

## MOTIVE AND FREEDOM IN THE ACT OF FAITH

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THE properties of the act of faith—that it is an assent of the intellect, obscure from several viewpoints, certain above all others, yet a free assent—are proved with comparative ease. Only minor divergences of opinion likewise are encountered in the demonstration that the mind assents to revealed truths on the authority of God. Vexing difficulties, however, beset further exploration of the nature of the act, nor do all experts solve them in the same way. The dispute is, of course, a domestic one. Since Schleiermacher's discovery of *Gefühlsglaube*, explanation of faith by scholars outside the fold has veered away from intellectualism. The postulate of autonomous inner light quite generally dominates, whether the particular explanation invokes "the testimony of the Holy Spirit" (Older Protestants), or asserts that "religion is independent of any historical fact" (Schweitzer), or protests against "revelation being put into us from outside" (Tyrrell), or defines faith as "spontaneous recognition of dogmas as the complement and satisfaction of our religious needs" (Blondel).

### THE PROBLEM

All such strategy, which aims to capture the material object of faith by means other than the combined operations of intellect and will, is a futile caricature of the analysis elaborated by the Church's theologians. Their analysis, while intransigently loyal to the light shed by revelation on the nature of faith, essays to harmonize the revealed data with known facts of human psychology. The harmonization depends on the solution of two interrelated problems. Firstly, since the act of faith is an act of the intellect and an assent to objective evidence, how can the act be free? Secondly, in what sense is the authority of God revealing the formal object and motive? Such it must be; yet it is equally certain that we may not reduce the act of faith to a syllogistic demonstration.

The solution here offered—and it is offered with a sincere *salvo meliore iudicio*—consists in focusing several principles of epistemology

and psychology on the act of faith, and in pointing out their particular application to it. Three principles seem apposite—the nature of sufficient evidence, the nature of free assent, the nature of assent on authority. Examination of each will be attempted; then the conclusions which emerge will be brought to bear on the operations of our faculties in the acceptance of God's revelation.

#### NATURE OF SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE

What is objectively true becomes pabulum for the mind through objective evidence. Initially, sensible properties of external objects impress themselves upon proper sense organs; the imagination combines and photographs the impressions; then, in the alembic of the mind's *vis abstractiva*, the photograph is transformed into immaterial idea and knowledge. Now, all this is very simple if the objective truth itself is as simple as the sheen of sunlight on a snow-covered field or the obvious mathematics of three black crows in the tree top. There the mind is constrained to admit the truth, nor may it hesitate. Objective truth, however, may be a complex of multitudinous details; moreover, it may be remote in time and place so that it cannot reach the mind directly, but solely through the roundabout of testimony. Testimony, too, may be more or less full. Various factors may thus decrease the clarity with which the truth is manifested. Does objective evidence thereby become unattainable, and certitude on the facts of the case impossible? Not unless one choose to play the martinet and demand too much. Grandchildren of the Blue and of the Gray argue about minor details of Chancellorsville, but there is substantial agreement on the main facts of that heroic field. The example might be extended to take in a large acreage of the field of history; for human witness to facts is rarely so ideally comprehensive and clear as to leave no residue of obscurity.

Nor does history furnish the only examples, but metaphysics as well. Cardinal Newman, premising that "we must take the constitution of the human mind as we find it, and not as we may judge it ought to be," indicates how our theistic certitudes are acquired and held under conditions of concomitant obscurities. The obscurities are:

... questions which have been solved without their solutions, chains of reasoning with missing links, difficulties which have their roots in the nature of things,

and which are necessarily left behind in a philosophic inquiry because they cannot be removed, and which call for the exercise of good sense and for strength of will to put them down with a high hand as irrational and preposterous . . . a host of questions which must arise in every thoughtful mind and, after the best use of reason, must be deliberately set aside as beyond reason, as (so to speak) no-thoroughfares which, having no outlets themselves, have no legitimate power to divert us from the King's highway, and to hinder the direct course of religious inquiry from reaching its destination.<sup>1</sup>

Even in proportion to mental keenness and thoroughness may be the apprehension of difficulties. Yet, where there is sound balance of judgment, difficulties will not inhibit assent, when sufficient weight of evidence lies in the scale. Assent is compatible with imprudent doubts, though not with prudent doubts. Scruples have as little right to halt the intellect in its conclusions as to paralyze the will in moral conduct.

