

## AUDIATUR ET ALTERA PARS

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**T**he well-known principle of forensic justice which we have put as our title in its original Latin has become, throughout the centuries, a basic measure for a fair judgement in all fields of life and society.

The said principle proves its validity particularly when we have to analyse and assess complex cultural phenomena or spiritual interaction between various philosophical, moral or religious movements and creations in the course of civilisation.

In publishing this volume of *PHRONEMA* the main addresses of the first One Day Conference on Gnosticism (and Radical Dualism) held at our Theological College on February 2, 1998 (cf. *PHRONEMA* vol. 13), we would like to underline how important it still is today to reconsider the various cultural streams which actively penetrated one another under the common umbrella of Hellenistic syncretism in both East and West. This was the situation at a time when Christian dogma had to make a clear distinction between the sacred and profane for the salvation of the faithful.

The continuous studies on Christian origins are of paramount importance also for contemporary Christendom for a series of reasons. Above all, we should mention the remarkable fact that most of the old heresies return in modern times with almost the same motivation and tenacity. This should make us especially careful, so that we may face with adequate sensitivity the spiritual factors which create the various divergences, not only in the interpretation of Christian dogma within Christianity worldwide, but also within the broader framework of the intended 'globalisation' in recent times, affecting both the present and future of all forms of religion and civilisation.

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In the historical rivalry between religious or philosophical traditions, one was not always prepared to see in the 'opposite camp' the degree of truth which could be appreciated as an integrating factor for a more balanced articulation and expression of one's own truth. For it takes indeed enormous moral courage to discover, in the person of the questioning fellow human being, not so much the supposed 'enemy', but rather the 'brother', if not even our own selves, being informed and educated under different conditions.

This does not mean of course any kind of doctrinal relativism for Christian theology. It is rather the sincere interest in keeping all kinds of dialogue in cultural and spiritual exchanges within the necessary calm atmosphere which is *conditio sine qua non* for facilitating a fair hearing of each other's pain, aspirations, fears, doubts and, no less, certain existential convictions. If such an atmosphere is necessary to listen productively to each other in general, how much more so is this an absolute must for every vigilant theologian *vis-a-vis* the fact of the divine revelation as such, which presupposes humility and forgiveness for the fallen human nature, in order that it may be rehabilitated into its original integrity.

A striking example of the need to judge theoretical constructions in the context of all other parameters of life is radical dualism which characterises all Gnostic systems from antiquity until today. In analysing such a general theory, we have to take into consideration that human life presupposes, in all its expressions, a tacit conviction that the experience of immanence is always opposed by, or at least parallel to, an unknown transcendence. Without a permanent interaction between immanence and transcendence, life loses its true character as mystery, or else degenerates into a demonic enigma.

Even the early Church could not overlook the sincere interest of both deviations from the Biblical message concerning the hypostatic union in the Lord's Incarnation, that is, on the one hand Arianism and, on the other, Sabellianism to safeguard, in the first instance, the transcendence of God and, in the second, God's loving care and continual presence in nature and history.

In the same context of a mild or radical dualism, the question that has often been discussed is the existence of evil in its natural or moral

form, which basically remains a tragic riddle in the midst of a world created out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) by an All-Good Creator. All related issues have, as known, been characterised by the quite indicative term ‘theodicy’, yet this does not mean that the problem of the responsibility for the existence of evil has been in any case satisfactorily answered. On the contrary, it is one of the philosophical or theological questions that will obviously remain an open dilemma in a radical, metaphysical sense.

With all the above, we tried to give only a few indications of the role that Gnosticism - and dualism in particular — in all its expressions, has played in the formation of Christian doctrine through many interrelated cultural streams.



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