

'PRINCIPIUM VERBORUM TUORUM  
VERITAS,' Ps. cxviii.

'The sum of Thy Words is Truth,' and for us who have to search for that Truth fidelity or loyalty to it when discovered. Easy in theory, difficult in practice: 'ascetic practices,' says St. Jerome, 'for example continence or mortification of the flesh, are of great value; but nothing is so mortifying as knowledge of the truth' (*On Nahum ii. 1*, P.L.xxv, 1244); he seems to be thinking of a man's reactions on coming up against some wholly unexpected truth, something running counter to his preconceived notions. 'Nothing,' says St. Augustine, 'is easier for a person not merely to say but really to think he has discovered the truth; but how difficult a thing that is!' (*De Utilitate credendi*, 1). If the Bishop of Hippo could ever have felt annoyed, he who had made the search after truth the passion of his life must have felt indignant when Secundinus the Manichee told him: 'the truth makes you as angry as philosophy made Hortensius' (*Ep. ad Augustinum*, 3, P.L.xlii, 574).

Our Dominican history furnishes us with three great examples, among many others, of this unflinching loyalty to the truth as they saw it, a loyalty which was not obstinacy but conviction based on the triple foundation of reason, faith, and their outcome—humility.

First and foremost comes the Angelic Doctor himself. All are familiar with the story of his youthful questioning: 'What is God?', in other words: 'What is Truth?' We know, too, how as professor the 'novelty' of his teaching staggered his contemporaries. But few, perhaps, realise the fight he had to carry on against two contending streams of contemporary thought: the ultra-Aristotelians or Averrhoists on the one hand, and the Augustinian tradition on the other. In this search after Truth he found himself in conflict with saints like St. Bonaventure, with Tempier, then Bishop of Paris, and—most painful of all—with some of his fellow-Dominicans, particularly with Kilwardby, Archbishop of Canterbury. It is true, of course, that the formal condemnation of Bishop Tempier—endorsed by Kilwardby—only dated some three years after St. Thomas' death, but those condemnations were but the outcome of a long-continued conflict.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See particularly Mrs. Ellen Sommer-Seckendorf's admirable *Studies in the Life of Robert Kilwardby, O.P.*, *Dissertationes Historicae*, Fasc. VIII, pp. 130-162.

How did St. Thomas react to the animadversions on ideas which he held to intensely?<sup>2</sup> Kilwardby's successor in the See of Canterbury, the Franciscan Pecham, himself strongly opposed to St. Thomas' teaching on the 'unicity' of 'forms' in man, gives us the answer in a letter written in 1285:

'The question arising from the opinions held by Brother Thomas of Aquin, of holy memory, opinions which his own Dominican brethren say are those held by his Order, and which he, in my presence, submitted to the judgement of the Theologians of Paris, remains as yet undecided by the Roman Curia.'

If it demanded courage to run counter to the prevailing tradition and to court disfavour because he felt he was defending the truth, what faith and humility it must have demanded to submit his teaching to a body of men who were, so far as we can judge, opposed to his views!

One of the outstanding figures of the sixteenth century was Thomas de Vio, Cardinal Cajetan, whose independence of judgement and courage in contending for views which were novel is well known. We are referring of course to his work on the Bible, nowadays too little known. His Commentaries have to be read in the light of the controversies then raging. The Reformers were contending for the purely literal sense, of which—so they maintained—Catholic interpreters had lost sight. Cajetan elected to meet them on their own ground: 'My sole aim,' he wrote to Pope Clement VII when dedicating to him his Commentary on the Gospels, 'is to bring out the literal meaning.' So too with the Psalter: 'My aim is to bring St. Jerome's version into exact correspondence with the original.'<sup>3</sup> With this object he secured the services of two Hebraists, one a Jew, the other a Christian.<sup>4</sup> When they kept insisting on the precise meaning of a passage Cajetan tartly remarked that the meaning was not their business which was 'simply to translate not to expound.' He treated the Pentateuch in the same way: 'it is the actual text of Moses I wish to expound, not that of his translators.'

His views on the Gospels were certainly provocative, though they would not be so considered to-day. He suggests, for instance, that had St. Matthew really written his Gospel in Hebrew he would not

<sup>2</sup> M. D. Chenu, *Les Réponses de St. Thomas et de Kilwardby à la consultation de Jean de Verceil*. And cf. *Quodlibets*, I-VI.

