

## THE INFLUENCE OF BISHOP BUTLER ON RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

JOHN L. MURPHY

*St. Francis Seminary, Milwaukee*

AMONG THE many problems which have continued to face the Christian world the last three centuries, none is more frequently encountered than that which treats of the relationship between faith and reason. While the sixteenth-century Reformers remained far from a creedless Christianity, their spiritual descendants were, like the Catholics, faced with a new and more far-reaching attack on Christianity within the very first century following the rise of Protestantism. By the time of Descartes's death in 1650, the stage was all but set for the deistic and rationalistic attempts to reduce Christianity to the realm of natural religion itself. In this period of history, specific lines of thought appeared which were to profoundly influence the religious debates of the future.<sup>1</sup> The Kantian reaction to deism was to open the way to the immanentist approach to religion which solidified in such men as Schleiermacher and found its most frank expression in nineteenth-century Liberal Protestantism and in its Catholic cousin, Modernism. On the other hand, the Kantian rationalism went on to find a different form of expression in the theopantism of Hegel, only to draw forth the violent opposition of such men as Kierkegaard, leading to the more existentialist concerns of the present.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout this entire period, however, one element continued to reappear in the many varied discussions: the role of history in relationship to Christian faith. Finding its roots in history, the Christian faith has frequently tended to lapse into an understanding of the certitude of faith that would identify it with that certitude proper to historical conclusions; it was this tendency which continually provoked a series of reactions, coming up to the present moment, in which those who despaired of rooting the certitude of faith in history attempted to come

<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. L. Murphy, "Can Historical Method Prove Christ's Divinity?" *Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Convention, CTSA* (Yonkers, N.Y., 1963) pp. 3-15.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. L. Murphy, "Modernism and the Teaching of Schleiermacher," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 144 (1961) 377-97; 145 (1961) 15-38; "Faith and Reason in the Teaching of Kierkegaard," *ibid.* 145 (1961) 233-65.

into contact with Christ and His message in some "Instant" outside the confines of history and time. Of its very nature, historical certitude involves something of the transient, the unsolved. There is always the possibility of encountering new evidence that will change our final conclusion, or of viewing the evidence on hand in a new and better light so as to reach a different conclusion. As Marrou expresses it, "research is of itself indefinite, historical truth is never definitive, it is always still becoming. . . ."<sup>3</sup> This is not to deny the validity of historical certitude, but it is to insist that it cannot be ranked with the absoluteness of metaphysical certitude; it moves in the realm of probable knowledge, and the certitude of history, ultimately reducible to moral certitude, differs both from physical and from metaphysical certitude. These are not univocal concepts. In the realm of reason, unswerving certitude is found only in those matters related to metaphysical principles; physical and moral certitude are, as Phillips expresses it, "imperfect forms of certitude, the name being applied to them analogically inasmuch as they proportionally share in the essence of formal certitude, the exclusion of fear of error."<sup>4</sup>

In human life, then, man not only can but must act upon physical and moral certitude in vast areas of his life. Even though he is often working in the realm of probable knowledge where certitude is based upon his judgment of a number of observable events, he recognizes that he has no other choice; the problems and decisions of daily life leap beyond metaphysical questions and the absolute certitude they engender. Nevertheless, probability and certitude are not mutually exclusive; certitude is verified essentially in firmness of adhesion. As Phillips points out, "though certitude implies firmness of adhesion, it does not entail the absolute necessitating of the mind; in other words, probable arguments can generate certitude."<sup>5</sup>

Thus historical certitude, while excluding any reasonable fear of error, cannot lay claim to that absolute and unhesitating adherence proper to metaphysical certitude.<sup>6</sup> For this basic reason, if we attempt

<sup>3</sup> H.-I. Marrou, *De la connaissance historique* (4th ed.; Paris, 1962) p. 279.

<sup>4</sup> R. P. Phillips, *Modern Thomistic Philosophy* 2 (Westminster, Md., 1934) 13; cf. Murphy, "Can Historical Method Prove Christ's Divinity?" pp. 15-27.

<sup>5</sup> Phillips, *op. cit.* 2, 13-14.

<sup>6</sup> This is the basic thought of all of those who place historical certitude in the category of moral certitude; cf. G. J. Garraghan, *A Guide to Historical Method* (New York, 1957) pp.

to make historical certitude the ultimate root of the certitude of faith, we at once encounter an insurmountable problem: How can a certitude of this type satisfactorily explain the absolute and unswerving adherence that Christian faith claims is proper to it? Not even an attempt to reduce such moral certitude to the metaphysical would solve the problem (if indeed moral certitude can be "reductively metaphysical" at all); a faith resting ultimately on metaphysical certitude would still be something far inferior to the unique certitude of faith, something which claims to surpass the realm of reason entirely.<sup>7</sup> Faith possesses a certitude which can only be viewed as belonging to a category of its own, reaching far beyond even the firmness of metaphysical certitude: *assensus super omnia firmus*.

#### BISHOP JOSEPH BUTLER

As we have indicated elsewhere, the Anglican Bishop Joseph Butler (1692-1752)<sup>8</sup> serves as an excellent example of the futility of attempting to found the assent of faith upon historical evidence and the argument from probability alone. Once hailed as one of the greatest Christian apologists of modern times, Butler eventually fell into such disrepute that some came to consider him even an enemy of Christianity. His great work, *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Consistency and Course of Nature* (1726), was directed against the utter rationalism of the deistic era, but actually his defense of Christian truth, though motivated by a deep and sincere concern for mysteries of faith, fell into the very same error which served as the foundation of

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70-80; J.-M. Levasseur, *Le lieu théologique "histoire"* (Trois-Rivières, 1960) pp. 158-66; M. C. D'Arcy, *The Meaning and Matter of History* (New York, 1961) pp. 45-47; Marrou, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-17, 133-36, 300.

<sup>7</sup> Garraghan, *op. cit.*, p. 76, explains the possibility of a reduction of historical certitude to metaphysical by an appeal to the principle of sufficient reason, but its validity can be questioned. Cf. Murphy, "Can Historical Method Prove Christ's Divinity?" p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Butler was born at Wantage, Berkshire, in 1692 of a Presbyterian family; as a young man he gave up his childhood faith and conformed to the Established Church, pursuing his studies at Oxford and eventually taking Anglican orders. In 1719 he was appointed preacher at the Rolls Chapel in London, thus beginning an ecclesiastical career which led him to become the Bishop of Bristol in 1738, and the Bishop of Durham in 1750. He died in 1752. For a study of his life and works, cf. E. C. Mossner, *Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason* (New York, 1936).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. L. Murphy, "A Rationalist Defense of Christianity," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 148 (1963) 217-35, 315-36.

deism. It reduced Christianity to a human level in a manner never envisioned by Butler. Because of this, the *Analogy of Religion* was eventually recognized as a subtle danger to Christian faith itself when later readers came to perceive the basic rationalism and potential scepticism which it contained.

The ultimate explanation for this is to be found in the nature of religious assent as proposed by the author of the *Analogy*. It is, from start to finish, a purely rational assent, based upon historical evidence (chiefly miracles and prophecies), and set forth with the frank admission that an argument along these lines moves entirely in the realm of probability. Butler's often repeated axiom that "probability is the very guide of life"<sup>10</sup> sets the tone for his whole approach to faith. He attempts to answer the objection (that probability does not give much in the way of certitude) by doing nothing more than defending two very unsatisfactory propositions regarding the problem at hand. First, he grants that the certitude of which he speaks is not overwhelming, but he also insists that we must be realistic enough to see that we have no more than such probable evidence in regard to Christian faith, so that we must learn to live with it.<sup>11</sup> Second, he tries to indicate that, although the certitude involved is not all that might be desired, it is still not as insignificant as some would make it, since "probable proofs, by being added, not only increase the evidence, but multiply it."<sup>12</sup>

When this answer is reversed, however, this same approach can easily enough be turned against Christianity, so as to claim that Christian faith has no real basis for an absolute and unswerving assent; one might just as well embrace agnosticism or even atheism. If Christian faith does not stand apart from all else, in a class of its own, the uniqueness of Christianity vanishes from sight. And this is the very line of argument followed by many later readers of Butler's *Analogy*, so that his reputation as a Christian apologist has been consistently downgraded until he is currently spoken of, with good reason, as a "rationalist apologist for Christianity."<sup>13</sup> From almost universal praise at the start, the judgment

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* 1, Intro., 4 (in W. E. Gladstone, ed., *The Works of Joseph Butler*, D.C.L. 1 [Oxford, 1896] 5). We will cite from this edition throughout; the numbers given in parentheses indicate the volume and page in the Gladstone edition (the text of the *Analogy* is found in Vol. 1, 1-383). Thus the present citation: *Analogy* 1, Intro., 4 (1, 5).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Analogy* 2, 6, 2 (1, 277); 2, 7, 1 (1, 302).      <sup>12</sup> *Analogy* 2, 7, 60 (1, 350-51).

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Spinka, *Christian Thought from Erasmus to Berdyayev* (New York, 1962) p. 82.

of history has passed into one of generally accepted condemnation, due largely to the change in philosophical approaches during these centuries, thus causing men to read Butler's works from a different point of view and leading them to draw quite opposite conclusions. Basically, the weakness is inherent in the principles upon which Butler built his defense of Christianity, so that it was inevitable that in time his rationalism would come to light.

In view of this, it is not surprising that during the first century after the appearance of the *Analogy* the work was generally highly praised; all things considered, attacks upon it were surprisingly few in number. Within Butler's lifetime, he was able to see the *Analogy* and the *Sermons* go through four editions each in England, as well as a Dublin reprint of the *Analogy*. As Mossner relates: "In 1752 Butler's authority in theology was unrivalled except by that of Tillotson, S. Clarke, Sherlock, and perhaps Edmund Law and Warburton. But of all those eminent reputations, that of Butler alone was not on the wane."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the influence of Butler continued to increase, even on the Continent (thanks to a German translation of the *Analogy* in 1756). His works were soon highly recommended in the universities of England, and about 1833 the *Analogy* was added to the list of standard authors for the final examination at Oxford. Thus, in Mossner's judgment, Butler only reached the peak of his popularity a hundred years after the *Analogy* first appeared—roughly from 1837 to 1860.<sup>15</sup>

This triumph, however, was short-lived. Once the influence of Kantian philosophy began to exercise its force, there were certain voices gradually raised against Butler and his rationalistic approach to faith. Those who read the *Analogy* from vastly different philosophical backgrounds became highly critical, so that his popularity began to decline in some circles; yet, precisely because of this criticism, his writings gained favor in others, so that Butler met with both favor and disfavor in the debates of the early part of the nineteenth century. He was particularly praised by those involved in the Oxford Movement, especially by John Henry Newman. On the other hand, the *Analogy* drew the attention of those

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It is not difficult to perceive the rationalism and scepticism implied in many of Butler's statements, such as in *Analogy* 2, Concl., 17 (1, 381): "It is certain, that doubting implies a degree of evidence for that of which we doubt; and that this degree of evidence as really lays us under obligations as demonstrative evidence."