It seems important here to distinguish flatly two senses of the term moral certitude. In one sense the term is used of a preponderance of motives for an assent or of the state of the mind in possession of these motives. Thus I may be morally certain of the dispositions of a penitent, even though the possibility of my being mistaken is not excluded. In epistemological usage, however, moral certitude means strict certitude, sc., an assent of the mind to a truth on motives which rule out, and are known to rule out, the possibility of the contrary being true. Thus, I am morally certain of a fact which properly qualified witnesses attest. The so-called moral laws, sc., certain constant norms manifested in the course of human conduct, guarantee the mind against error in this matter, just as the physical laws and metaphysical principles afford like guarantees in the other two species of strict certitude.

#### NATURE OF FREE ASSENT

When objective evidence is compelling, the mind needs must assent, as the eye must see what is before it in clear light. In the case of the sufficient evidence explained above, the assent does not follow with a like inevitability. Instead, the assent is potentially free, insofar as in the circumstances the will may influence the intellect. Three

<sup>1</sup> J. H. Newman, *Grammar of Assent* (New York: Longmans, 1895), p. 218.

contingencies may be considered. First, the matter to be judged may be a matter of indifference to the self-interest of the individual; secondly, it may be gratifying to self-interest; thirdly, it may be distasteful to self-interest. In the first case, the will remains passive, allowing the intellect to elicit the certain assent warranted by the intrinsically sufficient worth of the evidence. In the second case, the will may add an accidental degree of firmness to the assent. In the third case, it is hardly arguable that the intellect fails to perceive the evidence at hand. In the language of logicians, this perception is the *apprehensio comparativa*, the seeing that the predicate is contained in the subject. Yet, the mental act is not perfected till assent supervenes, till the mind formally joins predicate to subject and rests in possession of a new certitude. Before assent is given the will must be reckoned with. If the individual belongs to the company blessed by the Christmas angels, his good will, despite self-interest, will order the intellect to disregard the unimportant obscurities in the evidence, and to assent to the unpleasant truth. Recalling, however, Cardinal Newman's words, we appreciate how admirably suited are the "no-thoroughfares" of the evidence to serve as talking-points in the propaganda of a will not rightly disposed. By directing attention from the clear lanes of evidence which converge in the conclusion to those which "have no outlets," by wrongheadedly overemphasizing the importance of difficulties unsolved or imperfectly solved, one may effect a suspension of judgment. In this sense the assent is said to be free *libertate exercitii*, insofar as the mind may assent or decline assent. Possibly, too, persistent lobbying on the part of a perverse will may in certain cases push through a judgment simply contradictory of the evidence (*libertas specificationis*). To speak strictly, of course, freedom is predicated of the mind's acts by extrinsic denomination derived from the freely acting will.

To recapitulate: the two conditions for free assent are sufficiency (as opposed to cogency) in the objective evidence, self-interest with its spawn of prejudices in the judging subject. The will, having power to control the intellect's attention, may forthrightly direct it toward the really sufficient motives for assent, under disregard of imprudent doubt and of prejudice. Reasonable and certain assent will follow.

¶ Or, the will may perversely concentrate the intellect's powers upon an

insoluble residue of obscurities, and, by fostering these imprudent doubts, inhibit assent.

"The long record of time" offers examples in confirmation of the foregoing doctrine. Clio is pictured holding a scroll but half-unrolled, to symbolize, one might say, the imperfection of historical documents. Events of the past, remote and complex in their circumstances, can be known through testimony. But the testimony is often not very abundant. Writings of a vanished past can be understood adequately only if we have acquaintance with the culture in which they originated. In the course of centuries meddlers may have altered records by interpolation or excision. And, after all, the original witnesses were men with human limitations. Account must be taken of their want of accuracy, their enthusiasms, their nationalism perhaps, and their religious convictions. The causes and the course of the titanic struggle between the Empires of Liliput and Blefuscu were, no doubt, recorded quite diversely in the respective histories of the warring nations.