<sup>3</sup> Paef. in *Comment. in Psalmos*, 1530 and 1534; cf. Allgeier in *Rev. Thomiste*, 1934.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Simon, *Histoire Critique de l'ancien Testament*, p. 319, remarks that though Cajetan 'had no knowledge of Hebrew he deals with it much better than many translators endowed with a mediocre knowledge of it.'

have felt obliged to translate 'Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani'; he even suggests that the Evangelist wrote both the Hebrew and the Greek versions, may possibly have translated his own Greek original into Hebrew. The doubtful ending of St. Mark's Gospel led him to say: 'these verses are not of such solid authority for establishing the faith as are the unquestionable portions of this Gospel.' Some words of St. Jerome led him to formulate the doubtful principle that 'if the Epistle to the Hebrews is not by St. Paul, then it is not canonical, and if not canonical, then not authoritative.' The Apocalypse he declined to treat of: 'Apocalypsim fateor me nescire exponere juxta sensum litteralem; exponat cui Deus concesserit!'

Small wonder that gainsayers were many. The Faculty of Paris condemned Cajetan's Commentaries in 1544 and 1545 though they were not condemned in the official Index of 1551 and 1556. Many urged that no one could be at the same time a speculative theologian of the first rank—as Cajetan unquestionably was—and a competent Biblical critic, Pallavicino remarking that to judge of him by his work on the Bible as compared with his theological treatises was like judging a peacock by his toes rather than by his tail!

The Reformers of course hailed the great theologian as a supporter of their views.<sup>5</sup> But I fancy Cajetan would have replied to all cavillers: 'Principium verborum (meorum) veritas.' But he must have felt hurt when members of his own Dominican family assailed him, notably a man of great theological acumen, Catharinus or Lancelot Polito, a devoted disciple of Savonarolo.<sup>6</sup> He particularly complained of a suggestion thrown out by Cajetan, commenting on Jn. vi, to the effect that in case of necessity—during a plague, for example—the laity could communicate themselves.<sup>7</sup> But Catharinus himself only narrowly escaped condemnation of fifty theses extracted from his writings. He ended, however, by becoming Bishop of Minori, near Naples, and finally Archbishop of Conza, dying just as he was about to receive the Cardinal's hat.

Those were the days when men said out what they thought was the truth; when, too, the Holy See looked on benignly, only prepared to step in when the problems discussed had been thoroughly ventil-

<sup>5</sup> Especially Whitaker, *De Auctoritate S. Scripturae*, ed. Parker Soc., p. 48 and *Passim*.

<sup>6</sup> *Annotaciones in Cajetania doctrina*, 1534 and 1542; *De Erroribus annotatis in Cajetani Commentariis*, 1561; *Annotationes in Excerpta quaedam de Cardinalis Cajetani commentariis dogmatare*, 1535.

<sup>7</sup> But Benedict XIV. would have none of this: 'Catharinum excessisse in censura tum quia non fideliter Cajetani sententiam retulerit, tum quia non admodum solide eam impugnaverit, facillime ostenditur,' *De Synodo diocesana*, I. xxx, cap. xix, sect. xxviii.

ated and one of the contestants proved wrong. The theological world then provided a series of intellectual jousts in which mighty blows were delivered and no one thought any the worse of the vanquished unless he refused to listen to the Supreme Authority when it spoke. It was the sifting of the wheat from the tares, and reason was allowed full play till it trespassed on faith's domains.

But to contend for views running counter to long-established teachings demands not simply courage but a supreme faith. No one expressed this better than Cajetan :

' If we come across some fresh interpretation which, though new, yet squares with the text under discussion, with the rest of the Bible and with the Church's teachings, we, as critics, must in fairness be prepared to render to every one his due. Holy Scripture alone is so authoritative that when its authors say a thing is so, we believe them. "When I read other writers," says St. Augustine, "I do not accept what they say simply because they say it—no matter how holy or learned they may be." Let no one, then, reject some fresh interpretation merely on the ground that it does not square with what the early Fathers have held. Let him rather examine the passage in question, bearing in mind, too, its context. If he then finds that the fresh interpretation harmonises with it let him give thanks to God who has not limited interpretation of the Bible to the early Fathers but has left Scripture to interpret Scripture, yet always under the interpretation of the Catholic Church ' (*Praef. in Pentateuchen*).

Statements such as the foregoing distressed Pallavicino who regretted the way in which so consummate a theologian had, as he thought, allowed himself to be side-tracked into Biblical studies. He even asserted that whereas Cajetan's theological writings had enhanced his reputation, this was not the case with his work on the Bible wherein he had allowed himself to be victimised by a set of Hebrew Grammarians! (*History of the Council of Trent*, vi, 17). A modern writer has acclaimed Cajetan as a mediaeval 'Modernist': he 'is far nearer to the Church of England than to the Church of Rome,' while his 'remarkable defence of the doctrine of Justification by Faith on Rom. iii,' he declares to have been 'the source from which our Reformers derived their definition of that doctrine in the Homily on the Salvation of Mankind.'<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Pref. Tridentine Doctrine: a Review of the Commentaries on the Scriptures by Thomas de Vio, Cardinal Cajetan*. R. C. Jenkins, 1891. This writer is little competent to deal with things theological, for he says 'the Lateran (sic) in 1860 (sic) established the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception,' and explains the technical term 'res sacramenti' as meaning 'the matter or outward part of the sacrament.' Preface, pp. vii-ix and p. 54.

