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Thomas Cajetan's Scientia Christi

Martin Luther's interview at Augsburg in 1518 not only confirmed his rejection of Rome, but apparently set Thomas de Vio, Cardinal Cajetan (1469–1531), to serious biblical scholarship¹. The solid and scientific hermeneutic behind Luther's theology led to several Catholic responses. For his efforts, Cajetan was violently denounced by Ambrosius Catharinus². Luther's judgment was forthright. "Although he may be a famous Thomist, he is a vague, obscure, and unintelligible theologian or Christian and therefore as unsuited to understand and judge the matter as an ass to play the harp."³ Four hundred and fifty years later one can see that neither Luther nor Catharinus have said the last word about Cajetan. A careful analysis of Cajetan's biblical study will show that to the epithet "Thomist" must be added the words "sacrae paginae magister"⁴.

1.

Cardinals Contarini and Pole appreciated Melanchthon's exegesis in 1537⁵. Pole's letter reflects the care with which the finest scholars in the Roman Church *studied Protestant exegesis*⁶. Cajetan represents a careful analysis of Protestant exegesis which helps to understand why the Roman Church rejected both Luther and Contarini. A fresh look at Cajetan corrects Luther's vulgarity and Catharinus' hostility.

¹ Th. A. Collins, Cardinal Cajetan's Fundamental Biblical Principles: Catholic Biblical Quarterly 17 (1955), p. 368; T. Hoyer, Cajetan: Concordia Theological Monthly 6 (1935), p. 349–356.

² T. A. Collins, The Cajetan Controversy: American Ecclesiastical Review 128 (1953), p. 90ff. See my Luther's Sola Fide in Italy, 1542–1551: Church History 38 (1969), p. 25–42.

³ V. H. H. Green, Luther and the Reformation (1964), p. 65.

⁴ To Collins' (n. 1) concentration on the controversy I should like to add data selected from Cajetan's New Testament Commentaries. Collins does not cite J. F. Groner, O. P., Kardinal Cajetan. Eine Gestalt aus der Reformationzeit (1951). For Catharinus as an exegete see my article in note 2 above. For his view of Aquinas see G. Hennig, Cajetan und Luther. Ein historischer Beitrag zur Begegnung von Thomismus und Reformation (1966).

⁵ A. M. Quirini, Opus epistolarum Reginaldi Poli, 2, Nr. 68.

⁶ See my article Laurentius Valla. Renaissance Critic and Biblical Theologian: Concordia Theological Monthly 39 (1968), p. 27.

Cajetan's life spans the period in which Valla's hermeneutic made its greatest impact via Erasmus. The Thomist Cajetan wrestled with the critical issues in a way Catharinus could never accept⁷. Whatever his theologian orientation, Cajetan's study at Padua had given him a fine appreciation for the Biblical languages⁸. That he constructs his own Latin text indicates Cajetan's interest in the new exegesis. At Rom. 5:1-5 where Faber followed the Vulgate text Cajetan agrees with all seven variants selected by Erasmus⁹.

The literal sense of the text is often given in Cajetan's Commentary on Romans (1532)¹⁰. In Chapter 3 one finds his statements on the meaning of *faith*. "Quia (pro propterea) ex operibus legis non iustificabitur omnis caro coram eo."¹¹ Cajetan distinguishes "iustitia operis" from "iustitia dei". "The justice of works justifies only to the extent of whose work it is, and works according to the 'habitus' of that work: the justice of God justifies man absolutely."¹² Thus it is said that the justice of works is not absolute justice, "because it does not remove sins but leaves man in the sins which he commits". The justice of God is absolute in the sense that it removes the sins it finds in man. This is the true distinction referred to in the preceding topic. The application is then made by Cajetan to the phrase "factores legis iustificabuntur apud deum". This phrase refers to the justification of men by works; while the former refers to absolute justification¹³. Through the law comes realization of sin; therefore the law cannot justify. Cajetan concludes:

⁷ Groner (n. 4), p. 62. See the Revue Thomiste of November 1934-February 1935, devoted to articles on the fourth centenary of Cajetan's death, especially M. J. Lagrange, "La critique textuelle avant le Concile de Trent".

⁸ Groner (n. 4), p. 25, claims that Cajetan knew neither Hebrew nor Greek, but used two Jews and a Greek (Hellenist) in determining the biblical text. Even so, the Pauline Commentaries reflect a judicious departure from Erasmus.