Nor are we who read history free from prejudices springing from enthusiasm, nationalism, religious conviction, and the like. Of the working of prejudice in one particular field, that of the history of religions, Fr. Pinard de la Boullaye, S.J., speaks judiciously:

The student of religions . . . must keep his critical sense keenly awake, and especially be on guard against the personal equation. By this is meant the ensemble of subjective dispositions capable of impeding sound judgment of facts. Among such dispositions may be named: the limitations of one's own intellectual ability, lack of experience, mental attitudes acquired from one's environment, religious beliefs or disbelief. One may desire sincerely to be impartial. He will not be so, unless he constantly makes allowance for the influence of such personal factors on his judgments.<sup>2</sup>

#### NATURE OF ASSENT ON AUTHORITY

It should be clear, then, that historical assent well admits elements of voluntariety. Further analysis suggests the possibility of still other elements of the same. There is, first, an obscurity inseparable from truths accepted on authority. The mind does not perceive them directly, but knows them only through the eyes of others, as the poets

<sup>2</sup> H. Pinard de la Boullaye, S.J., *L'Étude comparée des religions* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1929), II, 38-39.

knew the lovely towns of Carcassone and Boscobel. A personal equation, moreover, cannot be overlooked in the analysis of submission to the authority. Though, obviously, authority is used here in a different sense than in the phrase "obedience to authority," the personal likes and dislikes which make obedience easy or difficult are to be reckoned with in assent to testimony. It is one thing to hesitate to accept a witness' statement when his information or veracity is genuinely questionable; another, to refuse to believe him simply because "I do not like you, Dr. Fell." Just as affection for one person may betray us into a willing and uncritical acceptance of his word, so personal bias against another may make us rule his statements out of court. The term "honorific assent" aptly expresses this aspect of assent on authority.

The formal object of man's cognitive acts is a quality inherent in an external object and capable of affecting a particular faculty. Simpler examples are the sensible qualities of material objects; a more complex example, the nexus or consequence which inheres in the premises of a reasoning process. Simple or complex, the formal object is (the definition rather eludes translation) *ea ratio quae per se vel in se attingitur*. Inhering in the material object, the formal object informs it, so that only through this cognoscible form does the faculty possess itself of the whole (material) object. In a judgment of the mind (e.g., "this golf-ball is white"), the formal object (roundness and whiteness) is also the motive of assent.

The application of these logical principles to an act of assent on authority is important and illuminating. Here the material object is the statement of the witness. The statement induces credibility through being informed by the witness' authority. It is his authority, his knowledge and veracity (not in the abstract, of course, but as here and now vouching for a statement) which constitutes the formal object. Insofar as the assent is *on* authority, i.e., insofar as acceptance of the statement is meant, the formal object (authority of the witness speaking) is also the motive of assent. However, it would seem that the same cannot be said if assent *to* authority is meant. In plainer words (and here we renew the *salvo meliore iudicio* professed above), there is no motive of the intellectual order for the act by which I accept the witness' authority. I know his qualifications and I know what he asserts.

It is seen that it is reasonable to believe him. Yet it would seem that the immediate motive for my actually doing so is the volitional act: "I choose to honor his authority." Only in theory can I isolate the active elements of knowledge and veracity from the whole personal compound that is the witness. Were it possible to do so, impartial syllogistic procedure would regulate the assent after the following form: "Knowledge and veracity of witness checked. His statement in evidence. Statement accepted and filed away."

The witness is himself, I who hear his words am myself, and more than syllogistic consequence is required to make the twain meet. Father D'Arcy writes: "The intellect is the power to see things as they are and to possess them, but it is the man who judges, and in all judgments of worth he is exhibiting himself and interpreting through the light or darkness of his own character."<sup>8</sup> "It is the man who judges," and in belief it is the man who is judged, not exclusively his qualifications as a witness.

