal service not alone to his own generation, but posterity as well. Competent authority informs us that de Vio was born at Gaeta, February 20, 1468, although one may find opinions varying from this date to as late as 1470. All, however, concur in the belief that he was extraordinary. A scion of nobility and profoundly pious, his early years found him pensive and precocious. In his sixteenth year he received the habit of the Dominican Friars in his native city, having assumed the name 'Thomas' in religion. Later he became known merely as 'Cajetan', because of his previous affiliation with the town of Gaeta. His progress was rapid and the intellectual prowess which he displayed did not go unrecognized by his superiors. Consequently, we

see him in the rôle of professor in the Universities of Padua, Brescia, Mantua and Milan successively and successfully. In the year, 1500, he was appointed Procurator General of his Order, a position which he retained until 1507, when he became its Vicar General. A year after this latter assignment the Chapter of the Order, held at Rome, unanimously elected him Master General, and while still acting in this capacity he was elevated to the Cardinalate, July 1, 1517.

Cajetan assumed the office of Master General at a time when the Church and society at large were undergoing a severe crisis. The dignity of his position placed demands upon him which would have proved beyond the capacity of a man of lesser mentality. But with a sense of perception difficult of description the General struck deep at the root of the evil with an eye to improvement. Himself a man of exceptional learning he demanded in no uncertain terms the thorough education of his subjects in the sacred sciences. If we but recall the laxity into which the clergy of this period had fallen we must readily admit the extensive ramifications of such a broad program. Hence his words to the members of his Order in the Chapter of Genoa, 1513: "Let others rejoice in their prerogatives, but unless the study of the sacred sciences commends itself to us, our Order is doomed."<sup>1</sup> Nor was Cajetan a boon only to his Order, for his influence also extended to the Universal Church.

The religious upheaval, occasioned by Luther and fanned by the greed of the nobility, was making rapid strides. De Vio, now Cardinal Cajetan, having received that honor from Leo X, found himself face to face with the author of the so-called reformation, in the capacity of the official representative of the Church of Rome. The attention of the Holy See had been called to Luther's attacks upon the doctrine of indulgences and the affair placed before a commission which, after having scrutinized the charge condemned it, and cited its author to retract within the space of sixty days under pain of censure for heresy. Cajetan, as Papal Legate, was appointed by Leo X to receive the recalcitrant's retraction. His mode of procedure in this affair has been roundly and unduly criticised in many instances. However, no one knew better than the Cardinal-friar the precarious condition of the religious situation in Germany. Intellectually groomed to meet the issue, he realized full well the value of what we of today might term 'political psychology.' To make unstinted use of the judiciary powers which were his to command would not in the

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<sup>1</sup> Monum. Ord. Praed. Hist. t. IX.

least alter a situation already festering from unscrupulous abuse. Hence, when the Legate threw his protection around the fiery monk, in the form of a safe-conduct to Augsburg, he merely displayed that deep-seated discernment which characterized his every action. That Luther had long since committed mental suicide was no secret to Cajetan, who was already aware that no amount of reasoning, be it ever so cogent, would produce an effect upon a mind already enslaved by fixed ideas. And so, contrary to the expectations of the innovator, who had anticipated a display of mental gymnastics rather than a paternal reception, the Cardinal merely reminded the captious Luther that his intentions were not to dispute, but only to receive his retraction and effect his reconciliation with the Church. The remaining episodes of the religious cataclysm are familiar ones. Luther at this stage was resolved not to submit to ecclesiastical authority. His plans were already too matured to permit of retraction and the good will and condescension of the Legate were entirely lost because of the obstinacy and subterfuge of the militant reformer.

