

STANISLAUS DILLON, O.P.



NE of the early biographers of St. Thomas, Peter Calo (c. 1320), tells us that "when Thomas had taken up his work as teacher and had begun his disputations and lectures, such a multitude of pupils flocked to his school that the lecture room could hardly contain them all. They were attracted by the word of so renowned a master and inspired by him to progress in the pursuit of wisdom. Under the light of his teaching many masters flourished, both of the Dominicans and of the diocesan clergy. The reason for this was the constructive, clear, and intelligible method of his lectures."¹ Taking into consideration the fact that Thomas taught not only at Paris, then the center of European culture, but also in his native land, in Orvieto, Perugia, Anagni, Viterbo, Naples, and in the studium of his Order at Rome, we can form some estimate of the great number of his disciples. Nor, in the light of the subsequent history of Thomistic thought, can the importance of these first disciples be emphasized too strongly. The intrinsic value of Thomas' teaching could not remain disputed for long. An erroneous interpretation of that teaching was always possible for those who did not rightly understand his mind. But who understood his mind better than his own immediate disciples? They listened to his teaching as it fell from his very lips, and from their personal contact with the scholar knew how he meant it to be understood. They treasured and guarded as a precious heritage this true and exact teaching of their master, valiantly defended it against all attacks and misinterpretations, and handed it down in its original purity to their disciples. Thus they constitute the first link in that chain of living tradition which unites the great Thomists of succeeding centuries to the living Thomas.

When St. Thomas went to Paris to teach there for the last time, between the years 1269 and 1272, his doctrine met with considerable opposition from the Averroists, the secular masters, and the old conservative Augustinian school. Against all these opponents Thomas defended his teaching in writing and in public disputation. After his death in 1274, the opposition to his doctrines continued. Some of his

¹ *Vita S. T. Aquinatis auctore Petro Calo.* Ed. D. Pruemmer (Tolosae, 1911) p. 30.

theses were even formally condemned by Bishop Stephen Tempier of Paris. But when his canonization by Pope John XXII on July 18, 1323, set the seal of orthodoxy upon Thomas' writings, the condemnations were withdrawn and the more violent opposition to them ceased.

During this period of struggle, Thomas was not without his faithful champions. Especially among the members of his own Order he had many friends and disciples who rallied to his defense. They studied his writings, explained and developed them, and defended them point for point against all the arguments of his adversaries. To mention only a few of these disciples, there were among the Italians John of Cajatia, Reginald of Piperno (the confessor and close companion of St. Thomas), Peter of Andrea, and Bartholomew of Lucca. These last three continued incomplete works of Thomas. Remigio Girolami (t1319), the teacher of Dante, was himself a disciple of St. Thomas. He it was who first acquainted the great poet with the teaching of the Angelic Doctor. Giles of Lessines defended the Thomistic position on the unity of the substantial form and John of Naples (t1325) answered the condemnation of the Bishop of Paris. In France, England and Germany, Thomas also had many steadfast disciples who kept alive and vindicated his exact teaching.

The most important adherent and defender of Thomism at the beginning of the fourteenth century was Hervaeus of Nedellec (t1323), who, as Master General of the Dominicans, promoted and witnessed the latter's canonization. Another influential Thomist of the fourteenth century was Peter de Palude who frequently mentions *doctor noster frater Thomas*. But the first disciple to write a complete, thorough, systematic and decisive defense of St. Thomas was John Capreolus, surnamed the Prince of Thomists. For the few details of his personal history which have come down to us, we are indebted to Père Echard in his *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum*.

Born in the year 1380 in the diocese of Rodez, France, John Capreolus received his early education in that city. There he entered the Order of St. Dominic at an early age, becoming affiliated to the province of Toulouse. In 1409, having obtained the degree of master in sacred theology, the general chapter of his Order at Poitiers assigned him to lecture on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard at the University of Paris. There he began, in the same year, his celebrated defensive commentary on the theology of St. Thomas. In 1411, and again in 1415, he passed examinations for degrees at the Sorbonne. Soon after, he was appointed regent of studies at Toulouse. About the year 1426, he returned to his native city of Rodez, where he la-

bored assiduously at his commentaries. These he completed between the years 1426 and 1433. On the 6th of April, 1444, he died at Rodez and was buried there beneath the sacristy of the church. Father Isidore Isolano tells us that "throughout his life John Capreolus cherished a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and his veneration for the Angelic Doctor was so great that the Holy Ghost seemed to have transmitted to him something of that same angelic spirit."

In his *Defense of the Theology of the Saintly Thomas Aquinas*, Capreolus follows the order of the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. Outside the schools of the Dominican Order this latter work was still the familiar text book in the universities. It was gradually supplanted by the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas; but only after the Council of Trent did the *Summa* come into general use. Whatever complete commentaries on theology were written up to the time of Capreolus, were written on the *Sentences*. Thus it was only natural that John Capreolus, in writing his defensive commentary, should follow the order of the *Sentences*. Besides, this method of procedure had the distinct advantage of enabling him to meet the opponents of Thomas on their own grounds and of answering their objections in order.

