PROBLEMI e PROSPETTIVE DI THEOLOGIA DOGMATICA

cap. 5: Unità e pluralità: la coerenza della verità cristiana

This paper falls into three parts: (1) Differentiations of Consciousness; (2) Pluralism and Theological Doctrines; and (3) Pluralism and Conversion.

Differentiations of Consciousness

For centuries theologians were divided into diverse schools. The schools differed from one another on most points in systematic theology. But all shared a common origin in medieval Scholasticism and so they were able to understand one another and could attempt, if not dialogue, at least refutation. But with the breakdown of Scholasticism, that common ancestry is no longer a bond. Wide divergences in doctrine are being expressed by Catholic theologians. If each abounds in his wisdom, he also tends to be mystified by the existence of views other than his own.

If one is to understand such diversity, one must, I believe, advert to the sundry differentiations of human consciousness. A first differentiation arises in the process of growing up. The infant lives in a world of immediacy. The child moves towards a world mediated by meaning. For the adult the real world is the world mediated by meaning, and his philosophic doubts about the reality of that world arise from the fact that he has failed to advert to the difference between the criteria for a world of immediacy and, on the other hand, the criteria for a world mediated by meaning.

Such inadvertence seems to be the root of the confusion concerning objects and objectivity that has obtained in Western thought since Kant published his Critique of Pure Reason.[1] In the world of immediacy the only objects are objects of immediate experience, where "experience" is understood in the narrow sense and denotes either the outer experience of our senses or the inner experience of our consciousness. But in the world mediated by meaning -- i. e., mediated by experiencing, understanding, and judging -- objects are what are intended by questions and known by intelligent, correct, conscientious answers. It is by his questions for intelligence (quid sit, cur ita sit) for reflection (an sit), for moral deliberation (an honestum sit), that man intends without yet knowing the intelligible, the true, the real, and the good. By that intending man is immediately related to the objects that he will come to know when he elicits correct acts of meaning. Accordingly, naive realism arises from the assumption that the world mediated by meaning is known by taking a look. Empiricism arises when the world mediated by meaning is emptied of everything except what can be sensed. Idealism retains the empiricist notion of reality, insists that human knowledge is constituted by raising and answering questions, and concludes that human knowledge is not of the real but of the ideal. A critical realism finally claims that human knowledge consists not in experiencing alone but in the threefold compound that embraces experiencing and understanding and judging.

Besides the differentiation of consciousness involved in growing up, further differentiations occur with respect to the world mediated by meaning. Here the best known is the

eventual separation of scientific from commonsense meaning.

Its origins are celebrated in Plato's early dialogues in which Socrates explains what he means by a definition that applies omni et soli, seeks such definitions of courage, sobriety, justice, and the like, shows the inadequacy of every proposed solution, and admits that he himself is unable to answer his own questions. But a generation or so later in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics we find not only general definitions of virtue and vice but also definitions of an array of specific virtues each one flanked by a pair of vices that sin by excess or by defect. But Aristotle was not content merely to answer Socrates' question. By his example he showed how it can be done; he scrutinized linguistic usage; selected the precise meanings that suited his purpose; constructed sets of interrelated terms; and employed such sets to systematize whole regions of inquiry.

In this fashion was effected the differentiation of commonsense meaning and scientific meaning. Socrates and his friends knew perfectly well what they meant by courage, sobriety, justice. But such knowledge does not consist in universal definitions. It consists simply in understanding when a term may be used appropriately; and such understanding is developed by adverting to the response others give to our statements. As commonsense does not define, so it does not enounce universal principles; it offers proverbs, i.e., bits of advice it may be well to bear in mind when the occasion arises; hence "Strike the iron while it is hot" and "He who hesitates is lost" are not so much contradicted as complemented by "Look before you leap." Finally, common sense does not syllogize; it argues from analogy; but its analogies

resemble, not those constructed by logicians in which the analogue is partly similar and partly dissimilar, but rather Piaget's adaptations which consist in two parts: an assimilation that calls on the insights relevant to somewhat similar situations; and an adjustment that adds insights relevant to the peculiarities of the present situation.