#### APPLICATION TO THE ACT OF FAITH

Among Catholics there is agreement that the evidence prerequisite to the act of faith is of the sufficient order, though exception is allowed for cogency of evidence in the minds, e.g., of the Blessed Virgin and the Apostles. Equally out of controversy is the fact that the act is an assent of the intellect and yet free. Thirdly, we believe the truths of faith because God has revealed them. The rest of this essay will attempt to elucidate these three points of evidence, freedom of assent, motive. The elucidation hopes to apply faithfully the epistemological and psychological principles already discussed, so that the act in its psychological aspects may not have to be classed as *sui generis*. The supernatural quality of the act does not enter directly into the present discussion.

#### EVIDENCE IN THE ACT OF FAITH

"Blessed are they that have not seen and have believed." For God's choice of mediate revelation instead of the way of individual illumination, the ultimate reason is His holy will. Yet, reasons of congruence do appear on consideration both of the needs of human

<sup>8</sup> M. C. D'Arcy, S.J., *The Nature of Belief* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1931), p. 83.

society and of the soul's individual good. If analogy be licitly drawn between natural and supernatural things, then an *Ecclesia perennis* teaching, ruling, and sanctifying will provide better for man's supernatural life than autonomous individualism, however rugged. Besides, singular virtue and merit accrue to the acceptance of revelation through multiple human mediation. The living Church witnesses for each generation and in every land through the voice of its unity and holiness. Over it hovers a cloud of witnesses of every century back to the Twelve who were chosen in Galilee and sent forth to preach the glad tidings. Apostolic traditions and written records contain what God revealed when "in those days He spoke to us by His Son" (Hebr. 1:2), and confirmed His revelation by "works that no other man hath done" (John 15:24).

Through these credentials Christianity presents itself to the mind as credible, i.e., as worthy of being believed on God's authority. The evidence is manifold and abundant, if by this is meant the multiplicity of separate indications pointing to the one fact of divine revelation. Still, for other reasons, Christian evidences furnish the almost ideal example of the sufficient, non-cogent evidence explained above. The evidence for Christian revelation is so intricate as to preclude manifestation to a finite mind with any high degree of clarity. Attention to one facet of the demonstration—for example, the preternatural character of Gospel cures—detracts from clear apprehension of the rest. Nor, when the mind does approach a total conclusion, has it more than a confused recollection of the laborious stages of the journey.

Furthermore, appreciation of the proofs would be easier, were the matter dealt with more germane to our everyday experience; but the matter is transcendent of our experience, an "evidence of things that appear not." There is the mysterious phenomenon of prophecy, which puts into human minds prescience and on human tongues prediction of the future. The Messiah, teaching with the personal authority of God, stirs in earth-bound minds "thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls." At His word, the laws of nature, which circumscribe our experience, stand suspended. He demands faith in mysteries and a life of self-denial. All this divine manifestation was made in remote times and among a people whose cultural pattern is known but imperfectly. Revelation's record, finally, was consigned to ancient



documents and traditions, whose due interpretation requires critical acumen and scholarship.

Nineteen centuries of apologetics attest the difficulty of the *demonstratio christiana*. From Quadratus and Justin onward, together with insistence on the positive motives of credibility, is found awareness of perplexing difficulties, honest effort to cope with them. Even in the second century, Tertullian and Origen were called upon to defend the historical worth of the Gospels. Prophecies were assailed as falsifications, miracles as magic art. The *De Civitate Dei* deals with a comprehensive corpus of objections drawn from the philosophy and religion of dying paganism. In the *Summa Contra Gentiles* the supposed antinomies between philosophic and revealed truth are examined. The Reformers' attack on Church unity branched off into attacks on the whole of the supernatural, so that for the last three centuries Christian apologetics has wrestled ceaselessly with protean objections on the fields of history, philosophy, and science.