⁹ See the discussion in Collins (n. 4), p. 363-366, and the list of variants to the Vulgate text of Rom. 5: 1-5 in J. M. Vosté, Thomas De Vio, O. P., Cardinalis Caietanus Sacrae Paginae Magister: Angelicum 11 (1934), p. 445-513; 12 (1935), fas. 3. I am grateful to the Librarian of University College, Cork, Ireland, for sending me this article. The variants are listed on pp. 24-25.

¹⁰ King's College Library, Aberdeen, Scotland πf227/V10.

¹¹ The exact text is reproduced from the 1532 commentary.

¹² Cajetan, Commentary on Romans, X: v.

¹³ Ibid., X: v-r.

“Et sumiter cognitio ut opponitur remissioni. Ita est sensus, per legem habetur cognitio, non autem remissio peccati. Iustificatio autem absolute oportet sit remissione peccati.”¹⁴

Paul's distinction between law and gospel is valid for Cajetan. However, the way in which remission of sins occurs is significant. Cajetan has important statements about how absolute justice is possible for men.

“Arbitramur enim (pro igitur) iustificari hominem per fidem sine operibus legis.” This is a clear conclusion drawn by Cajetan from the premises already mentioned. It is not the intent of Paul to exclude works of the law from what he has said above: “Factores legis iustificabuntur apud deum.” For Cajetan makes a further distinction. “Non intendit inquam excludere ab executione sed a iustificatione, hoc est a virtute iustificatiua hominis absolute: quod est dicere a virtute remissiua peccatorum.”¹⁵ It remains then for Cajetan to define faith. Faith is the means whereby absolute justification or forgiveness of sins is possible. Is faith then the same for Cajetan as Melanchthon? Cajetan was prepared as few others to realize the serious nature of this definition of faith. The crisis of vocabulary was more than academic. The entire sacramental system was in danger if the implications of Melanchthon's view were consistently applied to Church life.

One feels that whatever his linguistic acumen, Cajetan does not build his theology on the Christological methods of the new theology. Rom. 5:12 supports the view that Cajetan's exegesis remained Thomistic. The key words are “in quo omnes peccaverunt”.¹⁶ He began by an appeal to the Greek text and linguistic meaning. Cajetan then selected a Latin meaning consistent with a pre-determined doctrinal context. The Greek interpretation is ambiguous, allowing either “propter” or “in”. The passage then presents a choice to the exegete of either “propter quod omnes peccauerunt” or “in quo omnes peccauerunt”. Cajetan did feel free to question the Vulgate. If the latter be the meaning, then in Greek it would have the sense of an adverb or conjunction. This would be the sense of reading “propter quod” or “in quo”. Cicero has the phrase “in

¹⁴ Loc. cit.

¹⁵ Ibid., XI, r.

¹⁶ Ibid., XV, r.

eo quo”, and such a sense for Cajetan best fits the fourfold context¹⁷. For then one understands that death has penetrated all “in eo quo omnes peccaverunt, hoc est propter hoc quo omnes peccaverunt”. Both options have extrapolations to fit what Cajetan wants: “Et hic sensus aptissime quadrat contextui et vero sensui...”¹⁸ The Greek text did not settle the question as for Erasmus, but was rather determined by the fourfold sense. If Melanchthon could add “sola” to “fide”, here Cajetan uses Cicero to add “eo” or “hoc” to “quo”. One wonders how carefully Catharinus read these commentaries.

New insights occur in his passages discussing faith and the spiritual life. Rom. 10:17 has Cajetan’s interesting comment that faith comes ultimately from the word of God, not from the human act of belief (non hominum intelligatur procedere quo ad determinationem credentorum)¹⁹. Actually Cajetan said, “The hearing of the people stems from the word of God revealed to the Prophets and Apostles.” Therefore faith is from God and no human authority is able to introduce new belief, but only to explain through the word of God what things have been revealed to the Apostles and Prophets²⁰. Further definition of faith occurs in his commentaries on Galatians, Ephesians and I Corinthians.

Chapter 2 of Galatians has several references to faith. Cajetan very carefully excludes works of the law from the process of justification. Yet in Gal. 5:6 he defines faith as working through love, without which it is dead. Faith for Cajetan in these passages is conditional. He attaches two conditions to Paul’s assertion, “Quod non iustificatur homo ex operibus legis nisi per fidem Iesu Christi.”²¹ His first is that from our original nature we are sinners through the religious practices (a patribus dei cultoribus) of the Jewish fathers, not those of our ancestors. The other is that man is justified by infused knowledge (scientia infusa) which is not through work of the law but by the faith of Christ. To these he joins a third condition, performance of that knowledge²². Precepts

¹⁷ Loc. cit.