But besides the world mediated by commonsense meanings, there is another world mediated by scientific meanings, where terms are defined, systematic relationships are sought, and procedures are governed by logic and methods. This second world was approximated by Plato's distinction between the flux of phenomena and the immutable forms. It was affirmed more soberly in Aristotle's distinction between what is first for us and what is first in itself. It has reappeared in Eddington's two tables: one brown, solid, heavy; the other colorless, mostly empty space, with here and there an unimaginable wavicle. So it is that scientists live in two worlds; at one moment they are with the rest of us in the world of common sense; at another they are apart from us and by themselves with a technical and controlled language of their own with reflectively constructed and controlled procedures.

Besides the scientific there is a religious differentiation of consciousness. It begins with asceticism and culminates in mysticism. Both asceticism and mysticism, when genuine, have a common ground that was described by St Paul when he exclaimed: ".. God's love has flooded our inmost heart through the Holy Spirit he has given us" (Rom 5, 5). That ground can bear fruit in consciousness that lives in a world mediated by meaning. But it can also set up a different type of conscious-

ness by withdrawing one from the world mediated by meaning into a cloud of unknowing.[2] Then one is for God, belongs to him, gives oneself to him, not by using words, images, concepts, but in a silent, joyous, peaceful surrender to his initiative.

Ordinarily the scientific and the religious differentiations of consciousness occur in different individuals. But they can be found in the same individual as was the case with Thomas of Aquin. At the end of his life his prayer became so intense that it interfered with his theological activity. But earlier there could have been an alteration between religious and theological differentiation, while later still further differentiation might have enabled him to combine prayer and theology as Teresa of Avila combined prayer and business.

Besides the scientific and the religious there is the scholarly differentation of consciousness. It combines the common sense of one's own place and time with a detailed understanding of the common sense of another place and time. It is a specifically modern achievement and it results from nothing less than a lifetime of study.

Besides the scientific, the religious, and the scholarly, there is the modern philosophic differentiation. Ancient and medieval philosophers were concerned principally with objects. What differentiation they attained, did not differ from the scientific. But in modern philosophy there has been a sustained tendency to begin, not from objects mediated by "ordinary" meaning, but from the immediate data of consciousness. In a first phase from Descartes to Kant, the primary focus of attention was cognitional activity. But after the transition, operated by absolute idealism, there was a notable shift in emphasis.

Schopenhauer wrote on Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung; Kierkegaard took his stand on faith; Newman took his on conscience; Nietzsche extolled the will to power; Dilthey aimed at Lebensphilosophie; Blondel at a philosophy of action; Scheler was abundant on feeling; and similar tendencies, reminiscent of Kant's emphasis on practical reason, have been maintained by pragmatists, existentialists, personalists.

We have distinguished four differentiations of consciousness; the scientific, the religious, the scholarly, and the modern philosophic. We have noted the possibility of one compound differentiation in which the scientific and the religious were combined in a single individual. But there are five other possibilities of a twofold differentiation,[3] and there are four possibilities of a threefold differentiation.[4] In addition there is one case in which a fourfold differentiation may occur by combining scientific, religious, scholarly, and the modern philosophic differentiation. Similarly, there is a single case of simply undifferentiated consciousness which is at home only in the realm of common sense.

Pluralism and Theological Doctrines

By far the most common type of consciousness is undifferentiated. It is unimpressed by the subtleties of science, the oracles of religion, the oddity of scholarship, the alleged profundity of the current philosophic differentiation.

To teach it or to preach to it, one must use its own language, its own procedures, its own resources. These are not uniform. What is common to common sense is not what it knows but the untaught spontaneity of its manner in coming to know. So there are as many brands of common sense as

there are languages, socio-cultural differences, almost differences of place or time. The stranger acts strangely because his common sense is not our own.