#### FREEDOM OF ASSENT IN THE ACT OF FAITH

A question here arises: Is not the picture of Christian evidence, just finished, a canvas suitable only for the classroom of a clerical seminary? Do men really draw near to faith through such labyrinthine ways? Does the pastor in his convert class, the chaplain in the army camp, the average inquirer who reads Catholic books elaborate the *demonstratio christiana* after this fashion? If faith is to be a reasonable faith, it must be based upon the credentials which God as a matter of fact has given—credentials which are the same for all. Though apologetic art will study means to adapt arguments to times and persons, it cannot change the character of the arguments themselves. Neither will the accident of intellectual training in hearer or student transmute essentially the strength of an argument.<sup>4</sup> To all alike Providence offers divine revelation as sufficiently attested, that through the exercise of good will and the operation of grace all may share the blessing of those who have not seen and have believed.

<sup>4</sup>We do not think it necessary to enter into the question whether children and the illiterate in general make the act of faith on the authority of parents and pastors (*fides relativa*), or directly on divine authority (*fides absoluta*). Either opinion may be held without censure. The one that defends *fides absoluta* seems to the writer in every way the more probable.

Freedom in regard to the act of faith may be antecedent, immediate, consequent. Antecedently, when one suspects that Christianity is God's revelation, one is obviously free to investigate its credentials. Consequently to embracing the faith, he is clearly free to live up to its obligations. Immediate freedom (freedom of the very act of assent) cannot be doubted. St. Paul's canticle of faith praises the patriarchs for freely accepting God's revelations (Hebr. 13). Zachary is punished with temporary blindness for not believing Gabriel's words (Luke 1:20). The Council of Trent is talking neither of the examination of credentials nor of faith working through charity, but of the assent itself of faith, when it states: "... fidem ex auditu concipientes, libere moventur in Deum, credentes vera esse, quae divinitus revelata et promissa sunt" (*DB*, 798). Then there is the explicit condemnation by the Vatican Council: "Si quis dixerit, assensum fidei christianae non esse liberum, sed argumentis humanae rationis necessario produci ... anathema sit" (*DB*, 1814).

In what, then, is immediate freedom of assent rooted? Objectively, in the sufficiency (as opposed to cogency) of the evidence that God has revealed, and in the honorific element which enters into an assent to authority. Subjectively, in a psychological "pattern interwoven of affective and intellectual factors" (D'Arcy). God, who could compel men to faith, chooses to invite them, to "hide his word from the wise and prudent and reveal it to little ones." Grotius writes:

It is the will of God to accept faith from us as obedience, and therefore He wills that the things He would have us believe shall not be as plain as the things we perceive by our senses and by demonstration, but only so far plain as to procure belief and to persuade a man who is not obstinately bent against it. Thus the Gospel is, as it were, a touchstone to try men's honest dispositions.<sup>5</sup>

After reasonable inquiry, informal or logically formal according to individual capacity and circumstances, Christianity is manifested as revealed by God. Assenting to this conclusion (the ultimate one of apologetics), the intellect does so freely, for sufficiency of evidence does not enforce assent. Logically and psychologically, this conclusion is several steps removed from the act of faith proper, being separated from it by the *judicia credibilitatis et credentitatis* and by the

<sup>5</sup> Hugo Grotius, *De Veritate Religionis Christianae*, II ad finem.

*pius credulitatis affectus*. However, the intrinsic character of the apologetic evidence (sc., its sufficiency) is apperceived during these subsequent acts and contributes to their freedom.

