

Book Review, Modern Schoolman. (January 1950)

Dom Iltyd Trethowan, *Certainty: Philosophical and Theological*. Dacre Press, Westminster, 1948. viii + 170 pp., 15/- net.

This is an instructive work written by a vigorous and inquiring mind. While the discussion ranges from logical positivism to mystical experience, the central concern is the reconciliation of the properties of the act of faith, which at once is certain yet free, rational yet due to divine grace. Though the ~~the~~ author has more material than he can fit smoothly into the space at his disposal, the ~~the~~ somewhat choppy presentation of exact information does not interfere with the strong logical structure and its strictly speculative intention. Indeed, I find the basic viewpoint most attractive: "Theology is queen of the sciences. But a philosopher may say 'I am a philosopher and not a theologian,' and, although this is not a satisfactory state of affairs, it does make good sense; whereas the theologian who says 'I'm a theologian and not a philosopher' is talking nonsense." [p. 65]

Slightly less than the first third of the book is merely philosophic. The position adopted is a dogmatic intuitionism that recalls Fr. Sebastian Day's significant work on Intuitive Cognition. Certainty is to be taken rigorously [p. 11] and it has to provide its own guarantee [p. 9]. By ruling that doubtful knowledge is not knowledge, it seems that incomplete knowledge is not knowledge. There follows an identification

of knowledge with certainty. There also follows a disregard of elements or factors within knowledge, so that our apprehensions are said to be affirmations in the form of judgments [p. 40]. This knowledge-apprehension-affirmation-certainty is intuitive: while Aquinas contrasted (C. Gent., XXII, 98, ad fin.), the author identifies the Platonist confrontation of knower with known and the Aristotelian identity of knower in act and known in act [p. 22]. A sharp distinction between sense and intellect is deprecated, and so an intellectual intuition of bodies is affirmed [p. 36]. The doctrine of species is under a cloud, for it risks changing the object [p. 30], and for the same reason the construction by intellect of its object is set aside [p. 37]. Indeed, the author is so opposed to distinction, analysis, explanation that, while admitting a difference between immediate and inferred knowledge, he proceeds to contend that the demonstration of God's existence is not syllogistic but an immediate inference [p. 42].

After the reader is introduced to theology and to the supernatural order, various theories of the act of faith, current among Catholic theologians, are passed in review. All are found unsatisfactory. With this pronouncement it would be difficult to disagree. But probably it will be contended that the author's proposal, while headed in the right direction, fails to reach the goal. He would ground faith on a supernatural intuition of God as revealing. This assures the intervention of grace, the sufficiency of evidence, and the certainty of faith. But it leaves faith

free not immediately but only in causa. The real difficulty, however, is whether the alleged intuition exists. The author appeals to the normality of mystical experience and argues that mysticism involves an intuition of God and that faith is the beginning of the mystical life; what can be overwhelming in mystical experience, should be rudimentary in faith, where it would provide the element of intellectual evidence that is needed. It remains that the author seems to wish he did not have to account for the faith of those in the state of mortal sin. More boldly, in the name of intellectualism, he attacks the theologians who advance that mystical experience radically is affective rather than intuitive.

The weak point of the work seems to me to be the notion of intuition. Faith cannot be a conclusion, for it is a new and supernatural beginning. But on the author's philosophy, certainty must be either a conclusion or an intuition. Really it is this premise that forces the affirmation of an intuition of God in faith, that leads to an a priori interpretation of mystical experience, that brings up the embarrassing faith of sinners, that excludes from faith immediate freedom, that would give rise to further difficulties if the term, intuition, were given an exact meaning in an adequately systematic presentation.

But it is not in such consequences that the real weakness ~~lies~~ lies; rather it is in the very notion of intuition. The definition of truth is correspondence between judgment and reality. The criterion of truth is evidence. Now to postulate

intuitions is unquestionably a simple and simplifying. At once the definition and the criterion of truth are made to coincide. At a stroke the critical problem is eliminated, for if evidence is evident intuition of reality, there is neither need nor possibility of proceeding rationally from the criterion to the definition of truth. Unfortunately the postulated intuitions do not seem to exist. In its first moment on each level knowledge seems to be act, perfection, identity; such identity of itself is not a confrontation; confrontation does arise but only in a second moment and by a distinct act, of ~~see~~ perception as distinct from sensation, of conception as distinct from insight, of judgment as distinct from reflective understanding. On this showing confrontation is not primitive but derived, and it is derived from what is not confrontation, not intuition, not <sup>formal and explicit</sup> duality. Admittedly it is difficult to justify such derivation. Overtly to accept such difficulty is a basic and momentous philosophic option. Still it seems to me to be the way of honesty and truth, and I should like very much to see so acute and so transparently honest a thinker as Dom Trethowan explore it.

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