A truly bizarre anomaly within the history of thought occurred in 1564, one which would have rendered this volume entirely otiose. In that year, a sixteen-year old aspirant to the Society of Jesus—then a fledgling religious order founded only a few decades earlier by Iñigo López de Loyola—was rejected for admission to the order. To be sure, there is nothing extraordinary about an aspirant’s being declined admission to various religious orders, yet when that aspirant turns out to be Scholasticism’s future Doctor eximius, Francisco Suárez, and the reason given for his rejection was a lack of intellectual gifts, which were prerequisite for an order whose charism is synonymous with education and the intellectual life, even the most casual observer is likely to be more than a little intrigued. Yet Suárez’s rejection from the Jesuits is an indisputable historical fact. In fact, as Joseph Henry Fichter explains in his biography of the Spanish thinker, most of Suárez’s youth was rather unremarkable, commonplace, and hardly notable for any academic promise. Moreover, Fichter’s estimate of Suárez’s lacklustre intellect appears to be shared by Suárez himself, who, upon eventual probationary admission to the Jesuits after at least one unsuccessful appeal to the provincial of Castile, asked to remain a lay brother (instead of being sent on for further studies to be ordained to the priesthood) because he did not have confidence in his own ability to pass his philosophical course of studies—and this from the man who would publish the first systematic account of metaphysics (viz., Disputationes metaphysicae) and whose philosophical vision would, in the words of one historian of philosophy, serve “as the main channel by which scholasticism came to be known by modern classical philosophers”!

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1 Raoul De Scorraille, François Suarez de la Compagnie de Jésus (Paris, 1912), vol. 1, pp. 43–44. A condensed chronological chart of important dates and events in Suárez’s life can be found in the opening pages (xix–xxi) of this same work.
3 Ibid., p. 48.
4 Ibid., p. 52.
Suárez’s luminous career spent entirely as an academic and as Spain’s most celebrated theologian—sought after for important academic positions by no less than the king—makes accounts of his youthful obtuseness unfathomable. Yet so it was. Sixteen years earlier, on 5 January 1548, Suárez was born in Granada (recently reconquered by Spain) to Antonia Vasquez and Gaspar Suárez, members of a well-to-do family whose service to the king and country was well known. When he was only thirteen, Francisco went to Salamanca to study canon law for three years, where he barely passed his course of studies. It was during his time at Salamanca that the young Spaniard fell under the spell of Juan Ramirez, an Andalusian Jesuit whose legendary sermons were unparalleled in rousing the spirits of many to take up the religious life. Suárez was among those who heard God’s call through Ramirez’s voice, and set his own mind on joining the Society of Jesus. As already mentioned, Suárez was a little over sixteen when, after much effort, many appeals, and a number of rejections, on 16 June 1564 he was finally granted admission to the Jesuits as an ‘indifferent’, that is, as someone whose future status in the Society as either a priest or lay brother was left undetermined. Two years later, in August 1566, Suárez professed his first simple vows.

Despite his rather unremarkable performance in his early studies as a young Jesuit, a radical—almost ‘overnight’—shift occurred in Suárez’s intellectual ability, which defies easy explanation. Philosophical problems that had seemed intractably twisted in Gordian knots one day were suddenly masterfully unravelled. Fichter is convinced that Suárez’s academic blossoming was due to a supernatural intervention brought about through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God. Likewise, De Scoraille considers the possibility of divine intervention, citing as examples of such occurrences the legends of Albertus Magnus and Duns Scotus, who were said to have received similar prodigious intellectual gifts after seeking the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. Whatever the explanation, whether natural or supernatural, among his superiors there was no doubt about Suárez’s new-found intellectual gifts,

6 Fichter, *Man of Spain*, p. 6. For more on the cultural atmosphere of reconquered Spain, see ibid., c. 2.
7 Ibid., pp. 11–12.
8 Ibid., p. 38.
9 Ibid., p. 45; cf. also De Scoraille, *François Suarez*, vol. 1, p. 35, n. 3.
10 Ibid., p. 51.
11 Ibid., p. 53.
12 Ibid., p. 69.
13 Ibid.