Co-operating with the objective element of evidential sufficiency is the subjective element, "the pattern interwoven of affective and intellectual factors." For the judgment which we call the act of faith does not deal with matters indifferent to the self. In it the intellect bows submissively to authority and accepts truths not perceived. Implicit in it, too, is acceptance of moral obligations unpleasant to nature. The challenge, therefore, to the surrender of faith alerts the defense line of the soul's prejudices. Educational influences, e.g., the rationalistic and materialistic tradition in Western education, have filled minds with specious presuppositions hostile to the supernatural. Nor does it greatly matter whether such presuppositions result from the indoctrination of formal education or have been contracted from the atmospheric influence of popular literature. To quote Butler's Analogy: "If persons who have picked up these objections from others, and take for granted they are of weight, will not give the time and attention which are necessary to examine them and to get right information . . . they will remain in ignorance and error, just as they will in regard to common scientific facts about which they do not take pains to inform themselves."<sup>6</sup> Levity of mind, sloth, and indifference to things of the spirit are not rare, even among those who are keen enough about their temporal affairs. Moral prejudices may not be as gross as those of a polygamous African savage, yet for many the strictness of the Christian code and its intransigent demands for reform of life prove a stumbling-block.

Does disinclination to assent really prevent the mind from seeing where the truth lies? Christ said of the Jews: "If I had not done among them the works that no other man hath done, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father" (John 15:24). It is hard to understand how, when sufficient evidence is before the mind's eye, perception can fail to result; for that is the nature of the mind. Perception, however, is only inchoative judgment (*apprehensio comparativa*). What prejudice can inhibit is the formal judgment (*assensus*). Prejudice, speaking through the

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Butler, *Analogy of Religion* (New York: Harper, 1894), p. 269.

will, first imposes a moratorium on assent. Then the mind is badgered into re-examination of the evidence, or rather of the difficulties and partial obscurities which incrustate the body of proven facts. Is not the miracle narrative of the Gospels a strange and implausible interlude in history's matter-of-fact record? Does not one sense unreality in the accounts of Jesus' apparitions after His death? Why are the excellent Roman historians of the period silent about the extraordinary events alleged to have occurred in a province of the Empire? The will can apply closure to all scrupulous debate on imprudent doubts by a peremptory: "Do it now," enjoining a reasonable and prudent assent to the real evidence for revelation. Failing to do so, it will leave the mind to wander, or, to speak more precisely, will positively impel it to wander in a *cul-de-sac*. The total result will be final refusal of assent (*libertas exercitii*) or perhaps even contrary assent (*libertas specificationis*).

#### AUTHORITY AND MOTIVE IN THE ACT OF FAITH

Faith is an act of assent elicited by the intellect and commanded by the will, having for its material object revealed truths and for its formal object the authority of God revealing—thus far Catholic theologians agree. The point of difficulty and of divergence of opinion is the manner in which the authority of God revealing moves the intellect to the assent of faith. To avoid the inadmissible doctrine that it does so as a rationally demonstrated premise logically inducing a conclusion (thus reducing the act of faith to a syllogistic demonstration), Suarez holds that in the act of revealing truths God reveals (*actu exercito*) His authority. Thus I could believe by an act of faith that God is revealing, and the unpleasant "premise to conclusion" difficulty would be obviated. Regretfully we must confine quotation to one brief extract:

Deus, dicendo aliquid, eo ipso dicit se esse veracem in eo quod affirmat, nam hac ratione inducit ad credendum illud dictum esse verum, et consequenter etiam dicit ita se esse veracem, ut mentiri nullo modo possit; nam hoc titulo obligat ad credendum illud tanquam infallibile, et ideo, ex intrinseca natura talis fidei et talis objecti nascitur ut idem testimonium, quod sufficit ad credendum rem revelatam, sufficiat ad credendum ipsum revelantem esse veritatem quae fallere non potest.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Suarez, *Tractatus de Fide Theologica*, disp. III, sect. 6, n. 8.

Although Suarez defends his thesis of simultaneous and inseparable revelation of formal and material object on the principle that "this belongs to the transcendent excellence of the divine truth, and that therefore the cognition here involved cannot be compared with any other," it is preferable, if at all possible, to avoid such introduction of the *sui generis* element. It would seem that the psychology of assent on testimony requires that the knowledge and veracity of God and the fact that it is He who speaks must be proved and known *aliunde*, that they cannot be taken as revealed *actu exercito*. Conscious of the difficulties of his position, Suarez frankly appeals to "magnum fidei mysterium."