<sup>14</sup> Mossner, *Bishop Butler*, p. 186.    <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

who shared in no way the aspirations of the Oxford Movement, but who perceived the scepticism latent in Butler's approach and who wished to make use of his authority or his now recognized failure in order to argue their case for rationalism, scepticism, and agnosticism.

In this fashion, Butler was credited by various groups as defending opposite movements, neither of which he himself had ever favored. Some thought he was a pro-Romanist leader in the Anglican Church, while others looked upon him as an unwitting promoter of the unencumbered scepticism or even atheism of the nineteenth-century liberals. Among those who embraced neither extreme, however, the influence of Butler simply declined with the rise of newer philosophical interests. For those who had accepted the immanentist approach to faith in the post-Kantian era, and for whom religion became ever more subjective, there simply was no longer any place left for Butler and the *Analogy*. Although in 1852 Newman felt he could describe Butler as "the greatest name in the Anglican Church,"<sup>16</sup> his success was actually near its end; as Mossner expresses it: "Modern knowledge discloses his many dialectical and theological errors, and it is only sentiment that attempts to keep him in the position of honor as an apologist."<sup>17</sup>

The Catholic judgment concerning the *Analogy* is no more flattering today than these others, though for different reasons in some instances. In general, however, it will necessarily center on the fact that, in attempting to meet the deists on their own terms, Butler fell into errors equally dangerous, particularly in regard to the ultimate nature of religious assent, which in Butler's system emerges as nothing more than a rational judgment of human reason, based chiefly upon the evaluation of such objective "proofs" for the truth of Christianity as miracles and prophecies as they are presented to us in the records of history. The Catholic perceives here a confusion between the question of the reasonableness of faith in the sense that it does not do violence to man's intellectual nature (the judgment of credibility), and the problem of the assent of faith itself.

#### STARTING POINT: JOHN LOCKE

Basically, Butler's concept of the argument from probability, which is so essential to his system, is derived from John Locke, who in his

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227, n. 67.    <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

*Essay on Human Understanding* distinguishes between demonstration and probability. For Locke, a demonstration means that one has shown the agreement or disagreement of two ideas by means of one or more proofs indicating a constant, immutable, and visible connection between the two ideas. Probability, on the other hand, results when such a constant connection is not present (or at least is not perceived by us); yet the agreement we note between the two ideas in this instance arises because whatever we do perceive is sufficient to induce the mind to draw a firm enough conclusion to make the individual feel justified in going on to act.

As an example of this, Locke refers to the various theorems of geometry which speak of the equality between the angles of a triangle. One man, he claims, may study the proof of these statements and grasp them entirely; this man perceives a demonstration. Another, however, may hear a respected mathematician state these theorems, and though he fails to understand the full argument, this individual nevertheless concludes that the statements are true. He does this on two counts. First, what the mathematician says sounds "probable"; it is this perception of probability that becomes the basis of the assent. Second, the authority of the man on whose testimony the individual accepts these theorems is an added proof of their truth. In this way, apart from a demonstration, the assent of an individual to a particular truth may be ultimately caused by "the wonted veracity of the speaker in other cases, or his supposed veracity in this."<sup>18</sup>

Locke also speaks of the "several degrees and grounds of probability,"<sup>19</sup> and insists that "probability is likeliness to be true. . . ."<sup>20</sup> As opposed to a "demonstration," Locke calls the act of the mind associated with probability either "belief, assent, or opinion," noting that in such probable knowledge we accept a certain proposition as true because of the "arguments or proofs that are found to persuade us to receive it as true, without certain knowledge that it is so."<sup>21</sup> Precisely because it fails to achieve that certain knowledge proper to a demonstration,

<sup>18</sup> John Locke, *Essay on Human Understanding*, Book 4, chap. 15, 1 (cf. *The Works of John Locke*, printed for J. Johnson et al. 3 [London, 1801] 88-89). This emphasis upon external "proof" in relationship to probable evidence is central in Butler's entire position; cf. Murphy, "A Rationalist Defense of Christianity," pp. 227-31, 321-27.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 4, 15, 2 (Johnson edition: 3, 89).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 4, 15, 3 (3, 89).      <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

Locke's "probability" admits of degrees.<sup>23</sup> There are some probable statements, he claims, which border so nearly on certainty that we entertain no real doubts about them, and proceed to act upon them as resolutely *as if* they were infallibly demonstrated and certain. At the same time, he admits that in this category the degrees of certainty can vary from "almost certain and demonstrated" to "improbability and unlikeliness," almost to "impossibility." And the assent will vary accordingly, reaching from full assurance and confidence (in regard to those things "almost demonstrated"), down to conjecture, doubt, or even distrust (in regard to matters considerably less certain).<sup>23</sup>

The chief point of agreement between Butler and Locke would seem to lie in Locke's admission that one can accept certain propositions as true simply because of the "arguments" or "proofs" associated with them, even though the individual would still have the consciousness that he does not possess a true demonstration (which alone, for Locke, "infallibly determines the understanding, and produces certain knowledge . . ." <sup>24</sup>). Similarly, there is an insistence in Locke that in many cases the upper ranges of probability are sufficiently certain to be acted upon with no serious doubts or hesitations; in fact, for practical purposes, he feels that these states of mind leave us as little liberty to assent or not to assent as does a true demonstration.<sup>25</sup> Locke's reason for holding this is emphasized strongly by Butler,<sup>26</sup> that is, that we have

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 4, 15, 2 (3, 89); 4, 16, 6-9 (3, 96-98).

<sup>24</sup> This thought is reflected in Butler as well. Cf. *Analogy* 1, Intro., 1 (1, 3): "Probable evidence is essentially distinguished from demonstrative by this, that it admits of degrees; and of all variety of them, from the highest moral certainty, to the very lowest presumption."

<sup>25</sup> Locke, *op. cit.* 4, 15, 5 (3, 90).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 4, 16, 9 (3, 98).

<sup>26</sup> E.g., *Analogy* 2, 8, 8 and 9; 2, Concl., 15 (1, 358, 359, 380): "For, it is said that the proof of religion is involved in such inextricable difficulties, as to render it doubtful; and that it cannot be supposed, that, if it were true, it would be left upon doubtful evidence. . . . Now the observation, that, from the natural constitution and course of things, we must *in our temporal concerns*, almost continually, and in matters of great consequence, act upon evidence of a like kind and degree to the evidence of religion, is an answer to this argument; because it shows, that it is according to the conduct and character of the Author of Nature to appoint we should act upon evidence like to that. . . . And, as the force of this answer lies merely in the parallel, which there is between the evidence for religion and for our *temporal conduct*; the answer is equally just and conclusive, whether the parallel be made out, by showing the evidence of the former to be higher, or the evidence of the latter to be lower. . . . And it is so far from being the method of Providence in other cases, to afford us



no other alternative than acting on what small evidence we possess, since it is necessary to act here and now. As Locke states: "The conduct of our lives, and the management of our great concerns, will not bear delay; for those depend, for the most part, on the determination of our judgment in points wherein we are not capable of certain and demonstrative knowledge, and wherein it is necessary for us to embrace the one side or the other."<sup>27</sup>

Locke also speaks of analogy in a manner reminiscent of Butler's treatment.<sup>28</sup> He claims that "in things which sense cannot discern, analogy is the great rule of probability."<sup>29</sup> By this, Locke indicates a type of knowledge which cannot arise from either observation or testimony, but can be known only by *comparing* certain things to other objects that we do know on the basis of observation and testimony; he cites, as examples of this, the existence of angels and microscopic beings. Thus, he points out that "analogy in these matters is the only help we have, and it is from that alone we draw all our grounds of probability."<sup>30</sup> The truth of what we know in this manner will be more or less "probably true" in the degree that it agrees with truths already established in our minds in other ways, and insofar as it fits proportionately into the entire complex of our knowledge.

While Butler makes this type of argument, based on analogy and probability, the ultimate basis for the assent of faith, Locke himself places faith on an entirely distinct level; had Butler followed Locke's lead in this regard, he might well have avoided the rationalistic pit into which his defense of Christianity fell. Locke fails to appreciate the role of a visible Church in the realm of faith, as included in Catholic teaching, and he casts aside any notion of a true faith existing within any church or community; in doing this, however, he does not reduce the assent of faith to the realm of reason.

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such overbearing evidence, as some require in proof of Christianity; that, on the contrary, the evidence upon which we are naturally appointed to act in *common matters*, throughout a very great part of life, is doubtful in a high degree" (italics ours).

<sup>27</sup> Locke, *op. cit.* 4, 16, 3 (3, 94).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Murphy, "A Rationalist Defense of Christianity," pp. 315-21.

<sup>29</sup> Locke, *op. cit.* 4, 16, 12, title (3, 100).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 4, 16, 12 (3, 101). Locke is obviously thinking here of a "proof" of the existence of angels from the philosophical point of view; and his notion of microscopic beings reflects an earlier period of scientific development; our concern here, however, is solely with the principles he set forth.

It is true that for Locke the various communities represent only diverse religious opinions, and he criticizes not only Catholics but all others, Christian and non-Christian alike, who (from his point of view) pin their faith on nothing more secure than the variable opinions of their fellow men: "And if the opinions and persuasions of others, whom we know and think well of, be a ground of assent, men have reason to be Heathens in Japan, Mahometans in Turkey, Papists in Spain, Protestants in England, and Lutherans in Sweden."<sup>31</sup>

What is of interest here is Locke's concern for the assent and certitude of faith. While Butler attempts to combine an assent of faith which would be based upon rational argument and proofs (chiefly miracles and prophecies) and at the same time be realized in the faith of the Established Church of England,<sup>32</sup> Locke places the assent of faith and its corresponding certitude in a different category altogether:

Besides those we have hitherto mentioned, there is one sort of proposition that challenges the highest degree of our assent upon bare testimony, whether the thing proposed agree or disagree with common experience and the ordinary course of things or no. The reason whereof is, because the testimony is of such a one, as cannot deceive, nor be deceived, and that is of God himself. This carries with it an assurance beyond doubt, evidence beyond exception.<sup>33</sup>

For Locke, this authority of God is perceived in a fashion distinct from all human proof and historical or rational arguments; the testimony is revelation, and our assent to it is called faith, which "absolutely determines our minds, and as perfectly excludes all wavering, as our knowledge itself; and we may as well doubt of our own being, as we can, whether any revelation from God be true."<sup>34</sup> In a statement almost diametrically opposed to the position of Butler, Locke warns

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 4, 15, 6 (3, 91).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Murphy, "A Rationalist Defense of Christianity," pp. 334-35.

