

CHRISTIAN ORIGINS

By

A. PATRICK MADGETT, S.J.

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Chapter VIII

FAITH, THE GATEWAY OF THE CHURCH

Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be condemned. (Mt. 16:15-16)

With these words Christ commissioned the hierarchy of His Church to continue the work He had begun. This work, we have seen, is not merely the continuance of an organization; it is the giving of a new life: LIFE IN CHRIST, THROUGH THE CHURCH, CHRIST'S MYSTICAL BODY.

FAITH IS THE GATEWAY OF THE CHURCH. Through its portals we enter into this new life. It opens the way to eternal happiness which Jesus Christ has won for us.

Now this is eternal life:

That they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent....

...the words which thou gavest me I have given to them, and they have received them, and have known in very deed that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou hast sent me. (Jn. 17:3,8)

God...even when we were dead in sins,
 hath quickened us together (convivificavit) in Christ,
 (by whose grace you are saved)
 And hath raised us up together,
 and hath made us sit together in heavenly places,
 through Christ Jesus:

That he might show in the ages to come
 the abundant riches of his grace,
 in his bounty towards us in Christ Jesus.
 for by grace you are saved through faith,
 and that not of yourselves,
 for it is the gift of God. (Eph. 2:5-8)¹

These words, partly from the mouth of Christ, Himself, partly from the inspired writings of St. Paul, almost give us a summary of our topic. The following pages should themselves provide a sort of summary of practical conclusions for the individual believer whereby he can grow in knowledge of divine truths and thus live more abundantly the divine life Christ gives through the Church.

I

FAITH AS A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

The popular impression that Religious Faith is a kind of "feeling" is one of the tragic consequences of Luther's teaching.² For a world already

¹ It should be noted that St. Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians, which is really a treatise on the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, emphasizes the importance of Faith as the necessary condition of admission to this life of the Church; and that the divine life received in and through the Church is not an individualistic possession, but demands corporate action because it comes to us through the Church, and lives vigorously only in those who live fully the life of the Church.

² Let it not be thought that we despise the power of emotions guided by reason and the truths of Faith to lead men to heights of virtue. But if subjective feeling dominates objective reason and Faith, Faith is in peril.

well on the way towards unbelief because of too much feeling and too little intellect in religion, the Sentimentalist, Schleiermacher (1768-1834), and his fellow Romantics, popularized "religion of feeling" as a substitute for Christianity. Thus one's personal religious life is made to depend more and more on volatile emotions instead of on solid religious truths. Blind instincts are to guide men to God, rather than truths revealed by Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. Never have we had more need to recall St. Paul's definition of Faith:

The substance of things to be hoped for,
 The evidence of things that appear not, (Heb. 11:1)

Faith is a way of acquiring knowledge - a way to TRUTH for which man's mind is made, and therefore a way to GOODNESS and HAPPINESS for which his whole being craves.

Broadly speaking, there are only two ways in which we can acquire knowledge: One is discovering for ourselves; the other is hearing from others. The first is the way of science; the second the way of Faith. The following brief examination of these ways to truth is not meant to be a scientific account, but only the briefest possible analysis; in order that we may see where SUPERNATURAL FAITH fits into the general scheme of man's sources of knowledge and truth.

A. SCIENCE

By "SCIENCE" we understand: all knowledge based on intrinsic evidence, whether gained through the senses or derived from self-evident principles. (Note that we are not using the word in the narrow sense which limits science unduly to the physical and experimental sciences.) What distinguishes science from faith is that in science I actually see the truth from judgments made on the basis of experience and reasoning.

I may see this truth intuitively, as in self-evident propositions like the principle of causality: "Whatever begins to be must have an efficient cause." No reasoning process is required here, but only an examination of the terms of the proposition and the connections between them.

From experimental knowledge of the world, and from self-evident principles, I can reason to further truths.

In either case, the basis for assent to the truth of judgments arrived at is the evident truth which I see.

B. NATURAL FAITH

FAITH (*fidere* - to trust) is knowledge based on extrinsic evidence of another's testimony. The truth of such knowledge is not seen in the statements accepted as true. The statements bear no intrinsic evidence of their truth, but are accepted for reasons extrinsic to the truth itself - i.e. on the authority of the speaker.