On hearing of the great Cardinal's death Clement VII mourned his loss as of the *Lumen Ecclesiae*. Cajetan lies buried at the door of the Minerva with the simple inscription : THOMAS DE VIO CAJETAN, of the Minerva with the simple inscription : THOMAS DE VIO CAJETAN, CARD. SI. SIXTI. SACRI ORDINIS PRAEDICATORUM. A contemporary penned the lines :

Felix, O nimium felix, nimiumque beatus  
Mortalem exutus vitam nunc denique vives  
Et fructum vitae innocuae sine fine frueris.

Coming down to recent days we have the heroic figure of Père Lagrange who realised from the outset that the only way effectively to meet modern rationalistic criticism was to secure an equipment equal to theirs, thoroughly to master the original languages of the Bible, to study rationalistic writings in no antagonistic spirit, presupposing that, however much in error they might be, their authors were honestly convinced of the views they propounded or were at least in search of the truth.<sup>9</sup>

Motived by these ideas he founded, Nov. 15, 1890, the Convent of St. Etienne in Jerusalem as a school of Biblical Studies,<sup>10</sup> a project in which he was warmly supported by Pope Leo XIII, who in 1893 issued the famous Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, a document which did much to forward Biblical Studies, and incidentally the aims of Père Lagrange. From the date of the foundation of the Biblical School began a period of intense activity on the part of its Director. In Aug. 1897 was held a Conference at Friburg during which Lagrange put forward views on the composition of the Pentateuch which later came to be severely criticised (*Rev. Biblique*, Jan. 1898). In 1902 came his *Livre des Juges*, also the subject of acrimonious criticism. This was followed in 1903 by his *Méthode Historique*<sup>11</sup> which to many of more conservative outlook came as a veritable bombshell, though a most favourable reception was accorded to his *Religion des Sémites* which appeared in the same year.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Note his words about M. Loisy : ' The great esteem I have always had for his talents and the testimony I have consistently borne to them and to his standing both as a man and a writer make me fear that he will yet exert considerable influence.' Preface to his *M. Loisy et le Modernisme*, 1932.

<sup>11</sup> *La Méthode Historique surtout à propos de L'Ancien Testament*, Paris, 1903; translated by Edward Myers, M.A., as *Historical Criticism and the Old Testament*, The Catholic Truth Society, 1905.

<sup>12</sup> *Etudes sur la Religion des Sémites*, 1903, 2nd. ed. 1905; see a most favourable review by S. A. Cook in the *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*, April, 1905.

Various publications followed, as well as Articles in the *Revue Biblique*: these however do not concern us here. With the death of Pope Leo a reaction set in. For many thought that these 'progressists' as they were termed were going too far and too fast; disciples too, lacking his vast erudition and balanced judgement, were going ahead of their master. At length the inevitable happened and in 1912 the Congregation of the Consistorial forbade certain works by Dr. Holzhey and Dr. Tillmann to be admitted into the Seminaries, and added: 'There are other Commentaries of a like spirit, such as many writings of Father Lagrange'; these, it is added, 'are not to be used in clerical education, saving a fuller judgement by the authority to whom this pertains.' June 29, 1912.

Now this was in no sense an official 'condemnation' of Lagrange's writings, though many understood it as such despite the fact that the pronouncement was studiously vague and no individual works were specified. This vagueness led the Archbishop of Siena to ask the Congregation to specify the errors which necessitated the exclusion of the incriminated works from Seminaries. In the detailed Reply complaint was made that articles by Lagrange in the *Revue Biblique* praised rationalistic authors while speaking 'often with bitter irony' of Catholic writers; in particular an article entitled *L'Innocence et la Péché*, 1897, pp. 341-346, was complained of; also on the Pentateuch, 1898, where 'critical opinions on the sources and the historical truth are contrary to ecclesiastical tradition.' Similar complaints were made about the *Méthode historique* and attention was especially drawn to a Note prefixed to the second edition: 'No Catholic exegete can claim freedom from the dogmatic judgement of the Church; but no authority can exempt our productions, as regards their scientific side, from the judgement of competent men, or prevent this verdict from being used against the Church, when a real deficiency is disclosed.' Further: the author's 'theories on the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible' are labelled 'dangerous,' while the Appendix on the Gospels 'contain very grave errors and dangerous theories regarding the origin and historical truth of all four Gospels.' The author's *L'Évangile selon S. Marc* is severely criticised, especially the statement that St. Mark is credited with 'the independance of an author' and not of a mere redactor!