<sup>33</sup> Locke, *op. cit.* 4, 16, 14 (3, 102-3). The importance of viewing the Church as the living Body of Christ and the divinely-guided magisterium as the extension of Christ's authority in time and space escaped Locke entirely. What he rejects is the teaching of any church or community, since he feels that it can represent nothing more than the purely personal "opinions and persuasions of others." Such a detached "teaching body," quite distinct from God, is entirely foreign to the Catholic view of faith but Locke perceived nothing of this approach to Christianity.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 4, 16, 14 (3, 103).

against the danger of believing a false revelation, since in such a case "our assent can be rationally no higher than the evidence of its being a revelation. . . . If the evidence of its being a revelation, or that this is its true sense, be only on probable proofs, our assent can reach no higher than an assurance or diffidence, arising from the more or less apparent probability of the proofs."<sup>85</sup>

Had Butler been as anxious to avoid this danger as was Locke, his *Analogy* would have been considerably transformed to secure for the assent of faith the absolute certitude it demands. Locke distinguishes faith and reason entirely. Reason, he says, "as contradistinguished to faith," is "the discovery of the certainty or probability of such propositions or truths as the mind can deduce." Faith, on the other hand, "is the assent to any proposition, not thus made out by the deductions of reason, but upon the credit of the proposer, as coming from God, in some extraordinary way of communication."<sup>86</sup> In other words, the certitude of faith—the psychological act itself—cannot be ultimately reduced to some form of human reason (whether it be a deistic reduction of Christian truth to the level of reason, or some form of rational demonstration or argument from probability, such as Butler defends).

From a Catholic point of view, it is also noteworthy that, for Locke, reason must still "judge the truth of its being a revelation."<sup>87</sup> He would not propose any purely subjective type of faith, nor run the risk of subjecting faith to the terrors of false illuminationism or psychotic hallucination. His position here approaches far more the teaching of the Catholic Church in regard to the judgment of credibility and the reasonableness of faith.<sup>88</sup> Locke insists on a rational preparation for faith, but for him the assent of faith itself is something distinct and unique, and it is for this reason that its certitude far overreaches the limits of even the highest type of rational argumentation. The motive of faith in Locke's view is rooted on the authority of God, perceived not in any purely natural manner, but in some supernatural manner that affects the act of faith even as a psychological act. On this point Locke approaches far more, in his own fashion, the Thomist-Saurezian

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* 4, 18, 2 (3, 126).    <sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* 4, 18, 8 (3, 132).

<sup>88</sup> Cf. J. L. Murphy, "Two Theories of Faith," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 147 (1962) 22-25; "Faith and Reason in the Teaching of Kierkegaard," pp. 258-61.

theory of faith and its insistence that the motive of supernatural faith itself is believed; and for the same reason, his concept of the assent of faith is totally distinct from that of Butler, despite the similarity on other scores.

#### THE CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE SCHOOL

In England during the eighteenth century there arose the Christian Evidence School, which, following the lead of Locke as interpreted by Butler, emphasized above all the argument from probability and external evidence. It culminated in William Paley's *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (1794), which Mossner describes as a "skilful reintegration of Butler's method with Lardner's data."<sup>39</sup> Nathaniel Lardner, a nonconformist, had written his *Credibility of the Gospel History* (1723-55) as an attempt to confirm the New Testament as pure history (in our more modern sense) by making an appeal to non-scriptural writers; it is something of a symbol of the antideistic reaction which led to an attempt to meet the deists and rationalists on their own terms by treating the Bible purely as a historical book.

In Paley, this historical approach of Lardner is coupled with Butler's appeal to analogy and probability, resulting in an extreme expression of what may not have immediately appeared so obvious in Butler, that is, a type of Christian faith that rests entirely on historical evidence. It is a form of the reduction of the assent of faith to the purely rational level, since it is only through the records of history that the believer comes to perceive both the fact of revelation and the authority of God associated with that revelation. Not unlike Butler, Paley avoids a discussion of the mysterious nature of the doctrines of Christianity, claiming that man is able to perceive the truth of the Christian system without going into such matters as the Trinity or the Incarnation: "The doctrine itself is by no means necessary to the belief of Christianity, which must, in the first instance at least, depend upon the ordinary maxims of historical credibility."<sup>40</sup>

In a similar fashion, Paley answers the objection that the proof of Christianity is not as clear and demanding as it might have been. He admits that we could imagine all other possible ways in which God might

<sup>39</sup> Mossner, *Bishop Butler*, p. 146.

<sup>40</sup> William Paley, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1795) p. 436.

have dealt with men (such as personal revelation, intuition, and the like); but dealing with revelation as it has actually been given, and as it is known to us through historical evidence, Paley insists: "The question is not, whether Christianity possesses the highest possible degree of evidence, but whether the not having more evidence be a sufficient reason for rejecting that which we have."<sup>41</sup>

DAVID HUME

This type of appeal to historical evidence as the foundation for the assent of faith was destined to come under early attack by a man who had the greatest respect for Butler, but who nevertheless was instrumental in undermining Butler's philosophical position. This man was David Hume.<sup>42</sup> Hume had already written his *Essay on Miracles* before he published the *Treatise on Human Nature* (1739); it was originally a part of this work, but Hume cautiously excised it from the tract. Hume had hoped to submit the *Treatise* to Butler, but realizing, it would seem, the probable effect of the chapter on miracles, he suppressed it in hopes of receiving a better evaluation of his work; this is at least one of the probable reasons for this change in Hume's plans. Eventually his attempts to contact Butler failed, and he sent him only a copy of the *Treatise* when it was finally published.<sup>43</sup> On the advice of his friends, the essay on miracles was not restored to its place in the *Treatise* at this time, although Hume might also have been motivated by the thought suggested by Mossner, that is, "an indication that what he was counting on was serious consideration of his philosophy as philosophy, rather than as religious controversy."<sup>44</sup> The essay on miracles, however, was later included in Hume's *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding* (a work which finally appeared in 1748 under a different title: *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*). As might be expected, the essay on miracles at once stirred up strong religious controversy; this was four years before Butler's death.

Hume is not overmuch concerned with the question of probability, although he admits the notion and makes use of it. While Locke divides all arguments into demonstrative and probable, Hume urges a

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 412.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. E. C. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (Austin, Texas, 1954) p. 110.

<sup>43</sup> Mossner, *Bishop Butler*, p. 157.      <sup>44</sup> Mossner, *David Hume*, p. 112.

threefold distinction: demonstrations, proofs, and probabilities. By proofs he means "such arguments from experience as leave no room for doubt or opposition."<sup>46</sup> There is, however, a slightly different twist to the notion as it appears in Hume. Arguing from his basic position that "there be no such thing as Chance in the world," Hume understands probability only as the state of mind resulting from our ignorance of the real cause of any event.<sup>46</sup>

This notion of probability figures largely in his discussion of miracles. Hume's purpose in his *Essay on Miracles* is not to prove the philosophical impossibility of miracles, as is often thought; he is concerned throughout with showing merely that miracles cannot be used as a foundation for any system of religion. His chief argument is that the fact of a miracle simply cannot be proved on the basis of testimony: "Upon the whole, then, it appears that no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof . . . and therefore we may establish it as a maxim that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion."<sup>47</sup>

Hume's argument is that "it is experience only which gives authority to human testimony."<sup>48</sup> Thus, if a number of people testify from their experience that there has been a miracle, there will also be as many people who will testify that according to their experience there are only laws of nature. In this way the two contrary testimonies will cancel out one another. Hume does claim that there might be a "miracle" that could be proved by an unusual universality of testimony, but he goes on to add that "perhaps, it will be impossible to find any such in all the records of history."<sup>49</sup> He suggests a case where the testimony of all people, from all parts of the earth, agreed that from the first of January, 1600, there was a total darkness over the whole earth for eight days. Should that happen, Hume concludes that "our present philosophers, instead of doubting the fact, ought to receive it as certain, and ought to search for the causes whence it might be derived."<sup>50</sup>

In other words, Hume still feels that nothing happens either by

<sup>46</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, ed. L. A. Selby-Biggs (Oxford, 1902) Section 6: "Of Probability," no. 46, p. 56.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, Section 10: "Of Miracles," Part 2, no. 98, p. 127.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 99, p. 127.    <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 99, p. 128.

“chance” or in any “miraculous” manner outside the fast and unchanging laws of nature. While he would accept such a “miracle” as this as certain, he still does not really think it is a miracle in the usual sense at all, and would want to set about investigating the laws which brought it about. As for a resurrection from the dead, Hume rejects this a priori, just as he rejects Christianity.<sup>61</sup> For him, such a thing simply could not happen, even by divine power; his scepticism is so strong that he feels that even God must deal with mankind through the testimony of other men, and this is quite untrustworthy.

Of concern for us here is the argument against religious assent that Hume levels at Christian theologians. He notes his pleasure at the type of reasoning he has proposed, “as I think it may serve to confound those dangerous friends or disguised enemies to the *Christian Religion*, who have undertaken to defend it by the principles of human reason.”<sup>62</sup> The opening paragraph of the chapter on miracles is really an attack on the use of historical evidence as a proof for Christianity. Hume begins by recalling Tillotson’s argument against the Real Presence, based on the assumption that “the authority, either of the scripture or of tradition, is founded merely in the testimony of the apostles who were eye-witnesses to those miracles of our Saviour, by which he proved his divine mission.”<sup>63</sup> Hence, Tillotson concludes that the evidence for the truth of the Christian religion is less than the evidence for the truth of our senses. The apostles at least had this evidence of their senses, but we are reduced to nothing but testimony—indeed, a testimony that “must diminish in passing from them to their disciples. . . .”<sup>64</sup>

Tillotson uses this argument to reject the doctrine of transubstantiation as contrary to experience, but Hume goes on to apply the same argument to miracles in general. It is interesting to note, however, the picture of more orthodox theologians that is depicted here. Christianity is supposedly proved by an appeal to history and the testimony concerning it. Hume’s presentation of the Christian faith exaggerates its dependence upon reason alone, but it must be admitted that the appeal to reason to which Hume objects had been overworked

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 99, pp. 128–29; cf. Mossner, *David Hume*, p. 174.

<sup>62</sup> Hume, *Enquiry*, Section 10, Part 2, no. 100, p. 130.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, Section 10, Part 1, no. 86, p. 109.      <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

by the apologetes he had in mind, including Bishop Butler. Hume uses the same argument from probability and turns it into a tool for destroying the force of Butler's *Analogy*, by implication at least. Hume insists that the probability for the miraculous evidence of the truth of Christianity is outweighed by the probability that everything happens according to the unchanging laws of nature, and that the testimony concerning these miracles is therefore untrustworthy. A wise man, says Hume, "proportions his belief to the evidence. . . . He weighs the opposite experiments,"<sup>55</sup> and finally compares the two sides, subtracting the smaller evidence from the greater "in order to know the exact force of the superior evidence."<sup>56</sup>

Whatever type of faith Hume does retain, he sees at least that it should be something distinguished from reason. He notes that, in regard to Christianity, "mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity."<sup>57</sup> This is true in every sense of the word, but the apologetes Hume had in mind were actually attempting to prove the truth of Christianity in this manner. Apparently Hume looks upon Christianity as subversive of the principles of understanding. Thus, his description of a believer is obviously cynical: "Whoever is moved by Faith to assent to it [Christianity], is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience."<sup>58</sup> But if he fails to see the truth of Christianity, Hume does manage to perceive the weakness of that defense of Christian truth proposed by those who appeal to reason alone.