FAITH IS THE NATURAL MEANS OF ACQUIRING

MOST OF THE KNOWLEDGE WE LIVE BY. Belief in one's fellow men is the normal social medium of knowledge, not for the simple and unlettered alone, but for the scholar as well. Those who pride themselves on their independence of mind are constantly accepting the greater part of their store of knowledge on the word of their fellow men.

There is, however, a difference between the true scholar and the average uneducated or semi-educated man. The true scholar, at least in those fields where he is competent, does not accept uncritically every statement he hears. He has learned that there are degrees of reliability in sources of knowledge.

1. SCIENTIFIC FAITH.

When one wishes certainly about historical fact, he uses critical historical methods (hermeneutics). He gathers as many witnesses to the fact as he can. He examines the knowledge and the trustworthiness of the witnesses. He checks one account against another. This is the process we used in establishing the credibility of the Gospels in CHRISTIAN ORIGINS, I. When, after critical investigation, we accept a fact as true, it is not so much because of the authority of any single witness to the fact, but because of our critical examination of the evidence. Then belief rests on scientifically rational grounds which may be put in the form of a syllogism:

Facts related in sources duly guaranteed by the knowledge and veracity of the witnesses must be accepted as true.
But these facts are related in sources duly guaranteed...
Therefore these facts must be true.

FORMULA: I believe, because I see that this statement must be true.

MOTIVE: My critical investigation into the sources.

It is clear that scientific faith is not faith in the strict sense. It is called faith because it makes use of testimony rather than of one's own experience. Even when facts are historically established, their truth is not obvious in themselves, but in the testimony of others. It is called scientific, because of the critical investigation of sources which is the motive of assent.

2. SIMPLE FAITH

SIMPLE FAITH is belief on the authority of another. There is no critical investigation of the trustworthiness of the witnesses. Undoubtedly, at least after we pass the stage of childhood, we always have implicitly in mind the judgment on which such faith rests: "Men do not lie without reason." But

the reason we here and now accept the word of our fellow men is not this judgment, but simply our reliance on the authority of others.

Such faith is very common. In fact, it is the whole foundation of social intercourse, of education, of business. A child believes his father and mother unquestioningly. A student believes his teachers. The unlearned believe the learned.

Simple faith, despite the fact that it rests on authorities which may err, is perfectly reasonable, even indispensable. If we were liable to accept many seriously erroneous views through these sources, men would long since have abandoned all faith in their fellow men. Even the serious errors to which public education exposes young men and women today, the unscrupulous use of advertising, and the vicious propaganda widespread in some countries, are not enough to make men universal sceptics, because universal scepticism is intolerable and unlivable.

However acute our senses may be, however brilliant our powers of understanding, the store of information which we can brand as peculiarly our own is as nothing compared with that derived from our fellow men. It is to their testimony that we are indebted for all our knowledge of the distant past, for much of our knowledge of the immediate present, for almost everything we know of the conclusions of science, and for all that mass of practical or moral certainty on which we regulate our daily lives.....³

Without inclining to credulity, we can (and must) say that simple faith is reasonable, and that the motive on which it rests has been, is, and ever will be sufficient to supply us with most of the knowledge by which we direct even the more important aspects of our lives.

³ Sheehan, Apologetics and Catholic Doctrine, Part II, p. 4.

FORMULA: I believe, because you say it.
MOTIVE: The authority of the speaker.

THE WILL MUST ACT IN SIMPLE FAITH and, in the opinion of some, even in scientific faith. The truths acquired do not come bearing their own evidence, as they do in science. The motives which impel the will to command the assent of the intellect are always extrinsic to the truths themselves. Consequently the mind is not forced by the evident truth of the statements, and looks to the will for that impulse which makes the mind assent: either on the authority of the speaker, or on the sufficiency of testimony. The latter is obviously reasonable because of its scientific thoroughness. The former is recognized by all men as sufficient reason for accepting truths.

II

SUPERNATURAL FAITH

A. VATICAN COUNCIL'S DEFINITION.

SUPERNATURAL FAITH IS MOST AKIN TO SIMPLE FAITH. This seems to be the sense of the Vatican Council's definition where the only motive given for assent in divine faith is the AUTHORITY OF GOD REVEALING.