Hence to preach the gospel to all nations calls for almost as many apostles as there are distinct places and times, and it requires each of them to get to know the people to whom they have been sent, and to catch on to the manner and style and way of their thought and speech. There follows a manifold pluralism, but primarily it is a pluralism not of doctrine but of communications. It remains that within the realm of undifferentiated consciousness there is no communication of doctrine except through the available rituals, narratives, titles, parables, metaphors, modes of praise and blame, command and prohibition, of promise and threat.

An exception to this last statement must be noted. The educated classes in a society, such as was the Hellenistic, normally are instances of undifferentiated consciousness. But their education had among its sources works of genuine philosophers, so that they could be familiar with logical operations and take propositions as objects on which they reflected and from which they inferred. In this fashion the meaning of homoousion for Athanasius was contained in a rule concerning propositions about the Father and the Son: What is true of the Father also is true of the Son, except that the Son is not Father.[5]

Similarly, the meaning of the one person and two natures mentioned in the second paragraph of the decree of Chalcedon, stands forth in the repeated affirmation of the first paragraph, namely, it is one and the same Son our Lord Jesus Christ that is perfect in divinity and the same perfect in humanity, truly

God and the same truly man, consubstantial with the Father in his divinity and the same consubstantial with us in his humanity, born of the Father before all ages in his divinity and these last days the same ... born of the Virgin Mary in his humanity.[6] Now the meaning of this first paragraph can be communicated without the addition of any new technical terms. But it can give rise to reflection and to questions. Only after someone asks whether the divinity is the same as the humanity and, if not, then how can the same be both God and man, is it relevant to explain that a distinction can be drawn between person and nature, that divinity and humanity refer to two natures, that it is one and the same person that is both God and man. Such logical clarification is within the meaning of the decree. But if one goes on to raise the metaphysical question whether person and nature can be really distinct or the anthropological question whether there can be any real disinction between subject and subjectivity,[7] then the issue is being transported from the fifth century to the thirteenth on the metaphysical issue, and to the twentieth on the anthropological issue. One not only steps beyond the context of Chalcedon but also beyond the capacity of undifferentiated consciousness to discover any possible solution.[8]

Turning now to religiously differentiated consciousness, we observe that it can be content with the negations of an apophatic theology. For it is in love, and on its love there are not any reservations or conditions or qualifications. It is with one's whole heart and whole soul and all one's mind and all one's strength. By such love one is oriented positively

to what is transcendent in lovableness. Such a positive orientation and the consequent self-surrender, as long as they are operative, enable one to dispense with any intellectual analogy or concept;[9] and when they cease to be operative, the memory of them enables one to be content with enumerations of what God is not.

The Christian however knows God not only through the grace of God in his heart but also through the revelation of God's love in Christ Jesus and the witness to that revelation down the ages through the church. Essential to Christianity is the Christian community which is the carrier of its constitutive meaning and values. So there emerges the function of church doctrines and theological doctrines: the function of explaining and defending the authenticity of the church's witness to the revelation in Christ Jesus.

As already indicated, there was a slight tincture of theoretically differentiated consciousness in the Greek councils. But principally it was in the medieval period that there was undertaken the systematic and collaborative task of reconciling all that had been handed down by the church from the past. A first step was Abaelard's Sic et Non, in which one hundred and fifty-eight propositions were both proved and disproved by arguments drawn from scripture, the Fathers, the councils, and reason.[10] In a second step Gilbert of Porreta used Abaelard to define the existence of a question; in this fashion Abaelard's Non became Videtur quod non and his Sic became Sed contra est. To these were added a general response, in which principles of solution were set forth, and then particular responses to the arguments advanced

on either side. A third step was the composition of books of sentences that collected and classified relevant passages from scripture and tradition. A fourth step were the commentaries on books of sentences, in which the technique of the question was employed to reconcile or eliminate contrary views. A fifth step was to obtain a conceptual system that would enable theologians to give coherent solutions to all the questions they raised; and this coherence was sought partly by adopting and partly by adapting the Aristotelian corpus.

Scholastic theology was a monumental achievement. Its influence on the church has been profound and enduring. Up to Vatican II, which preferred a more biblical turn of speech, it has provided much of the background whence proceeded pontifical documents and conciliar decrees. Yet today by and large it is abandoned, and that abandonment leaves the documents and decrees that relied on it almost mute and ineffectual. Such is the contemporary crisis in Catholicism. It is important to indicate why it exists and how it can be overcome.