#### OTHER OBJECTIONS TO BUTLER

It is not surprising, in the light of such considerations, that similar objections were aimed more directly at the doctrine of Bishop Butler in the *Analogy*. In his *Autobiography*, John Stuart Mill (born in 1806) relates that he was brought up in an atmosphere devoid of any religious belief in the ordinary acceptance of the word. He recalls what his father had told him on this subject of religion:

I had heard him say that the turning point of his mind on the subject was reading Butler's *Analogy*. That work, of which he always continued to speak with respect,

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 87, pp. 110, 111.      <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 87, p. 111.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, Section 10, Part 2, no. 101, p. 131.      <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*



kept him, as he said, for some considerable time, a believer in the divine authority of Christianity by proving to him that whatever are the difficulties in believing that the Old and New Testaments proceed from or record the acts of a perfectly wise and good Being, the same and still greater difficulties stand in the way of the belief that a Being of such a character can have been the Maker of the universe.<sup>60</sup>

This was hardly the purpose Bishop Butler had in mind in writing the *Analogy*, that is, to show that deism involved even greater difficulties than Christianity, so that one might as well remain a Christian; but it is a reading that can be given to it. In the case of James Mill, even this was only a temporary help; as his son records: "Finding therefore no halting place in Deism, he remained in a state of perplexity until, doubtless after many struggles, he yielded to the conviction that concerning the origin of things nothing whatever can be known."<sup>61</sup>

Tristram has remarked on the fact that while Butler's *Analogy* was successful if read by a deist from his own point of view, if we consider later nondeistic readers "we shall find ourselves forced to the conclusion that a considerable number had their faith, if not shattered, at least weakened rather than confirmed by Butler's apologetic."<sup>62</sup> Mossner cites additional witnesses to this fact. William Pitt, the younger, declared that "Butler's work raised in his mind more doubts than it had answered,"<sup>63</sup> and Thomas Huxley parodies Butler's argument in the *Analogy* thus: "There is no absurdity in theology so great that you cannot parallel it by a greater absurdity in nature."<sup>64</sup> The Unitarian James Martineau claims that he considered the *Analogy* of Butler to contain "the most terrible persuasives to atheism that have ever been produced."<sup>64</sup>

With such changes in view, it is not surprising that about 1860 the *Analogy* was dropped from the list of standard authors for the final

<sup>60</sup> *The Autobiography of John Stuart Mill*, ed. J. J. Coss (New York, 1924) p. 27.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>62</sup> Henry Tristram, "Bishop Butler's Analogy: A Persuasive to Popery," *Dublin Review* 199 (1936) 126.

<sup>63</sup> R. I. and S. Wilberforce, *Life of William Wilberforce* 1 (1838) 89-90, 94, 95; in Mossner, *Bishop Butler*, p. 200.

<sup>64</sup> Leonard Huxley, *Life and Letters of Thomas Henry Huxley* 1 (New York, 1901) 239-40; in Mossner, *Bishop Butler*, p. 220.

<sup>64</sup> James Martineau, *Studies of Christianity* (1858) pp. 93-94; in Mossner, *Bishop Butler*, p. 213.

examination at Oxford; it had been incorporated into the list in 1833. In the 1870's, the criticism of Butler's position appears in more extended fashion in the writings of Leslie Stephen and Matthew Arnold, both worthy of brief consideration.

In his *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876), Stephen gives a very rationalistic interpretation of Butler that is far from flattering to the Bishop of Durham. He notes that "though Butler is habitually described as amongst the ablest champions of Christianity, he has probably made few converts, and has clearly helped some thinkers towards scepticism,"<sup>65</sup> and it is Stephen's opinion that one can certainly discover a line of thought in the *Analogy* that "leads to Atheism."<sup>66</sup>

Despite the title, Stephen's work is not exactly a history but more his own personal reaction to the events and teachings of history, written in the spirit of the nineteenth-century essayist. But his parody of Butler's position is indicative of the manner in which such a mind would react to the *Analogy*. He feels that Butler's argument from probable evidence may simply be reduced to this:

. . . the chances are so awful that we cannot afford to neglect them. If there is no presumption against the existence of heaven and hell, there is a presumption for it; or, at least, a plain reason for acting as though it were a fact. . . . In matters of health or money, we have to act upon insufficient evidence. Why not in matters of salvation? Hell is probable enough to be worth avoiding.<sup>67</sup>

Stephen views Butler's opinion that the need to act upon less than satisfactory evidence indicates a type of reasoning that "provokes the criticism most commonly directed against the 'Analogy.' It is an attempt to meet difficulties, by suggesting equal or greater difficulties. It should, therefore, lead to scepticism rather than to conviction."<sup>68</sup>

Like certain others, Stephen is willing to admit that Butler's argument is undeniable against the deists,<sup>69</sup> but this is not the point of view from which Stephen is writing. He sums up Butler's defense of Christianity by stating that "if *nature* is a riddle, how should the *message* of the God of nature be clear?"<sup>70</sup> This is not an unfair criticism of Butler's

<sup>65</sup> Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* 1 (New York, 1949 reprint) 280.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 1, 301.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 1, 287, 304.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 1, 303.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 1, 307.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*; italics ours.

defense, although it is no criticism of Christianity itself. Had Butler rested the assent of Christian faith on something more solid than his argument from probable evidence, this criticism could never have been made; but Butler directed his thought entirely to the deistic principles, arguing from history and reason alone. Instead of giving the right answer, he actually gives a faulty one by admitting too much of his opponent's position. Stephen is entirely right when he states that "Butler fails to understand that his assertions read by the light of a different set of assumptions would lead to a totally different result."<sup>71</sup>

The evaluation of Butler given by Matthew Arnold is no more favorable than that of Stephen. Arnold delivered two lectures at the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution which were later published in 1876: "Bishop Butler and the *Zeit-Geist*." In them he chose to ask what might be the value of the *Analogy* for the nondeist audience of the nineteenth century.<sup>72</sup> Arnold's final answer is this: "Let us, then, confess it to ourselves plainly. The *Analogy*, the great work on which such immense praise has been lavished, is, for all real intents and purposes now, a failure; it does not serve."<sup>73</sup> It apparently had some force in the past, but it is totally ineffectual now.

Arnold's conclusion is based upon a number of considerations. One of them is the basic inability of the *Analogy* to help those who most need help in their religious life: "I say, a man who is looking seriously for firm ground cannot but soon come to perceive what Butler's argument in the *Analogy* really amounts to, and that there is no help to be got from it."<sup>74</sup> The reason why Arnold asserts this is that the nineteenth century was experiencing a new "*Zeit-Geist*." Remarking that Butler considered miracles and the fulfilment of prophecy to be the fundamental "proofs" of Christianity, Arnold appeals to the biblical criticism of his own age, and holds that this in itself has made the *Analogy* outmoded: "Neither could Butler now speak of the Bible-history being all of it equally 'authentic genuine history,' or argue in behalf of this thesis as he does."<sup>75</sup> Butler's approach belongs to a former age, never more to return.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 1, 305-6.

<sup>72</sup> Matthew Arnold, "Bishop Butler and the *Zeit-Geist*," in *The Works of Matthew Arnold* 9 (London, 1904) 317.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* 9, 333.    <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 9, 322.    <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 9, 329.

It is true that Butler argues from the position of his own age; his argument faces difficulties along these lines today, even when confronted by the most conservative estimate of biblical criticism. Yet this is only a part of the argument formulated by Butler. The chief principle to which he appeals is that of the need of acting on only probable evidence, and it is interesting to note the reason why Arnold attacks Butler on this question: "The wonderful thing about the *Analogy*," he says, "is the poor insignificant result, even in Butler's own judgment,—the puny total outcome,—of all this accumulated evidence from analogy, metaphysics, and Bible-history."<sup>76</sup> Arnold complains that the most Butler's argument can do is indicate that something is "probably" true, and nothing more; nor is he satisfied with Butler's response that we must be content to act on similar evidence in other events of our daily lives. He sums up the argument in favor of religion in this manner: "It ought, in all reason, considering its infinite importance, to have nearly the same influence upon practice, as if it were thoroughly believed."<sup>77</sup>

Arnold contrasts this unsettled state of mind with that which he ascribes to the Bible (and which he would refer to as proper to the assent of supernatural faith):

How unlike, above all, is this motive to the motive always supposed in the book itself of our religion, in the Bible! After reading the *Analogy* one goes instinctively to bathe one's spirit in the Bible again, to be refreshed by its boundless certitude and exhilaration. 'The Eternal is the strength of my life!' 'The foundation of God standeth sure!'—that is the constant tone of religion in the Bible. 'If I tell you the *truth*, why do ye not believe me?—the *evident* truth, that whoever comes to me has life; and evident, because whoever *does* come, gets it!' That is the evidence to constrain our practice which is offered by Christianity.<sup>78</sup>

Had Butler managed to emphasize far better the certitude of faith, the truth that results on the authority of God directly perceived by the believer and not grasped by means of reason alone, this criticism would not be justified. As it is, we must admit that the contrast is well drawn. It is a great failing of the *Analogy* that it leaves faith rooted on so unstable and insecure grounds.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 9, 331.    <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 9, 331–32.    <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 9, 332–33.

## INFLUENCE ON NEWMAN

While the nineteenth century brought forth this criticism of Butler, it also witnessed the high praise accorded him by those involved in the Oxford Movement—Newman, above all. It was about 1823, Newman tells us, that he read Butler's *Analogy*; he was then twenty-two years of age, preparing for his ordination (in 1825) to the priesthood in the Church of England. Newman was greatly impressed by the work. From it he gained two points above all which became, according to his own admission, "the underlying principles of a great portion of my teaching."<sup>79</sup> One of these was Butler's general notion of an analogy between the separate works of God; the other was his "doctrine that Probability is the guide of life. . . ."<sup>80</sup>

It is important to note, however, that these served merely as starting points for Newman's later teaching; he did not accept Butler's position in an uncritical fashion. Thus, he notes that this doctrine of probability in Butler "led me, at least under the teaching to which a few years later I was introduced, to the question of the logical cogency of Faith, on which I have written so much."<sup>81</sup>

The later influences in Newman's life profoundly altered the manner in which he made use of Butler's argument from probability. Newman made the essential distinction we have criticized Butler for ignoring, that is, the distinction between the fact of revelation (the judgment of credibility) and the act of faith itself. Juergens sees a contrast here between Newman's approach and that of the so-called "traditional school":

Newman's aim differs from that of the traditional school of apologists in this that, while the latter demonstrates that human reason has irrefragable proofs for its certitude in the divinity of Christianity, his sole object is to show that the average man has a proof sufficient for his own needs, though he ordinarily cannot analyze this proof, give it proper expression and skillfully defend it against attack.<sup>82</sup>

There is some truth to this, but the fault seems to lie more on the side of the "traditional school," which, in the light of the entire teaching of the Church, does not appear to be quite so "traditional." To seek

<sup>79</sup> John Henry Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua* (London, 1905) chap. 1, p. 10.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*   <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>82</sup> S. P. Juergens, S.M., *Newman on the Psychology of Faith in the Individual* (New York, 1928) p. 148.

