

Benedict's Thinking – I

July 9, 2011

The “Eleison Comments” of June 18 promised a series of four numbers which would show how “disoriented” is Pope Benedict XVI’s “way of believing.” They present in fact a summary of the precious tract on his thinking written a few years ago by Bishop Tissier de Mallerais, one of the four bishops of the Society of St Pius X. The Bishop’s tract, *The Faith Imperilled by Reason*, he calls “unpretentious,” but it does lay bare the Pope’s fundamental problem – how to believe in the Catholic Faith in such a way as not to exclude the values of the modern world. The tract shows that such a way of believing is necessarily disoriented, even if the Pope does still in some way believe.

It divides into four parts. After an important Introduction to Benedict XVI’s “Hermeneutic of Continuity,” Bishop Tissier looks briefly at the philosophical and theological roots of the Pope’s thinking. Thirdly he lays out its fruits for the Gospel, for dogma, for the Church and society, for the Kingship of Christ and for the Last Things. He concludes with a measured judgment upon the Pope’s Newfaith, highly critical but wholly respectful. Let us start with an overview of the Introduction:–

The basic problem for Benedict XVI, as for all of us, is the clash between the Catholic Faith and the modern world. For instance he sees that modern science is amoral, that modern society is secular and modern culture is multi-religious. He specifies the clash as being between Faith and Reason, between the Faith of the Church, and Reason as worked out by the 18th century Enlightenment. However, he is convinced that they can and must both be interpreted in such a way as to bring them into harmony with one another. Hence his close participation in Vatican II, a Council which attempted to reconcile the

Faith with today's world. But Traditionalists say that the Council failed, because its very principles are irreconcilable with the Faith. Hence Pope Benedict's "Hermeneutic of Continuity," or system of interpretation to show that there is no rupture between Catholic Tradition and Vatican II.

The principles for Benedict's "hermeneutic" go back to a German historian of the 19th century, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911). Dilthey maintained that as truths arise in history, so they can only be understood in their history, and human truths cannot be understood without the involvement of the human subject in that history. So to continue the core of past truths into the present, one needs to subtract all elements belonging to the past, now irrelevant, and replace them with elements important for the living present. Benedict applies to the Church this double process of purification and enrichment. On the one hand Reason must purify the Faith of its errors from the past, e.g. its absolutism, while on the other hand the Faith must get Reason to moderate its attacks on religion and to remember that its humanist values, liberty, equality and fraternity, all originated in the Church.

The great error here of the Pope is that the truths of the Catholic Faith on which Christian civilization was built and on which its feeble remains still rest, have their origin by no means in human history, but in the eternal bosom of the unchanging God. They are eternal truths, from eternity, for eternity. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" says Our Lord, (MtXXIV,35). Neither Dilthey nor, apparently, Benedict XVI can conceive of truths far above human history and above all its conditioning. If the Pope thinks that by making such concessions to faithless Reason, he will draw its adherents towards the Faith, let him think again. They merely despise Faith the more!

Next, the philosophical and theological roots of Benedict's thinking.

Kyrie eleison.