The Scholastic aim of reconciling differences in statements of Catholic tradition had one grave defect: it was content with a logically and metaphysically satisfying reconciliation; it did not realize how much of the multiplicity in its inheritance constituted not a logical or a metaphysical but basically a historical problem.

Secondly, the Aristotelian corpus, on which Scholasticism drew for the framework of its solutions, suffers from a number of defects. The Posterior Analytics set forth an ideal

of science in which the key element is the notion of necessity. On this basis science is said to be of the necessary, while opinion regards the contingent; similarly, wisdom is said to be of the necessary, while prudence regards contingent human affairs. There follows the supremacy of speculative intellect, and this can be buttressed with a verbalism that attributes to common terms the properties of scientific terms. Finally, while man is acknowledged to be a political animal, the historicity of the meanings that inform human living is not grasped, and much less is there understood the possibility of history being scientific.

In contrast, modern mathematics is fully aware that its axioms are not necessary truths but freely chosen and no more than probably consistent postulates.[11] The modern sciences ascertain, not what must be so, but only what is in itself hypothetical and so in need of verification. First principles in philosophy are not just verbal propositions but the de facto invariants of human conscious intentionality. What was named speculative intellect now turns out to be merely the operations of experiencing, understanding, and judging, performed under the guidance of the moral deliberation, evaluation, decision, that selects an appropriate method and sees to it that the method is observed. The primacy now belongs to praxis and the task of philosophy is to foster the emergence of authentic human beings. Finally, it is only on the basis of intentionality analysis that it is possible to understand human historicity or to set forth the foundations and critize the practice of contemporary hermeneutics and critical history.

The defects of Scholasticism, then, were the defects of

of its time. It could not inspect the methods of modern history and thereby learn the importance of history in theology. It could not inspect modern science and thereby correct the mistakes in Aristotle's conceptual system. But if we cannot blame the Scholastics for their shortcomings, we must undertake the task of remedying them. A theology is the product not only of faith but also of a culture. It is cultural change that has made Scholasticism no longer relevant and demands the development of a new theological method and style, continuous indeed with the old, yet meeting all the genuine exigences both of Christian religion and of up-to-date philosophy, science, and scholarship.

Until that need is met, pluralism will not be exorcized. Undifferentiated consciousness will always want a common-sense theology. Scientifically differentiated consciousness will drift towards secularism. Religiously differentiated consciousness will know that the main issue is in the heart and not the head. Scholarly differentiated consciousness will continue to pour forth the fruits of its research in interpretations and histories. Philosophically differentiated consciousness will continue to wobble between empiricism and idealism. But the worthy successor to thirteenth-century achievement will be the fruit of a fivefold differentiated consciousness, in which the workings of common sense, science, scholarship, intentionality analysis, and the life of prayer have been integrated.[12]

Pluralism and Conversion

Conversion involves a new understanding of oneself because, more fundamentally, it brings about a new self to be understood.

It is putting off the old man and putting on the new. It is not just a development but the beginning of a new mode of developing. Hence besides the beginning there is to be considered the consequent development. This may be great or average or small. It may be marred by few or by many relapses. The relapses may have been fully corrected, of they may still leave their traces in a bias that may be venial or grave.

Conversion is three-dimensional. It is intellectual inasmuch as it regards our orientation to the intelligible and the true. It is moral inasmuch as it regards our orientation to the good. It is religious inasmuch as it regards our orientation to God. The three dimensions are distinct, so that conversion can occur in one dimension without occurring in the other two, or in two dimensions without occurring in the other one. At the same time the three dimensions are solidary. Conversion in one leads to conversion in the others, and relapse from one prepares for relapse in the others.

By intellectual conversion a person frees himself from confusing the criteria for knowledge of the world of immediacy with the criteria for knowledge of the world mediated by meaning. By moral conversion he becomes motivated primarily not by satisfactions but by values. By religious conversion he comes to love God with his whole heart and his whole soul and all his mind and all his strength; and in consequence he will love his neighbor as himself.