"irrefragable proofs" for the divinity of Christianity would seem to be striving to root the certitude of faith on some form of historicorational argumentation; it would reflect the post-Cartesian theories of faith and their confusion of the judgment of credibility (the apologetic problem of the relationship between faith and reason) with the assent of faith itself. The moral certitude sufficient for the judgment of credibility would seem to be the chief concern of Newman when speaking of the preambles of faith.<sup>83</sup>

There should be no difficulty, therefore, in making use of Newman's notion of probable evidence to arrive at this judgment of credibility. Even in its unrevised form in Butler, the argument was claimed by its author to lead one to some sort of moral certitude, but Butler unfortunately made this the grounds for the certitude of faith; this was his failing. In Newman, however, the assent of faith is not grounded on this basis, as he himself reminds us: "Reason is one thing and faith is another, and reason can as little be made a substitute for faith, as faith can be made a substitute for reason."<sup>84</sup>

Just how far Newman eventually separated himself from Butler can be seen in his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* (1874), where he rejects entirely the notion of Christian truth proved from historical argument in a manner evident in Butler:

For myself, I would simply confess that no doctrine of the Church can be rigorously proved by historical evidence; but at the same time that no doctrine can be simply disproved by it. Historical evidence reaches a certain way, more or less, towards a proof of the Catholic doctrines; often nearly the whole way; sometimes it goes only so far as to point in their direction; sometimes there is only an absence of evidence for a conclusion contrary to them; nay, sometimes there is an apparent leaning of the evidence to a contrary conclusion, which has to be explained;—in all cases there is a margin left for the exercise of faith in the word of the Church. He who believes the dogmas of the Church only because he has reasoned them out of History, is scarcely a Catholic. . . . After all, . . . in all cases the immediate motive in the mind of a Catholic for his reception of [these doctrines] is, not that they are proved to him by Reason or by History, but because Revelation has declared them by means of that high ecclesiastical *Magisterium* which is their legitimate exponent.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Murphy, "Two Theories of Faith," p. 23.

<sup>84</sup> John Henry Newman, *Discourses to Mixed Congregations* (London, 1906) p. 189.

<sup>85</sup> John Henry Newman, *A Letter Addressed to His Grace, the Duke of Norfolk, on the Occasion of Mr. Gladstone's Recent Expostulation* (London, 1875) pp. 105, 106.

An analysis of Newman's position on the assent of faith would take us too far afield, but it is generally conceded that he belongs to that school of thought which considers the grace of faith as having a psychological as well as an entitative effect in the believer.<sup>86</sup> Thus, when Newman says that "the absolute and perfect certitude of divine faith does not rest on reasoning or human motives, but solely on the fact that God, the Eternal Truth, who cannot deceive nor be deceived, has spoken,"<sup>87</sup> he is arguing along these lines. In this he is worlds apart from Butler and the *Analogy*, whatever similarity exists on other points.

#### NEWMAN MISUNDERSTOOD

It is quite easy to see the manner in which Newman could possibly have been misunderstood in much of what he wrote. He was a man whose thought-life was constantly evolving, and he wrote in a language and terminology that was sometimes difficult for others to grasp, especially for those who (unlike Newman) were trained in the atmosphere closer to Scholasticism. In many respects Newman is like Augustine, since the writings of each bear so strongly the changing imprint of the particular period of life in which they wrote, or the various debates they faced. Newman does not express himself in the coldly logical terms of the Scholastics, and this increases the difficulty. The similarity between some of Newman's phrases and those of Butler, plus his avowed respect for Butler, might easily have led to misunderstanding.

There is no indication, for example, that Cardinal Manning had Newman in mind in his work *The Grounds of Faith*, but he is surely opposing an approach to faith which would not represent Newman's more mature views, but is certainly that which we find in Butler's *Analogy*:

We are told, indeed, that to be certain is inconsistent with faith, that probability is the atmosphere in which faith lives, and that if you extinguish probabilities, faith dies. Did the Apostles then believe the doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity upon a probability? Did they believe the doctrine of the Incarnation upon

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. Philip Flanagan, *Newman and Faith* (Rome, 1945) pp. 119-138.

<sup>87</sup> John Henry Newman, "Cardinal Newman's *Theses de fide* and His Proposed Introduction to the French Translation of the University Sermons," ed. Henry Tristram, *Gregorianum* 18 (1937) 235 (thesis 9).

conjecture? Was it because they walked in twilight that their faith in their Divine Lord was acceptable?

To what are we come? In this Christian land, once full of light, once in unity with the Church of God, once replenished with truth—to what are we come? A new virtue is promulgated: to be uncertain of the truth and of the will of God; to hold our faith on probabilities. And yet, what is the very idea of Revelation but a Divine assurance of Truth! Where faith begins uncertainty ends. Because faith terminates upon the veracity of God; and what God has spoken and authenticated to us by Divine authority cannot be uncertain.<sup>88</sup>

This is precisely the fault found on all sides with Butler's defense of Christianity. Newman's position on faith, however, was eventually clearly separated from anything approaching this view. This difference in point of view is indicated in a letter dated February 8, 1861; it is cited by Robinson as taken from an unpublished notebook used in the preparation of the *Grammar of Assent*:

Bishop Butler stopped the evil (of scepticism) only by lowering the pretensions of Christianity—for, without wishing to speak disrespectfully of a writer to whom I owe so much, as many others do, still it does seem as if the practical effect of his work was to make faith a mere *practical certainty*, i.e. a taking of certain statements of doctrine, not as true, but as safest to act upon.<sup>89</sup>

In his study of the notion of faith in Newman prior to his conversion to the Church of Rome in 1845, Elbert comes to a similar conclusion, that is, that "Newman's conception of faith must have undergone considerable change in the course of his life. . . ." <sup>90</sup> Prior to 1845, Newman apparently held to a theory of faith similar to that of Butler, in which faith is presented as "a discursive act just as is any other act of reason."<sup>91</sup> Yet Elbert insists that "in his Catholic days Newman was certainly dissatisfied with probability as the guide of life and required more than 'a mere balance of arguments.' For real and earnest practical religion he demanded certitude, at least in the premises."<sup>92</sup>

From his *Discussions and Arguments* it appears that by 1866 Newman had rejected this approach entirely, and had formulated a more

<sup>88</sup> Henry Edward Manning, *The Grounds of Faith* (London, 1881) Lecture 1, p. 11. Cf. a similar statement by Newman, *infra* n. 93.

<sup>89</sup> John Henry Newman, *Letter of February 8, 1861*, in J. Robinson, "Newman's Use of Butler's Arguments," *Downside Review* 76 (1958) 170, n. 32.

<sup>90</sup> J. A. Elbert, *Newman's Conception of Faith Prior to 1845* (Dayton, Ohio, 1933) p. 75.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.



profound theory of faith in which the assent does not rest on reason and historical argument, and in which certitude replaces mere probability:

It is the very characteristic of the profession of faith made by numbers of educated Protestants, and it is the utmost extent to which they are able to go in believing, to hold, not that Christian doctrine is certainly true, but that it has such a semblance of truth, it has such considerable marks of probability upon it, that it is their duty to accept and act upon it, as if it were true beyond all question or doubt; and they justify themselves, and with much reason, by the authority of Bishop Butler.<sup>93</sup>

Newman goes on to add, however, that such a faith “does not rise to the level of the *sine qua non*, which is the condition prescribed for becoming a Catholic.”<sup>94</sup> The entire approach of Newman to the assent and certitude of faith had progressed during these years. It is not too difficult, however, to imagine that some of those who read Newman failed to make the distinction between his earlier and his later positions (if, indeed, they read that much of him to begin with), and thus attributed to the Catholic Cardinal a position he himself had long since rejected. It may be in this way that the faulty notion of faith as an assent based on reason alone, and associated with mere probability, filtered down to the advocates of Modernism. These men did not in all likelihood read Butler any more, but they did read Newman, failing, however, to understand his change of position on these essential points where he came to differ radically from Butler.

#### THE TEACHING OF MODERNISM

Thus we come to the proposition of Modernism condemned in 1907 under Pius X by the decree *Lamentabili*, issued by the Holy Office: “The assent of faith rests ultimately on an accumulation of probabilities.”<sup>95</sup> There was an open attempt on the part of Alfred Loisy to associate Newman with this condemned proposition. After the appearance of the *Lamentabili*, Loisy claimed that the statement that the assent of faith rests on an accumulation of probabilities “was Newman’s doctrine.”<sup>96</sup> Loisy refers to an article he had published under

<sup>93</sup> John Henry Newman, *Discussions and Arguments* (London, 1899) pp. 391–92.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> DB 2025.

<sup>96</sup> Alfred Loisy, *Simples réflexions sur le décret du Saint-Office Lamentabili sans exitu et sur l’encyclique Pascendi dominici gregis* (Paris, 1908) p. 64.

the pseudonym of Firmin in the *Revue du clergé français* of March 15, 1900. The article itself has particular interest.

Like many others who fall into one extreme, Loisy was able to perceive the error of another school of thought very clearly. The article in question was occasioned by the appearance of Auguste Sabatier's *Outline of a Philosophy of Religion*. Sabatier criticizes the Scholastic approach as having rationalized dogma, and goes on to complain that "the intervention of miracle as a criterion or proof of doctrine does not remove the difficulties of the theory; it multiplies and aggravates them."<sup>97</sup> Sabatier holds that with the lapse of time, joined to the incertitude of the documents and the demands of modern thought, it is even more difficult to prove that these miracles are true than it is to prove the truth of the religion they are supposed to substantiate.

We can note in this the same confusion found in Butler, namely, the presumption that miracles and historical evidence are the proof upon which the certitude of faith rests: the doctrine is accepted as the result of a reasoning process. Thus, Sabatier complains that "faith, which, in the Bible, was an act of confidence and consecration to God, becomes an intellectual adherence to an historical testimony or to a doctrinal formula."<sup>98</sup>

Loisy rises to the defense of Catholic faith in this instance and launches out on something of an attack on what he (like Sabatier) considered "traditional apologetics." Unfortunately, both of them were concerned only with this faulty notion so evident in Butler, but found even in the writings of Catholic apologetes in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Loisy saw the error in this approach and set out to solve the problem; but his solution was another error—that of immanentism. While his complaint concerning faith and historical certitude in "traditional" apologetics may have been justified, since the question might then have been presented in so faulty a manner, his solution is just as unacceptable. But understanding the type of appeal given in Butler and reflected elsewhere, we can see the justice of Loisy's comment that "the most clear-sighted spirit, after having studied the most profound apologetic books, can still remain very

<sup>97</sup> Auguste Sabatier, *Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion Based on Psychology and History*, anonymous English translator (New York, 1902) Book 1, chap. 2, 3 (p. 48).