¹⁸ Loc. cit.

¹⁹ Ibid., XXXVII, v.

²⁰ Loc. cit.

²¹ Ibid., CXIX, v.

²² Loc. cit.

of the Catholic church accomplish the transition from “non ex operibus legis” to “nisi per fidem Iesu Christi”. One may protest that “works of the law” refers only to Jewish observances. Cajetan claims that canon law is not to be included in Paul’s exclusion of law in Gal. 5 so that the theological science of the medieval church mediates a knowledge of faith. Performance based on that theological knowledge is faith working through charity²³. This intellectual context seems to be present whenever Cajetan defines the nature of faith. He reiterates the same three conditions when discussing Gal. 2:17, “Quod si quaerentes iustificari in Christo, inventi sumus et ipsi peccatores.”²⁴ From birth there are sinners among the gentiles, since they are without the observance of the divine law. His argument concludes that without such observance there is an evangelical liberty which is sin²⁵. Gospel seems to be a new law, albeit regulated by ecclesiastical custodians of divine law such as Cajetan, who through sacramental grace dispense the gospel.

There is a key passage in Gal. 5:6. One expects to find a scholastic definition in his comment on “fides quae per charitatem operatur.”²⁶ Faith without love is dead. “Hanc theologi consueuerunt appellare fidem formatam, illam vero fidem informem.”²⁷ The occurrence of such phrases and distinctions mark Cajetan as orthodox and scholastic. In Eph. 2:8–9 no such statements are explicit. Are they then to be implicitly understood? Such seems likely. The definition of “gratia” is pored to these previous presuppositions. It is the gift of God, but the phrase “not of works” is superfluous for Cajetan. It means simply that we are not to glory when we are saved, for the grace by which we are saved is a gift of God. “The faith by which we are saved is freely given us by God. For this reason it is conditional.”²⁸ This particular proposition is necessary for Cajetan to understand in what way men are made members of

²³ Ad. loc.: “Et nos in Christum Iesum credimus (pro credimus), ut iustificemur ex fide Christi et non ex operibus legis. Credere enim in Christum ad consequendam iustificationem consequenda mediante fide Christi. Et ad maiorem explicationem idem quod superius dixit scitum, modo subiungendo repetit Vt rationem intentionis.”

²⁴ Ad. loc.

²⁵ Ad. loc.

²⁶ Ibid., CXXIII, v.

²⁷ Loc. cit.

²⁸ Ibid., CXXXI, r. (iuxta).

Christ. Faith is linked to grace to show both are gifts of God. Faith cannot be alone therefore, but is sacramental²⁹. Nowhere does Cajetan mention the syntax of the verbs in Eph. 2:8 nor the gender of τοῦτο. The neuter relative can only have as antecedent δῶρον, and the verb is certainly a perfect passive participle which suggests that the gift of God was completed by the faithfulness of Christ³⁰. Faith then is not sacramental but Christological, and for the Christian becomes “fiducia” in the perfect obedience of Christ. “Fiducia” nowhere appears in Cajetan’s commentaries, but permeates those of Melanchthon. One concludes that Cajetan follows scholastic exegesis at a point where Melanchthon and Contarini do not.

From time to time Cajetan calls attention to the Greek meaning and adopts it. In 1 Cor. 2:5 it settles the sense directly:

“Non sit in sapientia hominum fundata sed in virtute dei: hoc est in potentia dei, vt patet in textu Graeco, tam hic paulo ante. In potentia in quam tum operante miracula, tum operante intus in spiritibus vestris.”³¹

It is Chapter 13, however, that gives one an insight into Cajetan’s exegetical and theological position. His first task is a definition of the Greek word ἀγάπη³². The Greek text, says Cajetan, is better translated by “dilectio” than “charitas”. Indeed the definite article teaches not any sort of love, but that “dilectio” which separates the sons of God from the sons of perdition, “which the Latin theologians call charity”³³. Paul begins with the gift of languages and goes on to discuss the apostolate. In all of this he shows the superiority of charity in its relation to the gifts of the ministry. Cajetan has begun with the Greek word, only to immediately place it in the context of Latin theology³⁴.

