



UNIVERSALITAS & PERVASIVITAS

il costituirsi e diffondersi della S.J. e suoi echi (1540 - 1773)
di A. Pisani

Schede di approfondimento di argomenti generali

PROBABILIORISMO



Besides Rigorism, Probabilism, and Laxism, there was also a theory of Probabiliorism which held that it is not lawful to act on the less safe opinion unless it is more probable than the safe opinion. This view, which was in vogue before the time of Medina, was renewed in the middle of the seventeenth century, as an antidote against Laxism. Its revival was principally due to the efforts of Alexander VII and Innocent XI. In 1656 a general chapter of the Dominicans urged all members of the order to adopt Probabiliorism. Though previously Dominican theologians like Medina, Ledesma, Bañez, Alvarez, and Ildephonsus were Probabilists subsequently the Dominicans in the main were Probabiliorists. Amongst them were Mercorius (d. 1669), Gonet (d. 1681), Contenson (d. 1674), Fagnanus (d. 1678), Natalis Alexander (d. 1724), Concina (d. 1756), Billuart (d. 1757), Patuzzi (d. 1769). Probabiliorism was held by many Jesuits such as Gonzalez (d. 1705), Elizalde (d. 1678), Antoine* (d. 1743), Ehrentreich (d. 1708), and Taberna (d.

1686). In 1700 the Gallican clergy, under Bossuet, accepted Probabiliorism. The Franciscans as a rule were Probabiliorists, and in 1762 a general chapter of the order, held at Mantua, ordered the members to follow Probabiliorism. In 1598 a general chapter of the Theatines adopted Probabiliorism. The Augustinians, the Carmelites, the Trinitarians, and many Benedictines were also Probabiliorists. The most notable event in the history of the controversy occurred in connection with Thyrsus Gonzalez, S.J., a professor of Salamanca, who (1670-72) wrote a work, entitled "Fundamentum Theologiae Moralis", in favour of Probabiliorism. In 1673 the book was sent to the Jesuit General Oliva, who refused permission for its publication. Innocent XI favoured Gonzalez, and in 1680 sent, through the Holy Office, a decree to the General Oliva ordering that liberty be given to the members of the order to write in favour of Probabiliorism and against Probabilism. Gonzalez was elected general of the order in 1687, but his book was not published until 1694.



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Probabiliorism

According to the teaching of Probabiliorists, it is unlawful to act on the less safe opinion unless it is also the more probable opinion. In addition to an argument derived from the Decree of Innocent XI, the principal arguments for Probabiliorism are the following:



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(1) It is not lawful to follow the less safe opinion, unless it is truly and expeditely probable. But an opinion which is opposed by a more probable opinion is not truly and expeditely probable, since its arguments are annulled by more potent opposing arguments and cannot in consequence gain the assent of a prudent man. Hence it is not lawful for a person to follow the less safe opinion when he regards the safe opinion as more probable.

As has already been explained in connection with Probabilism, Probabilists maintain that the less safe opinion does not necessarily lose its solid probability because of more probable opposing arguments. This being so, the law is not certain, and consequently does not impose an obligation in regard to action, even though in regard to speculative assent it is rightly looked on as more probable.

(2) As in speculative doubt we are bound to give assent to the new which is more likely to exclude error, so in practical doubt about lawfulness we are bound to adopt the opinion which is more likely to exclude the danger of material sin. But the more probable opinion is the more likely to exclude this danger. (Consequently in practical doubt we are bound to adopt the Probabiliorist view. Probabilists reply that this argument leads to Tutorism rather than to Probabiliorism, because the only efficacious way of excluding reasonable danger of material sin is to act on the safe opinion so long as the less safe opinion is not morally certain. Moreover, Probabiliorism would impose an intolerable burden on the consciences of timorous minds, since it would demand an investigation into the various degrees of probability, so as to enable a person definitely to say that one opinion is more probable than another. In view of the great diversity of opinion, which exists on many moral subjects, this definite judgment is practically impossible, especially in the case of the vast majority of men who are not experts in moral science.

Riferimenti per questa pagina

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