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

undecided and perplexed if it has consulted only speculative reason and has limited his investigation to a critique of the proofs, seeing that each particular proof leads only to a probable conclusion which does not exclude absolutely the possibility of the opposite conclusion. . . ."<sup>99</sup>

This is a complaint in no way different from the many we have recorded in regard to Butler. The solution suggested by Loisy, however, is not the notion of the grace of faith exercising its influence on the psychological as well as the entitative level, but a more subjective, immanent idea of faith associated with the thought of Schleiermacher and similar writers of the post-Kantian era. Loisy denies the value of external evidence as a foundation for faith itself, noting that the full and decisive efficacy of these proofs does not depend on the accumulation of probabilities "which again creates for reason only the utmost probability, but on the intimate experience that one has and on the vital rapport which is established between the soul which seeks and the truth which tenders itself."<sup>100</sup>

This immanent notion of faith is joined throughout the article to Loisy's other doctrinal position regarding the variable expressions proper to religion, and "to the relativity of traditional creeds."<sup>101</sup> His concept of faith is purely subjective: ". . . the profound and universal basis of faith is none other than the conformity of religion with the need and aspirations of man."<sup>102</sup>

In speaking of the role of reason leading to faith, however, Loisy remains quite orthodox, despite his aberrations on the notion of faith itself: "Reason shows the reasonableness of faith; but the moral certitude which it gives is not the absolute certitude of faith, a certitude which results from faith itself and which is an act of the soul in its entirety, aided by God to recognize Him in His revelation."<sup>103</sup> Loisy's definition of faith, of course, reflects his purely immanentist approach, but if we replace this with a truly Catholic concept, the statement expresses quite well the relationship between reason and faith.

<sup>99</sup> A. Firmin (pseudonym of A. Loisy), "Les preuves et l'économie de la révélation," *Revue du clergé français* 23 (15 mars 1900) 140. In his book *Simple réflexions* . . . Loisy refers (p. 64) to this article as having been written by him.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142. Cf. Murphy, "Modernism and the Teaching of Schleiermacher," pp. 377-82.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

Loisy notes that the enemies of religion have attempted to show how inane religion is by making an appeal to science and reason, but he complains that the apologetes have also made a great mistake by attempting to demonstrate the absolute truth of religion by these same arguments of reason and science.<sup>104</sup> It is not an unjust criticism. This represents another example of the weakness already demonstrated in Butler of attempting to meet the adversary on his own ground, only to end up by giving a totally unsatisfactory defense of one's own position.

In speaking of the *Lamentabili*, however, Loisy is anxious to indicate that the condemned doctrine of faith resting upon probabilities is really the doctrine of Newman. Benard has already shown that Loisy extracted a passage from the *Apologia* of Newman which describes his state of mind in 1843-44, while still an Anglican. Considering the acknowledged appreciation Newman had for Butler, it is not difficult to see in this statement a doctrinal position in regard to faith which would reflect the *Analogy* of Butler. Nevertheless, Newman is careful to note in this precise section of the *Apologia* that he is recording attitudes which had been his in the past (and which he had by this time come to reject):

Let it be recollected that I am historically relating my state of mind, at the period of my life which I am surveying. I am not speaking theologically, nor have I any intention of going into controversy: but, speaking historically of what I held in 1843-4, I say that I believed in a God on a ground of probability, that I believed in Christianity on a probability, and that I believed in Catholicism on a probability, and that these three grounds of probability, distinct from each other of course in subject-matter, were still, all of them, one and the same in nature of proof, as being probabilities—probabilities of a special kind, a cumulative, a transcendent probability, but still probability. . . .<sup>105</sup>

This is the Newman of 1843 speaking, but essentially it is the doctrine of Bishop Butler, who is further reflected in Newman's statement that at that time he felt that "He who has made us has so willed, that in mathematics, indeed, we should arrive at certitude by rigid demonstration, but in religious enquiry we should arrive at certitude by accumulated probabilities. . . ." <sup>106</sup> When Loisy attributed this position to the mature teaching of Newman as a Catholic, he did him an in-

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>105</sup> Newman, *Apologia*, chap. 4, 2 (p. 199).

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

justice—and undoubtedly he did so knowingly, since he purposely left out of his citation from Newman the important phrase indicating that he was “speaking historically.” Many other things entered into Newman’s experience before he escaped the trap unwittingly set for him by Butler and carefully distinguished between the judgment of credibility and the act of faith itself. For Newman the Catholic, as Benard points out, “the convergence of probabilities in itself, logically preceding faith, forms a sufficient argument for the rational certitude of that faith.”<sup>107</sup> But this is not as yet faith; it is only the judgment of reason concerning the fact of revelation by which the act of faith is rendered reasonable, that is, an act in accord with reason, an act which does no violence to man’s intellectual nature.

#### BUTLER AND THE CURRENT PROBLEMATIC

A consideration of the position of Butler in effect traces the argument of probability from the time of John Locke down to the *Lamentabili* of 1907, but it also offers insight into a number of questions debated at the present time. The relationship between ideas becomes an especially intriguing study when we can note the subtle manner in which one idea is reformed, rephrased, and refashioned throughout history by successive thinkers. In this instance we confront the background of a statement which began in the defense proposed by an Anglican bishop of the eighteenth century against the deistic attacks of his age on the Christian system, but which eventually came to take its place in the long history of propositions condemned by the Church of Rome because of their unorthodox import. Butler surely never intended or envisioned the ultimate result, but the historical record is inescapable.

Out of this complex of concerns, there has emerged with ever-increasing clarity a realization that faith has only too often been in danger of being falsely identified with theology, and that belief would be ultimately rooted upon a series of “proof texts” from Scripture, coupled with rational-historical arguments set forth in syllogistic fashion. Butler is a prime example of the dangers inherent in such a mentality; his mistakes point out a path to be avoided today.

Basically, one of the great problems of the present hour coincides in large measure with the question with which Bishop Butler struggled,

<sup>107</sup> E. D. Benard, *A Preface to Newman’s Theology* (St. Louis, 1945) p. 188.

that is, the relationship of history to the certitude of faith. For Catholic theologians, this problem centers chiefly on a question paramount in the two over-all approaches to the assent of faith. What may be described as the "more recent" theory of the post-Cartesian era appears to offer no better solution to this question than the *Analogy* of Butler; indeed, in the light of the many objections made to it (chiefly in regard to the nondefinitive nature of historical certitude, and the shift in emphasis concerning the precise manner in which the Scriptures verify the notion of true history), it is difficult to see how such an approach can be defended at all today as an acceptable theory of faith.<sup>108</sup>

No one contests that this more recent theory gives an acceptable explanation of the *supernatural* of the act of faith; its insistence upon an entitative (ontological) elevation of the act of faith to the supernatural level suffices for this purpose, since, in accord with the Tridentine emphasis upon the need to believe in a manner necessary for salvation, it is satisfactorily distinguished from a purely human, natural act.<sup>109</sup> It is in regard to the *certitude* of the assent of faith that this theory fails dismally, and it is here that the crux of the problem lies. Those who have defended this view in recent times (e.g., Billot, Van Noort, Lercher, Lennerz, de Aldama, among others) have universally admitted at least the possibility (though not always demanding the necessity) of a so-called act of "natural" or "scientific faith." If this assent differs in no way psychologically from the assent of supernatural faith, the conclusion must follow that supernatural faith is bogged down in the very problem associated with historical certitude; it is a perception of the authority of God revealing that rests on ra-

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Murphy, "Can Historical Method Prove Christ's Divinity?" pp. 50-56.

<sup>109</sup> *DB* 813: "Si quis dixerit, sine praeveniente Spiritus Sancti inspiratione atque eius adiutorio hominem credere, sperare et diligere aut paenitere posse, *sicut oportet*, ut ei iustificationis gratia conferatur: A.S." As the corresponding chapter indicates (*DB* 797), the phrase "credere . . . sicut oportet" emphasizes the total supernaturality of the act of faith. The phrase "sicut oportet" is found in II Orange's condemnation of Semipelagianism (*DB* 179, 199). Neither II Orange nor Trent, however, was concerned with the current debate over the effect of the grace of faith on the psychological level, and Billot's use of these texts to imply the possibility of a purely "natural" or "scientific faith" surely reads more into these decrees than the historical context would allow; cf. L. Billot, S.J., *De virtutibus infusis* (2nd ed.; Rome, 1905) Prolegomenon, 3: "De ratione distinctionis supernaturalium habituum," no. 1, sectio 2, p. 70.

tional-historical arguments and cannot serve to explain adequately the absolute, unswerving certitude proper to the assent of Christian faith. No amount of "entitative elevation" of that act can strengthen or change the degree of certitude, since this rests on different grounds entirely.

In the past, the Thomist-Suarezian approach has generally defended its concept of faith by having recourse to the axiom that "acts are specified by their formal objects," so that the assent to a supernatural truth would demand an act which is supernatural psychologically and not merely entitatively. While accepting the validity of this axiom, it might seem that, for the reasons cited above, it would be more profitable to discuss the question from the opposite point of view, considering the degree of certitude possible in a psychological assent to Christian truth which—precisely as assent—is identical in "scientific" and "saving faith" (noting especially the present-day view of the Scriptures as books written by believers for believers, rather than purely historical accounts of past events).

Faith must possess a certitude surpassing even that of metaphysical certitude; it must be an *assensus essentialiter certus, firmissimus, super omnia firmus*; no Catholic could deny this.<sup>110</sup> The Thomist-Suarezian response to this problem is based largely on a clear distinction between the judgment of credibility and the assent of faith itself; for the judgment of credibility, moral certitude (proper to historical conclusions) will suffice, while the certitude of the assent of faith leaps beyond this level in that the very motive of faith (the authority of God revealing) is psychologically perceived in a supernatural manner, and thus pertains to that which is believed in Christian faith.<sup>111</sup> The act of faith will exist side-by-side with the judgment of credibility (since at each moment of his life of faith the believer must know that he is not

<sup>110</sup> The theological note attached to this statement varies, although no Catholic could safely deny the proposition. De Aldama's contention that it is *De fide divina et catholica*, at least from the ordinary magisterium, appears to be the best-founded response; cf. J. A. de Aldama, S.J., *De virtutibus infusis*, in *Sacrae theologiae summa* 3 (Madrid, 1953) 754 (no. 83). St. Thomas also implies a direct and unique certitude resulting from faith, entirely distinct from the certitude generated by arguments from history and reason; one of the clearest of such statements is in *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 1, a. 5: "... haec [fides: sacra doctrina per revelationem] autem certitudinem habet *ex lumine divinae scientiae*, quae decipi non potest," as contrasted with the certitude "*ex naturali lumine rationis humanae*. . ."