His definition of fides, spes and charitas proceeds by an analysis of Paul’s examples. The clarity of Cajetan’s exposition reflects a rare insight into the textual difficulties and meanings of the passage. In tone it is far removed from Lombard or contemporary expositors.

²⁹ Loc. cit.

³⁰ Greek text reads: ἔστε σεσωσμένοι.

³¹ Cajetan, Commentary on I Corinthians, LII, v.

³² Ibid., LXXVI, v.

³³ Loc. cit.

³⁴ Ad. loc.

“Et si habuero omnem fidem ita vt montes transferam”: Such words reflect the excellence of charity with respect to the three gifts. These are: “fides de agendis, potestates et sanationes”³⁵. These three Cajetan contained in the single expression, “si habuero omnem fidem”. Rarely is the effective meaning of this passage given, says Cajetan: very rarely because Gregory in his first Dialogue refers to the moving of the mountain. Cajetan implies that Gregory’s interpretation has colored most subsequent exegesis. The surprise is that Cajetan rejects it³⁶. Gregory has obscured the doctrine of the Apostles. Cajetan’s task is to reconcile this passage with Romans and Corinthians. To the Romans Paul wrote “iustificari hominem fide sine operibus”, while to the Corinthians it was the warning, “autem fidem omnem sine dilectione non conferre divinum esse hominum animis.”³⁷ Cajetan does not disguise the difficulty nor the errors of previous exegesis. His solution is a vital one for the Church in view of the new philology and theology.

The solution for Cajetan lies in the diversity of ways in which Paul describes faith. As to Romans, under the name of faith Cajetan understands faith, hope and love. Under this sign, he claims, Paul used synonymously the terms “fides” and “lex fidei”. Therefore in Rom. 3:27 it is certain that hope and love are to be understood; the law of faith is distinguished from the law of deeds. On the contrary, under the law of deeds are the works of all the virtues of morality – “prudentiae, iustitiae, temperantiae, fortitudinis, et partium earum” – which the nations do without the written law³⁸. This is the immediate reason why faith is defined as contrary to law. “Fides distinguitur contra opus quia innititur deo cui creditur, ita spes innititur deo in quo speratur, et dilectio innititur deo qui diligitur...”³⁹ The words of our Lord attest this when He said to those possessing faith and charity, “your faith has made you whole”, and “many sins are forgiven to him who loves much”. Clearly, says Cajetan, here under the sole name of faith itself is signified the necessity of love. “Ut clare patet in textu nulla igitur est dissonantia.”⁴⁰ To put it bluntly, Cajetan denies that sola fide occurs at all in Romans.

³⁵ Ibid., LXXVI, v.

³⁶ Loc. cit.

³⁷ Loc. cit.

³⁸ Ibid., LXXVI, r.

³⁹ Loc. cit.

⁴⁰ Ad. loc.

Given such basic distinctions, which admittedly are logically sound, Cajetan proceeds to a definition of charity with full confidence in the Greek text⁴¹. Faith when used by Paul in Romans must be understood as a single term in which are included the three virtues of 1 Cor. 13:13. When Paul defines charity he includes works of all the remaining virtues done in the light of "scientia christianae". Cajetan concludes that faith is always formed by charity and is never alone. The phrase "omnia credit" refers to the things revealed by God in sacred scripture⁴².

Cajetan represents scholasticism at its zenith. His attempts to reform doctrine were brave. Though repudiated as heretical, Cajetan's attempt to purify the theological vocabulary was an extension of the Church's finest tradition. That he stands out in bold relief against the sycophancy of the Papal court is one of the saddest comments one can make about that tragic age. His exegesis was an attempt to reconcile the new vocabulary with Thomistic categories. Little wonder that Luther faced the question of authority in all its ramifications from the moment of his Augsburg interview with Cajetan⁴³. Vosté has well noted Cajetan's doctrinal concern:

"Notus est Caietani zelus pro reformatione et decore tam Ordinis sui quam Ecclesiae. At sicut fuit semper vir studio addictissimus, amans solitudinem, abhorrens a mere externis ceremoniis, ita fuit modestissimus velans proprias dotes, celans intimos suos sensus. Hinc sat raro apparet sacerdotalis zelus eius, pia eius anima in commentariis istis; prout supra iam diximus: non est hic locus. Hos commentarios exarat, exponens litteralem spirituale vel asceticum."⁴⁴