To follow Capreolus' line of defense, therefore, it is necessary to keep in mind the order of the book of *Sentences*. Peter Lombard had gathered together and systematically arranged the traditional theological doctrines up to his day. He divided the *Sentences* into four books preceded by an introductory tract or prologue on the nature and extent of theology. The first book treats of the existence and nature of God, of the Trinity, of providence, predestination, and of evil; the second, of the creation of the angels, fallen man, grace, and sin; the third, of the Incarnation, the ten commandments and the virtues; the fourth, of the sacraments, the resurrection, and of the four last things (*de novissimis*). Capreolus, following this order, divides his commentary into questions and articles. First he states the question and gives a short argument for and against it. Then he divides each question into three articles. In the first he states the conclusions in regard to that particular question and proves them by arguments drawn from the various writings of St. Thomas. In the second article he brings forward the objections of the adversaries, and in the third he solves their objections in as brief a manner as possible.

In the prologue to his first volume, the Prince of Thomists explains his intention: "Before I come to the conclusions, let me state my one purpose throughout this entire work. It is this: that I intend to set forth not my own opinions but to give only what seemed to me to be the mind of St. Thomas. Nor shall I, save rarely, adduce any

proofs for the conclusions except his words. The objections of Aureolus, Scotus, Durandus, John of Ripa, Henricus, Guido the Carmelite, Warron, Adam, and of the others who attacked the teaching of St. Thomas, I propose to bring forward in their proper places and to solve them through the words of St. Thomas."

How well Capreolus accomplished his purpose is evident from his work. He kept so closely to the aim he had set forth for himself that he was called the "Soul of St. Thomas." Besides his profound and remarkable knowledge of the *Summa*, he possessed a comprehensive grasp of all the other writings of St. Thomas: he was well versed in the *Summa Contra Gentes*, and the *Commentaries on the Books of Sentences* and the works of Aristotle. He makes constant use of the *Quaestiones Disputatae*, especially those on Truth, on the Power of God, and on Evil, as well as the various opuscula. Although he draws from all these sources the principles and arguments to answer the objections against the Angelic Doctor, nevertheless he gives preference to the doctrine expressed in the *Summa Theologica*, which he regarded as the final statement of St. Thomas' views. He answers clearly, concisely and conclusively all the objections against St. Thomas as far as possible in the latter's own words. Nor does he ever weary of repeating that many of these objections arise from a wrong understanding of Thomas' words. From its very nature, the commentary of John Capreolus is more than a defense of St. Thomas. It is also a clear exposition and harmonization of his teaching, a theological digest drawn from all his writings. The work presents a complete and definite picture of the Saint's views on each question treated in the *Book of Sentences*. Nothing could better reveal the interrelation and coherence, the marvellous order and consistency of Thomas' thought.

Whereas the earlier disciples of St. Thomas had explained and defended his teaching in special works on certain debated points, Capreolus undertook and accomplished the task of defending him on all the points of dispute up to his day. Sylvester of Ferrara at a later date was to write his classic commentary on the *Summa Contra Gentes*, and Cardinal Cajetan, John of St. Thomas, Sylvius and others their learned and illuminating commentaries on the *Summa Theologica*. But Capreolus was the first to write a complete and thorough defensive exposition of the entire theology of St. Thomas. This was of invaluable assistance to the great Thomists who succeeded him. Whatever the relative merits of these great scholars may be, certainly none ever surpassed Capreolus in adhering so faithfully to the traditional teaching of the Common Doctor. This is the special merit

of his work: its firm adherence to that doctrine which Pope Innocent VI declared to have above all others, the canonical writings excepted, "accuracy of expression, arrangement of subjects, and soundness of conclusions so that he who holds it will never swerve from the path of truth, while he who attacks it must always be suspected of error." Thomas of St. Germain, in his preface to the first edition of Capreolus' commentary, notes this special characteristic of the author: "Who among all the defenders of St. Thomas was gifted with such a keen and penetrating intellect as John Capreolus? No one was ever found up to his time who seemed to understand the mind of St. Thomas so exactly, to have such clear insight into it, to explain it so well, and to defend it so strongly."

The disciple is not greater than the master. He is great in proportion as he approaches the master and can bring others nearer to him. He is great in proportion as he rightly understands, clearly explains and faithfully defends his master's teaching. And this is John Capreolus' claim to greatness. Prince of Thomists, the scholar of Rodez drank deeply of the wisdom of Thomas, proposed it for the benefit of his intellectual posterity and thus forestalled the opponents who, unwittingly or no, might have deprived an indigent scholastic world of a thorough appreciation of the Thomistic synthesis.

AT THE BIRTH OF OUR LADY

ARTHUR O'CONNELL, O.P.

O All-Immaculate! Fairest work of thy Creator's hand!
 What lauding word, angelic or of human art,
 Can ever meetly praise thee? What gardened land
 Supply for thy bright presence Paradisal part
 To dwell therein? What child of all the generations
 Yet to call thee Blessed, Mother, Holy Queen,
 Fit love for thine repay? Too far beyond creation's
 Voice or heart or habitations—all too mean.

That word sublime can only come from Him
 Who'll house His Word in thy mortality;
 That home must be where the Seraphim
 Will serve His tabernacle—thee;
 That Child fit filial praises hymn
 Who, though thine own, yet God's true Son will be.