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Murphy, "Two Theories of Faith," pp. 22-25, 34-35.

acting contrary to reason); the two acts complement one another, despite the fact that they are psychologically distinct. As Alfaro expresses it, the judgment of credibility is a *conditio sine qua non* for making an act of faith (a condition involving priority of nature, if not of time).<sup>112</sup> This judgment of credibility, however, does not constitute "even partially" the logical motive for the assent of faith itself.<sup>113</sup>

Basically, this judgment of credibility treats of the *fact* of revelation and the "reasonableness" of man's going on to believe, thus avoiding a purely immanentist type of faith or one linked with the theories of fideism or traditionalism.<sup>114</sup> Since this judgment is something preparatory in nature, nothing more than moral certitude is required, as all theologians agree; it is an act which fits into the general category of those things which men must do in the day-to-day routine of life and in which they must act on whatever certitude they have:<sup>115</sup> in this regard, the principles of Locke and Butler are quite valid. In addition, it need not be held that each individual actually formulates such a judgment of credibility by the power of reason alone. We are concerned here merely with the root power found in mankind; this very same judgment, while remaining distinct from the assent of faith, may also be formulated with the aid of divine grace.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Cf. J. B. Alfaro, S.J., *Adnotationes in tractatum de virtutibus* (Rome, 1959) p. 200.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>114</sup> As appears from the acta, the intention of Vatican I was to reject the position of those nineteenth-century philosophers and theologians who would exclude the use of reason in the total process of coming to believe (e.g., the immanentism of Schleiermacher; the reduction of faith to reason, as with Hermes; or the acceptance of the Kantian principles and the denial of a rational preparation for faith, as with the fideists and traditionalists). Cf. *Collectio Lacensis* 7, 87; 7, 186; 7, 191; 7, 528. The form of canon 3 *de fide* (DB 1812) as originally suggested adds insight to the version finally approved: "Si quis dixerit, fieri non posse, ut revelatio divina externis signis reddatur credibilis, ideoque sola interna cuiusque experientia homines ad fidem moveri: a.s." (CL 7, 77).

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Murphy, "Two Theories of Faith," pp. 23-24.

<sup>116</sup> Vatican I rejected an emendation (no. 102) stating that God has rendered revelation "vere credibilem omnibus," since the canon, as explained by the relator *de fide*, Bishop Martin, is not concerned with the *fact* that this is done, but merely with the *possibility* of human reason perceiving the credibility of divine revelation; cf. CL 7, 186, 191. The case is similar to Vatican I's decree on the basic power of human reason to know the existence of God, coupled with its view that most Christians actually accept it on faith; cf. J. L. Murphy, "Modern Man and God," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 144 (1961) 244-71. As to the possibility of grace aiding in the formulation of the judgment of credibility, cf. Alfaro, *op. cit.*, pp. 200 ff.; Guy de Broglie, S.J., "La vraie notion thomiste des 'praeambula fidei,'" *Gregorianum* 34 (1953) 341-89.



In the purely theoretical order, Alfaro would seem to be correct in stating that the absolutely essential, but at the same time the final, meeting place of reason and grace would be the "practical judgment of credibility."<sup>117</sup> The usual analysis of the genesis of faith is, of course, concerned with the abstract order; in practice, these steps are not so clearly delineated, and the adult approaching faith undoubtedly will most often be assisted by actual grace from the very start. Since the practical judgment of credibility involves a personal commitment to go on to believe, however, the help of grace would be absolutely necessary (had it not been granted previously). In addition, it would appear that it is in this practical judgment that the rational motives behind it exercise their psychological force for the last time, as far as the act of faith itself is concerned; the force of the judgment of credibility itself, of course, would continue throughout the life of the believer.

In the Thomist-Suarezian view, this judgment of credibility does not constitute the act of faith, or enter in any way into the act itself; beyond this point the absolute, unswerving assent of faith will result from the supernatural perception of the authority of God revealing (a perception which results from man's acceptance of and co-operation with the grace of faith itself, in which the entire process is terminated).<sup>118</sup> All of this implies, of course, a rejection of the very possibility of any so-called "natural" or "scientific faith." All that any individual without the grace of faith itself could possess would be a precise knowledge of *what* the Christian believes; but a true act of faith, a personal act of assent and a Christian commitment to the way of life unveiled through revelation, involves much more than simply *knowing* what others believe. Assuredly, the rational-historical type of argumentation of the "more recent" theory of faith, with all its syllogistic overtones, can lead to such a knowledge of *what* Christians believe, but it cannot result in that absolute, unswerving certitude proper to supernatural faith.

Those who attempt to defend this post-Cartesian theory of faith reflect its deficiencies in their very defense; they are obviously strug-

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Alfaro, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

<sup>118</sup> *DB* 1811, 1789. The Council merely indicated, of course, that the one and only motive of faith is the authority of God revealing; it said nothing about the further question with which we are concerned here, that is, the precise manner in which the believer perceives this divine authority.

gling to find some acceptable explanation for the absolute certitude required. An entitative elevation of the psychologically natural act will not suffice. Hence they seek to discover some other element associated with faith that will solve this problem. Lennerz, for example, distinguishes between two types of syllogisms, one presumably proper to scientific faith, the other connected with supernatural faith precisely because of the special note of obedience to the command of God to believe.<sup>119</sup> The attempt fails, however, since it shifts the essence of supernatural faith—that which is unique to it, as distinct from any so-called “scientific faith”—from an act of the intellect to an act of the will (something quite contrary to the teaching of St. Thomas and the Scholastics, made the authentic teaching of the Church at the First Vatican Council, namely, that faith is essentially an act of the intellect).<sup>120</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Cf. H. Lennerz, S.J., *De virtutibus theologicis* (Rome, 1947) pp. 188–90, nos. 340–42. De Aldama (*op. cit.* 3, 779, no. 120) falls into this same difficulty in his defense of the more recent theory of faith, holding that the assent of saving faith, as distinguished from that of scientific faith, is not present until the will commands the intellect to assent. The motive for the act of the will is “*bonitas quae habetur in submissione intellectus et voluntatis Deo creatori et fini ultimo*,” but this both places the distinguishing characteristic of supernatural faith in an act of the will and still leaves the nature of the certitude of the assent unaltered. These authors are following the general position of Billot, *De virtutibus infusis*, who argues especially against the teaching of Suarez and de Lugo (Thesis 15; p. 287), and who contends that human reason can, of itself, attain the object of the supernatural virtues. He strongly defends the possibility of a “scientific” or “natural” faith; cf. Prolegomenon, p. 68: “*Quod nihilominus, externa revelationis gratia semel praesupposita, obiecta praedicta attingi possunt actu naturali, id est elicito per solas naturae vires, si physica saltem ipsius naturae potentia nunc consideretur: quanquam non eo modo qui habeat efficaciam ad conducendum in possessionem boni ad quod ordinem dicunt.*” This saving faith involves solely an entitative elevation of this act to the supernatural order: “. . . unice ex principio gratiae qua elevatur operativa potentia ad eum ordinem perfectionis cuius ultima consummatio est in unione per lumen gloriae ad divinam essentiam ut ad formam intelligibilem” (p. 73). Cf. Murphy, “Two Theories of Faith,” pp. 26–31; “Can Historical Method Prove Christ’s Divinity?” pp. 47–51.

<sup>120</sup> Faith is always and necessarily an act involving the entire man in his personal encounter with God and his commitment to the Christian way of life; the decree of Vatican I (*DB* 1789) places the essence of the act of faith in an act of the intellect, but its equal insistence on grace and free will includes the commitment of the entire man, the human totality (*DB* 1791). The distinction of the motive of the act of the intellect in the natural order (“*propter intrinsecam rerum veritatem naturali rationis lumine perspectam*”) and in faith (“*propter auctoritatem ipsius Dei revelantis*”) does not exclude these other essential elements from the notion of faith, which, as Pius XII emphasized even more clearly in *Mystici corporis Christi*, always involves the “personal freedom, responsibility and princi-

Apart from this, however, the emphasis upon the special note of obedience to God's command does nothing to explain the specific certitude proper to supernatural faith; certitude as such pertains to the intellect, and if the assent of faith is conceived of as possible on a purely human level, a mere entitative elevation of that psychological act cannot increase the degree of certitude, any more than an additional note of obedience to God's will could do so. While it is true that the authority of God is supreme and infallible, the precise question is the manner in which man *perceives* that authority. The mere fact that God revealed these truths does not suffice for attributing absolute and unswerving certitude to man's perception of that fact, if this is done by a psychologically natural act.

#### SCRIPTURAL QUESTIONS

As noted above, this more recent theory of faith also works under the supposition, accepted by Butler, that the Scriptures represent history in the strictly modern sense; it was for this, among other things, that Matthew Arnold criticized the position of Butler.<sup>121</sup> Today, any acceptance by the Catholic of the principles of Form Criticism as set forth in the *Divino afflante Spiritu* of Pius XII destroys the very possibility of any purely "scientific" or "natural faith."<sup>122</sup> The Catholic does not, of course, deny the basic historicity of the Gospel accounts, and he does not interpret them in the context of a post-Kantian philosophical approach; this would be Modernism.<sup>123</sup> To accept the teaching of Pius XII concerning literary criticism in the Bible, however, and still hold out for the possibility of a purely "scientific faith" would leave the Catholic with the alternative of giving no better interpretation than that associated with Protestant Liberalism or Modernism (since such a "scientific" or "natural faith" by its very nature must

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ples of conduct" in each believer (*AAS* 35 [1943] 234, 243: NCWC edition, par. 87, 104). It is in this sense that one may perceive the pertinence of Philbin's objection to a statement that Vatican I "canonized" the notion that faith is to be viewed "purely as belief" as a cold, intellectual, depersonalized assent to the truths of revelation (R. G. Philbin, S.J., review of E. D. O'Connor, C.S.C., *Faith in the Synoptic Gospels*, in *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 23 [1962] 649).

<sup>121</sup> Cf. supra n. 75.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. *Enchiridion biblicum* 558-60 (NCWC edition, par. 35-39).

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Murphy, "Modernism and the Teaching of Schleiermacher," pp. 28-31.

exclude the operation of the Holy Spirit either in formulating the manner of presentation of the scriptural message or its gradual clarification through the centuries by means of a divinely-guided magisterium within the living Church; such a "scientific faith" demands a purely historical source).<sup>124</sup>

The Thomist-Suarezian approach, however, experiences none of these difficulties when faced with the present view on the nature of the biblical writings. It can easily accept the Bible as what O'Keefe calls "the believing history of the primitive Church."<sup>125</sup> In fact, this theory of faith finds a natural counterpart in the present discussions concerning the intimate relationship between Scripture and tradition, and the role of the living magisterium in the presentation of revealed truth as well as its relationship to the authority of God as the one and only motive of faith.<sup>126</sup>

As noted elsewhere,<sup>127</sup> it is not only the present-day Catholic theologian who is concerned with this problem of historical certitude and the assent of faith, but many crisis theologians and existentialist theologians of modern Protestantism as well. Forced by the findings of the Form Critics to admit a previous oral and written tradition which is reflected in the Bible, these theologians have had to abandon the extreme fundamentalist scriptural position of the sixteenth cen-

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Murphy, "Can Historical Method Prove Christ's Divinity?" pp. 52-53.