Groner's thesis, that Melancthon and Cajetan were incompatible, is born out by a preliminary investigation of these biblical com-

⁴¹ Ad. loc.: "Vel vt imperantur a charitate et sic tam virtutes moralium communium etiam infidelibus, theologium communium etiam non iustificatis opera, et iustificant et vivificant aeterna vita hominem: et sine ipsis fides mortua est. Et saepissime in sacra scriptura praecipuntur ac commentantur vsqueadeo, vt sine ipsius dilectio dei salua esse non possit et sine ipsis vana omnia ad aeternam censeantur vitam. Et sic liberando, opera relinquarum virtutum Paulus attribuit charitates hoc in loco."

⁴² Ad. loc.: "Actus fidei attribuitur charitate imperative: sicut et actus patientiae, et similiter spei."

⁴³ G. Rupp, *Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms 1521* (1951), p. 60-62.

⁴⁴ Vosté (n. 9), 95. Now see J. Beumer, *Suffizienz und Insuffizienz der Heiligen Schrift nach Kardinal Thomas de Vio Cajetan: Gregorianum* 45 (1964), p. 816-824.

mentaries. The modernity of Cajetan's exegesis can be seen in the extent to which the literal sense of the text underlies the theological statement of it. Unlike Aquinas, Cajetan at times does depend on the meaning of single words, as in Rom. 5:12, to settle the syntactical relationship within the sentence. Yet as in Aquinas the meaning of the syntactical unit as a whole determines the meaning of any part. Therefore logical distinctions rather than a Christological unity become the measure of the meaning. Cajetan uses 1 Cor. 13 to define the meaning of faith in all of Romans, and one suspects in all of Paul's Epistles. He admits the scholastic doctrines of congruous and condign merit in the definition of charity and faith. If Melanchthon does the opposite, it illustrates the essential noncontinuity of their theological positions. Cajetan did not share the "Weltanschauung" of Melanchthon, nor indeed his exegesis.

Melanchthon followed neither the "philosophia Christi" of Erasmus nor the "scientia Christi" of the Thomist. Faith was not contained for him in the act of the intelligence. Rather it was "fiducia promissae misericordiae propter Christum, assentiens promissioni divinae"⁴⁵: a love formed by faith. The attraction of such a position was its new vocabulary. The extent to which biblical commentaries of the Catholic Reformers from 1536 to 1566 reflect his insights is astonishing. Only widespread sympathy to the new vocabulary rising from a fresh exegetical methodology can explain these attempts at theological compromise. A serious consideration of such biblical exegesis must follow. The positions of Melanchthon and Cajetan are two poles attracting scores of exegetical writings. For the subsequent period until Trent they are valid norms to assess the religious-linguistic crisis. No more significant writings of the Catholic reformers can be found than their biblical exegesis. The extent to which dogmas are discussed from a biblical context demands fresh consideration of the role of scripture in the life of sixteenth century Catholic reform⁴⁶. From Cardinal Pole to Cardinal

⁴⁵ Corp. ref. XV, 503.

⁴⁶ R. McNally, *The Council of Trent and Vernacular Bibles: Theological Studies* 27 (1966), p. 204-227, and M. Anderson, *Biblical Humanism and Catholic Reform (1501-1542)*. Contarini, Pole and Giberti: *Concordia Theological Monthly* 39 (1968), p. 686-707; idem, *Trent and Justification (1546)*. *A Protestant Reflection: Scott. Journ. of Theol.* 21 (1968), p. 385-406.

Seripando the problems of the successor of St. Peter find their solution in the study of St. Paul.

Without a knowledge of Greek, Cajetan could get at the new issues of the Reformation. Yet he let his theology overrule even that careful attempt to consult those who knew the text better than he. That appears to be every bit a crisis for the Catholic Reformation as is the separation of Holy Writ from Holy Church for the Protestant Reformation⁴⁷. A study of the sources in the 500th anniversary of the birth of Luther's judge at Augsburg suggests that both Cajetan and Luther took liberties with the Biblical text. Both crises can be overcome by the use of historical as well as biblical study. *Ne plus ultra.*

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⁴⁷ Ulrich Horst, *Der Streit um die heilige Schrift zwischen Kardinal Cajetan und Ambrosius Cattarinus: Wahrheit und Verkündigung*. Festschrift für Michael Schmaus, 1 (1967). p. 551–577.