

## INTRODUCTION

A theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix. The classicist notion of culture was normative: at least de jure there was but one culture that was both universal and permanent; to its norms and ideals might aspire the uncultured, whether they were the young or the people or the natives or the barbarians. Besides the classicist, there also is the empirical notion of culture. It is the set of meanings and values that informs a way of life. It may remain unchanged for ages. It may be in process of slow development or rapid dissolution.

When the classicist notion of culture prevails, theology is conceived as a permanent achievement, and then one discourses on its nature. When culture is conceived empirically, theology is known to be an ongoing process, and then one writes on its method.

Method is not a set of rules to be followed meticulously by a dolt. It is a framework for collaborative creativity. It would outline the various clusters of operations to be performed by theologians when they go about their various tasks. A contemporary method would conceive those tasks in the context of modern science, modern scholarship, modern philosophy, of historicity, collective practicality and coresponsibility.

In such a contemporary theology we envisage eight distinct tasks: research, interpretation, history, dialectic,

foundations, doctrines, systematics, and communications. How each of these tasks is to be performed, is treated now in greater and now in less detail in the nine chapters that form the second part of this work. In the first part are treated more general topics that have to be presupposed in the second part. Such are method, the human good, meaning, religion, and functional specialities. Of these, the last, functional specialities, explains how we arrived <sup>a/at</sup> at our list of eight distinct tasks.

In general, what we shall have to say, is to be taken as a model. By a model is not meant something to be copied or imitated. By a model is not meant a description of reality or an hypothesis about reality. It is simply an intelligible, interlocking set of terms and relations that it may be well to have about when it comes to describing reality or to forming hypotheses. As the proverb, so the model is something worth keeping in mind when one confronts a situation or tackles a job.

However, I do not think I am offering merely models. On the contrary, I hope readers will find more than mere models in what I shall say. But it is up to them to find it. For the first chapter on method sets forth what they can discover in themselves as the dynamic structure of their own cognitional and moral being. In so far as they find that, they also will find something that is not open to radical revision. For that dynamic structure is the condition of the possibility of any revision. Moreover, subsequent chapters are in the main prolongations of the first. They presuppose it. They complement it, indeed, but they do so by drawing attention to further

aspects or fuller implications or added applications. However, just as each one has to find in himself the dynamic structure indicated in the first chapter, so too he has to satisfy himself about the validity of the further additions in the subsequent chapters. As already I have said, method offers not rules to be followed blindly but a framework for creativity.

If I hope many readers will find in themselves the dynamic structure of which I write, others perhaps will not. Let me beg them not to be scandalized because I quote scripture, the ecumenical councils, papal encyclicals, other theologians so rarely and sparingly. I am writing not theology but method in theology. I am concerned not with the objects that theologians expound but with the operations that theologians perform.

The method I indicate is, I think, relevant to more than Roman Catholic theologians. But I must leave it to members of other communions to decide upon the extent to which they may employ the present method.