<sup>125</sup> V. T. O'Keefe, S.J., "The Gospels Read as Gospels," in John J. Heaney, S.J., ed. *Faith, Reason and the Gospels* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1961) p. 241; cf. also F. J. McCool, S.J., "The Preacher and the Historical Witness of the Gospels," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 21 (1960) 517-543.

<sup>126</sup> We have discussed these various elements elsewhere. In regard to the role of the magisterium in faith, cf. "Two Theories of Faith," pp. 32-36; "Faith and Reason in the Teaching of Kierkegaard," pp. 262-65; "Can Historical Method Prove Christ's Divinity?" pp. 55-56, 63. In regard to the relationship between Scripture and tradition, cf. J. L. Murphy, *The Notion of Tradition in John Driedo* (Milwaukee, 1959); "Unwritten Traditions at Trent," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 146 (1962) 233-63. It is important to note that the current discussions among Catholics about the "one-source" or "two-source" theory of revelation is not an "either . . . or" choice; the sole question revolves around the *relationship* between the two sources, Scripture and tradition, as J. R. Geiselman points out in *Die Heilige Schrift und die Tradition* (Freiburg, 1962) p. 272: "Die Schrift ist 'Quelle und Norm der Kirchenlehre, des Glaubens und der Theologie.' Der *Erkenntnis* nach ist sie dies aber nicht; denn sie ist nicht sui ipsius interpres, sondern bedarf der lebendigen Überlieferung der Kirche als ihrer Interpretin."

<sup>127</sup> Cf. J. L. Murphy, "Can Historical Method Prove Christ's Divinity?" pp. 22-24, 33-34.

ture.<sup>128</sup> At the same time, they wished to cut themselves off from the Liberalism of the nineteenth century and its more anthropocentric religion, which made "religious experience" the center point of belief rather than God. As H. Richard Niebuhr puts it, these theologians are again seeking the God of faith, who had become a necessary "auxiliary" to this subjective experience and little more.<sup>129</sup>

The influence of Bultmann in this matter cannot be ignored, and it was precisely the question of history and faith which led him to work out his unique distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte*, whereby *Historie* is concerned only with facts or events in the course of human life; in this sense the death of Christ upon the cross may be viewed as a historical fact, proved with historical certitude and based on historical sources. This is not, however, faith in Bultmann's eyes. In the light of God's revelation, this event in history takes on another, deeper meaning; it is associated with the entire redemptive plan of God, which came to fulfilment in Christ's death and resurrection. Henceforth the believer must personally become associated with that redeeming act, which now informs or fills, as it were, the events of history. It is this all-important divine element that brings forth what Bultmann calls *Geschichte*. This is revealed to man only through faith, and this alone has real importance for the Christian. The passing events of time, the life and function of the historic Church—*Historie* in general—must be looked on as of relatively little importance; faith is not a subject of history alone.<sup>130</sup>

Whatever may be said of Bultmann's distinction, it is interesting to note here one of the chief reasons which led him to adopt this theological approach. He had studied first of all in the liberal tradition of the

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 6-8.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. H. R. Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York, 1941) p. 28. A similar comment is made by Dillenberger-Welch, *Protestant Christianity* (New York, 1954) p. 271: "For liberalism, God became essentially the counterpart of religious experience, and revelation tended to become identical with history (Ritschl) or religious experience (Schleiermacher). The primary reality, the one directly known, was religious experience. . . . The point of this is that, as it seems to more recent thought, a terrible inversion had taken place. Religion had been substituted for God."

<sup>130</sup> This notion is not unlike the doctrine of the "Instant" or "Moment" so central in the thought of Kierkegaard: that type of synthesis of time and eternity in which the believer becomes contemporaneous with Christ. Cf. Murphy, "Faith and Reason in the Teaching of Kierkegaard," pp. 260-65.

nineteenth century, both at Tübingen and at Berlin; later, at Marburg, he became engrossed in the concerns of Form Criticism. In an age strongly affected by the trials of war and given over to far-reaching shifts in philosophical thought, Bultmann found himself drawn to the so-called "new theology" (initiated especially by Barth's *Römerbrief* in 1919); he was impressed by its emphasis on personal encounter and the further conclusion Bultmann saw in this approach, namely, that faith is not to be linked essentially to history:

It seemed to me that in this new theological movement it was rightly recognized, as over against the "liberal" theology out of which I had come, that the Christian faith is not a phenomenon of the history of religion, that it does not rest on a "religious *a priori*" (Troeltsch), and that therefore theology does not have to look upon it as a phenomenon of religious or cultural history. It seemed to me that, as over against such a view, the new theology had correctly seen that Christian faith is the answer to the word of the transcendent God that encounters man and that theology has to deal with this word and the man who had been encountered by it.<sup>121</sup>

Eventually this approach came to be incorporated into his hermeneutical tool of demythologizing. For Bultmann, it is only through contact with the apostolic kerygma that the hearer is able to enter into the moment of salvation and encounter Christ. This message, however, has come down to us in writings in which men necessarily attempted to express the "otherworldly," the transcendent and the divine, in phrases which are proper to this world: human, tied to time, reflective of man's way of thinking. These elements Bultmann describes as "myths": not in the sense of pagan myths or of something unreal and untrue, but rather in the sense of human modes of expression by which men strive to give voice to the otherworldly and the transcendent.

Since these phrases were introduced by the biblical writers to enable the men of their own time to understand the apostolic kerygma, the exegete must now strip such phrases away so that the pure kerygma might once again be uncovered in its original import and then interpreted in terms of man's present concerns; hence the term "demythologizing." Central in this approach to faith, however, is the

<sup>121</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Autobiographical Reflections," in *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann*, tr. S. M. Ogden (New York, 1960) p. 288.

question of the relationship of faith to history. Bultmann does not deny some relationship between history and the kerygma, but he insists that history and historical formulas are of secondary importance. Thus he rejects the attempt of nineteenth-century liberalism to explain faith in terms of history and historical method, but he does so not in the sense of condemning the method entirely, but rather of striving "to carry further the tradition of historical-critical research as it was practiced by the 'liberal' theology and to make our more recent theological knowledge fruitful for us."<sup>133</sup>

For Bultmann, there can be no attempt to "prove" the truth of Christianity by such methods; he is anxious to avoid all such approaches, and wishes to argue along his own lines precisely because of this basic desire of extricating faith and the personal encounter with God from the limitations of historical proof. He feels that it is necessary to urge this, since otherwise, as Lengsfeld explains, "the activity of God would be placed under that view of man which establishes things historically, and thus faith would no longer be a decision but a reasonable conclusion from historical premises."<sup>134</sup> The very phrase "reasonable conclusion from historical premises" recalls the position of Butler and others, and the dangers inherent in such an understanding of faith. Yet, as has become more apparent today, Bultmann's escape from history led to so radical a disregard for the historical facts of the life of Jesus that barely anything was left.<sup>134</sup> The desire of the post-Bultmannian school (represented by such men as Bornkamm, Fuchs, and Käsemann) to set forth on a new quest of the historical Jesus is a reaction to this position; they are confident that the historical negativism of Bultmann led to a gross exaggeration.<sup>135</sup> Yet the basic question remains dominant even here: What is the precise relationship between history and faith?

A similar concern can be noted in the writings of Paul Tillich, who has objected to "the attempt to give a foundation to Christian faith

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Peter Lengsfeld, *Überlieferung* (Paderborn, 1960) p. 236. Cf. also pp. 239, 244, 248.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, tr. L. P. Smith and E. H. Lantero (New York, 1958) p. 9: "I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary; and other sources about Jesus do not exist."

<sup>136</sup> Cf. J. M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Naperville, Ill., 1959).

and theology through historical research. . . .<sup>136</sup> He also views this attempt as a failure. Tillich's great question appears to be the problem of the certitude of the assent of faith. Thus he points out the fact that, by following the historical method, "the historian never can reach certainty in this way, but he can reach high degrees of probability. It would, however, be a leap to another level if he transformed historical probability into positive or negative historical certainty by a judgment of faith. . . ."<sup>137</sup> For this reason, Tillich considers the quest of the historical Jesus a failure precisely because it presumed that historical studies, research, or scholarship could serve as an adequate foundation for Christian faith itself:

The search for the historical Jesus was an attempt to discover a minimum of reliable facts about the man Jesus of Nazareth, in order to provide a safe foundation for Christian faith. This attempt was a failure. Historical research provided probabilities about Jesus of a higher or lower degree. On the basis of the probabilities, it sketched "Lives of Jesus." But they were more like novels than biographies; they certainly could not provide a safe foundation for the Christian faith. Christianity is not based on the acceptance of a historical novel; it is based on the witness to the messianic character of Jesus by people who were not interested at all in a biography of the Messiah.<sup>138</sup>

Granting the vastly different philosophical and theological basis on which Tillich works, it would appear clear enough that what he is striving to solve in this instance is the same problem which besets the Catholic theologian when discussing the effect of the grace of faith on the psychological level: he is in search of something that will remove the act of faith itself (as distinct from the preparation for faith) from the certitude bound by the limitations of the historical, critical, and rational order. Tillich even asks whether such a use of historical certitude as the foundation of faith is not dangerous for the believer: "Does not the acceptance of the historical method for dealing with the source documents of the Christian faith introduce a dangerous insecurity into the thought and life of the church and of every individual Christian?"<sup>139</sup> Tillich's statement in regard to historical proof and

<sup>136</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* 2 (Chicago, 1957) 107.   <sup>137</sup> *Ibid.* 2, 104.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* 2, 105. Cf. Murphy, "Can Historical Method Prove Christ's Divinity?" pp. 24, 30-42.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* 2, 113.



probability is essentially the same as the conclusion of the present study concerning faith and reason in the writings of Bishop Butler: "Whatever faith can do in its own dimension, it cannot overrule historical judgments. It cannot make the historically improbable probable, or the probable improbable, or the probable or improbable certain. The certitude of faith does not imply certainty about questions of historical research."<sup>140</sup>

The ultimate solution must lie elsewhere, and while the Catholic will not detach the assent of faith from history altogether, he finds the point of contact in that historical certitude concerning the fact of revelation: the judgment of credibility is built upon historical analysis. The absolute, unswerving certitude of Christian faith, however, would appear to be defended adequately for the Catholic only within the general realm of the Thomist-Suarezian theories of faith. Christianity is rooted in history and in historical fact; even the Bible indicates this historical nucleus, although one may not always be able to single it out from the full context in which the Christian revelation eventually took shape in written form. Moreover, Christian faith has its close and necessary relationships with reason; it is not contrary to reason, and it may be approached through reason. The assent of faith itself, however, leaps beyond to a higher level, where the divine power becomes evident to the believer within the confines of the living, divinely-guided Church. The spectre of Bishop Butler lifts a warning hand to those who would ignore this approach, indicating that should faith become confused with historical certitude and rational argumentation, one or the other will suffer: faith lapsing into rationalism, or reason giving way to scepticism or agnosticism.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* 2, 108.