Though, as we have said, this was not a 'condemnation' in the strict sense of the term—it was never published in the official *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*—yet Lagrange could not fail to regard it as such, and he at once tendered his submission to the Holy See:

'Most Holy Father: Prostrate at your feet I desire to express my grief at having caused you pain, also my complete obedience.

My sole aim has been and always will be unreserved and heartfelt submission to the wishes of Christ's Vicar. But precisely because I know that my filial submission is so absolute you will permit me to express to you my regret at the reflections to which the condemnation of some of my writings as yet unspecified may give rise; for they may perhaps suggest that they are tainted with rationalism. I am quite prepared to acknowledge that these works contain errors. But, Holy Father, allow me to state that nothing was further from my mind than to write in a spirit of disobedience to Ecclesiastical tradition or the decisions of the Biblical Commission.

'Your Holiness' devoted servant, J. M. Lagrange, O.P.'

One of the last Acts of Pope Leo's long Pontificate was to draw up the framework of the Biblical Commission and thus put the coping-stone on his work for the furtherance of Biblical Studies. With this end in view he summoned Lagrange to Rome from which centre he wished him to continue the publication of the *Revue Biblique* which he proposed to make the official organ of the Biblical Commission. In his distress at this proposal Lagrange wrote to Cardinal Rampolla setting out some of the difficulties he foresaw if the contemplated remove came to pass. To this the Cardinal replied: 'Have no fear for unpleasant consequences either for the *Revue Biblique*, or for the School at Jerusalem, or for your Order. The sole intention of the Holy See is to shew to yourself and your Order a proof of good will and esteem.' (*Rev. Biblique*, Oct. 1919).

But Pope Leo died before he could put his plans into execution.

The storm died down and Lagrange quietly went on with his work, devoting himself to the production of his now famous Commentaries on the Gospels, on the Gospel in general, on the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians.<sup>13</sup> His last years being occupied with questions of Textual Criticism and the history of the Canon.<sup>14</sup>

What a record of long years spent in laborious study for the sake of the Truth! *Principium verborum tuorum Veritas*. The principles that guided him throughout were those of Pope Leo's *Providentissimus Deus*; they have now been re-asserted in the last Papal pronouncement *Divino afflante Spiritu* of 1943 or fifty years later.

<sup>13</sup> *L'Évangile selon S. Marc*, 1911; *selon S. Luc*, 1921; *Selon S. Matthieu*, 1923; *selon S. Jean*, 1925. *L'Évangile de Jesus Christ*, 5th. ed. 1929, translated by Members of the English Dominican Province, 2 vols. 1938: *The Gospel of Jesus Christ*. *L'Épître aux Romains*, 1918, cf. *La Vulgate Latine et l'Épître aux Romains, et la Texte Grec*, *Revue Biblique*, Jan., 1916. *L'Épître aux Galates*, 1918.

<sup>14</sup> *La Critique Rationnelle; Critique Textuelle*, 1935. *Histoire ancienne du Canon du Nouveau Testament*, 1933.

In keeping with Père Lagrange's whole life was his *Testament spirituel* :

' I declare before God that it is my desire to die in the Catholic Church to which I have always belonged, heart and soul, since I was baptized; and to die in her faithful to my vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in the Dominican Order. I therefore commend myself to Jesus Christ my Saviour and to the prayers of His Mother who has ever proved so gracious to me.

' Further, I declare in the most positive terms that I submit all I have written to the judgement of the Apostolic See. And I feel I may add that it has always been my aim in all my studies to do my best to forward the reign of Jesus Christ, the honour of the Church, and the good of souls. And I would repeat once more : " I am a child of Mary : *Tuus sum ego, salvum me fac.*" '

HUGH POPE, O.P.

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## IN STUDIIS PERSEVERARE

The obligation to be perseverant in study is an essential characteristic of the Order of Preachers. It has been so from the beginning. The modern form of the Constitutions shows the importance which the Order attaches to it, not only by the express statement of this obligation in Constitution No. 189, but by the repetition, almost word for word, of that statement in No. 690. In a document generally regarded as reflecting the succinctness of the Code of Canon Law, with which it was brought into conformity in 1932, and as somewhat sharply contrasted with earlier editions in this respect, such a repetition carries enormous force. It provokes an enquiry into the mode of life which it conditions and into the character of those who are dedicated to its fulfilment. The text itself is instructive : ' Our priests, by reason of their vocation, or of the special purpose of the Order, are all the more (i.e. by comparison with those students not yet ordained to the Priesthood) bound to be perseverant in study throughout their whole life, especially in the study of dogmatic and moral theology, of sacred Scripture, of the Holy Fathers, and of the other sacred sciences, both for the purpose of fostering spiritual