The authentic Christian strives for the fullness of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. Without intellectual conversion he tends to misapprehend not only the world mediated by meaning but also the word God has spoken within that world.

Without moral conversion he tends to pursue not what truly is good but what only apparently is good. Without religious conversion he is radically desolate: in the world without hope and without God (Eph 2, 12).

While the importance of moral and religious conversion may readily be granted, hesitation will be felt by many when it comes to intellectual conversion. They will feel it is a philosophic issue and that it is not up to theologians to solve it. But while these contentions are true, they are not decisive. The issue is also existential and methodical. Theologians have minds. They have always used them. They may use them properly and they may use them improperly. Unless they find out the difference for themselves or learn about it from someone else, they will be countenancing a greater pluralism than can be tolerated.

Indeed in my opinion intellectual conversion is essentially simple. It occurs spontaneously when one reaches the age of reason, implicitly drops earlier criteria of reality (are you awake? do you see it? is it heavy? etc.), and proceeds to operate on the criteria of sufficient evidence or sufficient reason. But this spontaneous conversion is insecure. The use of the earlier criteria can recur. It is particularly likely to recur when one gets involved in philosophic issues. For then the objectification of what is meant by sufficient evidence or sufficient reason may become exceedingly complex, while the objectification of taking a good look is simplicity itself. So one becomes a naive realist; if one takes that seriously, one becomes an empiricist; if that proves uncomfortable, one can move on to idealism; then to pragmatism; then to phenomen-

ology. But far less laborious than traveling round that circuit is the task of finding out just what sufficient evidence is. I grant that facing that issue calls for some concentration. But enormously more concentration is needed to explore the philosophies that either neglect sufficient evidence or, on the other hand, propose excessive criteria.

The Coherence of Christian Truth

Any incoherence in what Christians believe by faith in God is due, not to God, but to their own unauthenticity.

Unauthenticity is overcome by full conversion, that is, not just the initial stages of religious, moral, and intellectual conversion but also the ongoing course of development to which conversion commits one.

That commitment is great indeed. In the second gospel we read:

> Then one of the lawyers... came forward and asked him, 'Which commandment is first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is the only Lord; love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these' (Mk 12: 28-31).

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NOTES

1) On the Kantian notion of object: very briefly, Lonergan, Collection (New York & London, 1967) p. 208; very thoroughly, G.-B. Sala, Das Apriori in der menschlichen Erkenntnis, Eine Studie über Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft und Lonergans Insight, Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1971.

2) See William Johnston, The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing, St. Meinrad, Indiana: The Abbey Press, ^{2}1975; Karl Rahner, The Dynamic Element in the Church (Montreal: Palm Publishers, and Freiburg: Herder, 1975) pp. 129ff.

3) The five are: scientific and scholarly; religious and scholarly; religious and philosophic; scholarly and philosophic; philosophic and scientific.

4) The four are: scientific, religious, and scholarly; scientific, religious, and philosophic; scientific, scholarly, and philosophic; religious, scholarly, and philosophic.

5) Athanasius, Oratio III c. Arianos, 4, MG 26, 329A.

6) DS 381 f.

(Notes 7 to 12 follow on p. 17)

7) As ontologically Christ is one person in two natures, so psychologically he is one subject with two subjectivities, one divine, the other human. Cf. my paper in Le Christ, Hier, Aujourd'hui et Demain (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1976) pp. 61 - 65. Add the Greek definite article before the noun, Theos, on page 63.

8) Differentiations of consciousness justify or lead to the discovery of previously unnoticed implications in the sources of revelation.

9) God's gift of his love is the cause of our knowledge of God by connaturality. Cf. Sum. theol., II-II, q. 45, a. 2 c.

10) ML 178, 1339ff.

11) Cf. Jean Ladrière, Les limitations internes des formalismes (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, and Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1957).

12) Our listing of differentiations of consciousness is not intended to go beyond the needs of this paper.