Cardinal de Lugo seeks to solve the problem by a theory of immediacy of assent. Two judgments, both immediately evident (!), prepare the assent. The one: "If the omniscient and truthful God speaks, His words are to be accepted as infallibly true." The other: "The Church's teaching, approved by diverse and great miracles and prophecies, adhered to by such multitudes of the wise and prudent, is God's revelation." The mind, with these truths before it, does not need to reason and conclude, but immediately perceives both that God has revealed and what He has revealed. To have Cardinal de Lugo's own words:

Non assentitur intellectus discurrendo et inferendo unum ex alio et dicendo: 'haec est Dei revelatio, quia Ecclesia auctoritate humana proponit, quia miracula confirmant, etc.' Sed considerat ex una parte totam illam Ecclesiae propositionem, martyrum testimonium, miracula, etc., tanquam unum extremum illius assensus, et ex alia parte doctrinam Dei, et comparat inter se sine ullo discursu haec duo extrema, inter quae invenit tantam connexionem, ut ex ipsa apprehensione et comparatione extremorum sine ullo discursu possit elicere assensum immediatum quo dicat: 'haec est doctrina Dei' seu 'hoc proponitur mihi ex parte Dei'.<sup>8</sup>

Repeatedly throughout his discussion, de Lugo speaks of the supernatural virtue of faith as possessed by the one whose act of faith he is analyzing. This supposition most likely colors the explanation offered for the act. To a Catholic, whose mental reflexes have been so rightly and so loyally formed *a genibus*, the judgment that the Church is the depositary and voice of God's revelation is so unquestioned as to seem immediately evident. But this is only seeming, not actuality; for in

<sup>8</sup> Joannes de Lugo, *Tractatus de Virtute Fidei Divinae*, disp. I, sect. 7, n. 124.

logical fact that judgment is the conclusion laboriously demonstrated by the whole of apologetics.

In more modern times, an explanation has been elaborated, whose tessera is that the authority of God revealing is an *objectum formale quo*, standing *extra lineam fidei*. In the words of Stentrup:

Motivum assensus fidei in actu secundo non est testimonium Dei infallibile absolute consideratum, sed est idem testimonium Dei relative prae mente movenda spectatum, ideoque iis propemodum circumvestitum, quibus menti cognoscibile redditur eique apparet. Haec autem, quibus testimonium infallibile Dei menti cognoscibile redditur, aperte ad motivum non spectant, ut aliquid quod constituit, sed ut aliquid quod ipsum manifestat et patefacit.<sup>9</sup>

The mind, in other words, knows from apologetic reasoning that God has revealed, and also recognizes that it is becoming and obligatory to believe the truths revealed. This apologetic cognition is admittedly natural, mediate, and *extra lineam fidei*. It serves the purpose, according to the defenders of the theory, of manifesting to the mind the motive for faith, but is itself no part of the motive. Apologetic cognition, as it were, drops back and ceases to influence the consummation of the act of faith. This consummation consists wholly in the mind, with the authority of God before it, assenting to the truths revealed. *Intra lineam fidei*, the authority of God revealing is not attained by the mind, i.e., it is not an *objectum formale quod* but an *objectum formale quo*. To illustrate the possibility of such mediateness in a formal object, Pesch has recourse to an analogy: "In actu iustitiae jus creditoris est objectum, quo movetur debitor ad solvenda debita, sed non est objectum formale, quod per se vult; immo potest, salva iustitia, velle ut hoc jus non existat."<sup>10</sup>

Two objections occur to the theory. Psychologically anomalous is an intellectual act which does not attain, and indeed *primo et per se*, its formal object. Then, the ingenious phrase, "patefactio motivi," does not seem to solve the radical difficulty of the whole problem. It would seem that, when the mind passes on to the acceptance of the revealed truths, it cannot shut its eyes to the fact that its motive is known only naturally and mediately. With this consciousness upon it, how does the mind accept these truths otherwise than as conclusions of a process of natural reasoning?

<sup>9</sup> Ferdinand Stentrup, S.J., *Praelectiones de Fide*, Thes. 31.

