

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.

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 phenom-