It is difficult to comprehend how Cajetan, beset as he was with administrative charges and in almost a continual state of distraction because of the religious and social unrest, could have found time to carry on such an extensive literary activity as was his. The fact is that even considering the multitudinous extraneous affairs with which he was harassed the Cardinal neither ceased his writing nor study. While attempting to treat with Luther at Augsburg he continued his literary habits, for several of his theological tracts bear 1518, as the year of their composition. His writings are not confined by the narrow limits of a single field. He does credit alike to Philosophy, Theology and Exegesis. The marvel is that he was not only one of the most active individuals of his period, but by far the most prolific writer and one of the most profound scholars.

Cajetan was the greatest theologian of his time. The counsellor of four popes in circumstances exceptionally grave and difficult, he did honor alike to the Church and to the Order of which he was a member. Faced with the inception of novelty, both social and religious, he met the period of transition upon the grounds of sanity. While respecting the traditions of his age he should not be classed as a confirmed 'laudator temporis acti.' He preserved doctrinal truths under all circumstances, but ideas of government, discipline, education, etc., were then, as they ever are, in a continual state of flux, and in his opinions concerning these we may trace a divergence from the traditional. Cajetan seems to have had a premonition of the catas-

trophe which was about to stir the religious and intellectual world to its depth. It did not take him unprepared for through relentless application he had fitted himself well to meet the exigencies of the time. To his contemporaries many of his opinions were considered radical; concessions, as it were, to the spirit of innovation pervading the age. As a consequence his critics were numerous. In modern times this view has been repudiated and Cajetan recognized as a theologian of great perspicacity, so far in advance of his contemporaries that they failed to realize the feasibility of many of his opinions which today are held in great esteem. Following the example of his patron, Thomas Aquinas, he wrote dispassionately. He never descended to the merely personal and in his numerous polemical works, dealing with questions extensively debated in his epoch, his mode of procedure is serene and profound. In purely scientific style he embraces a problem in its entirety and exhibits complete mastery over the subject with which he happens to be dealing at the time.

As in theology so also in philosophy Cajetan is a faithful adherent to the Thomistic System. He is universally recognized as the classic commentator upon the "*Summa Theologica*" of Aquinas, a sentiment which has been confirmed by the insertion of his commentaries, together with those of Ferrariensis, into the Leonine edition of the Angelic Doctor's work. Many of the passages of Cajetan's works, usually trumped up as proof against his Thomistic orthodoxy, are now generally regarded as merely personal opinions with little or no bearing upon Thomism as a system. When we consider the widespread confusion with which he had to contend it is not strange that some few of the opinions bruited as his were conceived. Moreover, as frequently happens, in his eagerness to refute the tenets of Averroistic rationalism, it is not surprising that he may have essayed some intricate questions from a dubious angle. At all events, deviate he did not from basic truth. Bartholomew Spina, probably his greatest antagonist, who vehemently censured the Cardinal-friar's every word, would have it that he sought to destroy the personality of the soul after death and other such inanities. Spina is not without his followers, who by some inconceivable stretch of the imagination, develop Spina's accusations and reach astounding conclusions. But, like the fabled phoenix, Cajetan has arisen from the ashes to which they would have consigned him and has taken his place among the great theologians, philosophers and exegetes of the Church. A man of transition, he presents a striking contrast to the scintillating theorists who cluttered the intellectual landscape of his period with

all manner of debris. His critics, to a great extent, have been more tolerant of their own views to the exclusion of the opinions of others—theirs has been a criticism of passion more than of unvarnished truth. Time has discovered their injustice. In many instances, however, even they have been forced to the admission of the intellectual capabilities of the object of their criticism.

After a life of unusual activity Cajetan passed the way of all flesh, August 9, 1534, four hundred years ago, and with his passing the Church and humanity mourned a staunch and saintly character. Upon the whole the intervening years have dealt kindly with his name, but it is only recently that the praise due to his genius has gained impetus in any noteworthy degree. Perhaps posterity, in the not too distant future, may pause, if only for a brief moment, before an humble tomb in the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, there to venerate the memory of a man who rose above his surroundings because he appraised the spiritual and the temporal at their proper value.

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