<sup>10</sup> Christian Pesch, S.J., *Praelectiones Dogmaticae*, VIII, n. 342.

Omitting still other explanations, we conclude with one, also of recent date, which bases a solution on close analysis of the nature of free assent.<sup>11</sup> With sufficient evidence at hand that God has revealed, three possibilities arise: the will may inhibit assent to the fact and acceptance of the truths revealed; the mind, if left alone by the will, may elicit an historical assent and believe the truths on authority sufficiently manifested: both acts will have the quality of moral certitude, and belief will be strictly proportioned in firmness to the sufficiency of the evidence (*actus fidei scientificae*); the will may positively command the mind to believe the truths on God's authority. This command may be to a belief proportioned in firmness to the sufficient evidence or to one more firm. In the latter case, it must be understood that certain reflex acts intervene. The religious benefits of light, peace, eternal reward will be weighed (*ratio boni*). The obligation of submitting to God will be realized (*ratio debiti*). Reflexly, too, and most importantly, the mind will appreciate the right of God, the ultimate ground of all truth, to unwavering faith.

"We are not the children of withdrawing unto perdition, but of faith to the saving of the soul" (Hebr. 10:39). The act of faith is self-expression at its finest. Mind and will reach upward to the light which clarifies and supplements the truths learned by experience and reason. "Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem." The soul rests its certainties upon uncreated and indefectible Truth. All the cool reasonableness of apologetic demonstration, of course, precedes as an indispensable condition. But once God is known to have spoken, His dignity as witness demands an assent firm beyond all others. Such an assent is unique among the mind's acts; but the phenomenon of God speaking to man is itself unique among phenomena manifested to our cognitive faculties. To submit to His authority is the privilege He offers to our highest faculties. Since it is privilege and not compulsion, the will must be the hegemon in this honorific assent, positively and immediately moving the intellect to believe Him with a firmness literally unique, strictly *super omnia*.

Previous remarks on assent *to* and *on* authority and on the relation of formal to material object, are here apposite. First, as in every

<sup>11</sup> The explanation here offered is essentially that of A. Straub, S.J., *De Analyti Fidei*, and L. Lercher, S.J., *Institutiones Dogmaticae*, I.

assent on testimony, so in the act of faith the mind terminates *primo et per se* in the formal object (God revealing); in the material object (Trinity, Incarnation, etc.) through, and precisely as informed by, the formal object. Objectively, the two constitute an indivisible composite, which subjectively is attained by one indivisible act. As theologians, of course, we can separate our discussion of the Trinity from that of the authority of God. Secondly, in the assent to God revealing, the will and mind make articulate man's whole loyal disposition toward God, just as in refusal of assent they conspire with multiple disloyal prejudices to deny Him His right. Faith is a deliberate human act of choosing to honor God.

The authority of God revealing is thus the formal object *quod* at which the act of faith terminates. Insofar, however, as the act is free and *super omnia firmus*, this same authority is not, to speak strictly, the motive which immediately and *causaliter* determines the assent. It would be so were we talking of an act of scientific faith. Since, though, we deal with the free act of faith *super omnia firmus*, there does not appear in the act a motive, properly so-called, of the intellectual order. Previously (as *motiva latiore sensu* of the act of faith and as indispensable conditions for it), perceptions are had that it is prudent and of obligation to believe with transcendent firmness our God revealing to us. But what here and now moves the intellect to honor the divine authority is the command of the will.

"Cum homo a Deo tanquam creatore et Domino suo totus dependeat et ratio creata increatae Veritati penitus subjecta sit, plenum revelanti Deo intellectus et voluntatis obsequium fide praestare tenemur" (*DB*, 1789). Our faith is an act wholly reasonable because of "divinae revelationis signa certissima et omnium intelligentiae accommodata" (*DB*, 1790). It is an assent firmer than all others by reason of Him on whom it rests. It is a supreme act of self-expression and self-realization, which with perfect freedom attains and clings to Truth itself. In this light of life we walk not in darkness.