Since man depends wholly on God, his creator and Lord, and since created reason is entirely subject to uncreated Truth, we are bound to give to God, Who reveals to us, full obedience of intellect and will by faith. This faith which is "the beginning of man's salvation," the Catholic Church teaches is a supernatural power by which, God's grace inspiring and assisting, we believe to be true all that He has revealed, not because of the intrinsic truth of things seen by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God Himself Who is revealing to us, Who can neither deceive nor be deceived.⁴

⁴ Vat. Council, Sess. III, De Fide, c. 3, DE. 1789. (Italics ours.)

FORMULA: I Believe because God has said it.
 MOTIVE: The authority of God revealing.

1. REASONABLENESS OF SUPERNATURAL FAITH

If simple natural faith is reasonable, (and no one could deny that it is without cutting the ground from under the whole structure of knowledge,) then, a fortiori, Supernatural Faith is reasonable.

But it is not on these grounds alone that we can call faith reasonable. We have spent the whole of the first part of CHRISTIAN ORIGINS, and half of the second, in establishing those previous certitudes, PREAMBLES OF FAITH, which lead to the judgments: The teachings of Christ, as they come to me through the Church, guaranteed as they are by miracles, rest on the authority of God who can neither deceive nor be deceived. Therefore THEY ARE WORTHY OF BELIEF. I OUGHT TO BELIEVE.

Yet we know from the constant teaching of the Church about Faith and justification that we cannot pass through the door of Faith by the power of human reason. Reason can prepare the ground as the farmer tills the soil, but reason cannot produce the act of Faith, nor can unaided human will command it, any more than the farmer can make seeds sprout. It is God who must intervene here.

We are speaking, remember, of SUPERNATURAL FAITH. Even in the preparations which reason makes, it is almost certain that God has been giving supernatural assistance all along the way. Between our human reasoning and the Supernatural act of Faith there is a strictly supernatural act usually called the "pious desire to believe." It is CERTAIN THAT THE "PIOUS DESIRE TO BELIEVE" MUST COME FROM GOD.⁵ (We

⁵ This is not only the common teaching of theologians, but the only interpretation which can be put on the Council of Trent's teaching on justification. Cf. IB. 793-799, esp. 797.

are supposing, of course, one who has not received the gift of Faith from infancy, but who approaches the Faith after he has attained the use of reason. In such a person we can watch at least the main steps of his progress towards Faith, even though it may be extremely difficult to describe a common pattern of the natural activities and supernatural assistance which occur in each individual.)

No one who has reflected on the preliminary judgments leading up to the act of Faith can doubt that these render Faith reasonable. The VATICAN COUNCIL has assured us of this in a statement immediately following the words we have quoted above:

That the submission of our faith be rendered consonant with reason, God has willed to unite with the internal helps of His Holy Spirit the external arguments for His revelation; namely, divine facts, especially miracles and prophecies, which are most sure signs of divine revelation since they wonderfully demonstrate the omnipotence and the infinite knowledge of God.⁶

Although the act of Faith does not follow from the preambles of Faith as the conclusion of a syllogism follows from its premises, it would be well to show how the preambles of Faith do affect the act, and do render it reasonable in itself. No one, in the mind of the present writer, has better satisfied the demands of doctrine and the results of psychological studies of Faith than Father Balivet, from whose excellent study we take the following analysis:

My intellect perceives revealed truth as worthy of assent of unconditional faith only in so far as that truth has been presented to the mind by two previous judgments as emanating from God and guaranteed by divine authority; and it is to this truth, present to the mind and guaranteed by the

⁶ Vat. Council. Sess. III, de Fide, c. 3, DB. 1790.

infallible authority of God, that my mind, under the command of the will, adheres. This command was necessary, not because the mind lacked an object (truth) or a reason (authority of God) for its assent, but because this object, in Faith, presents itself to the intellect under such conditions that the mind cannot by its own energy alone adhere to it. All that the intellect can do is to ask the will for the needed impulse and then, applied by the will to its object (i.e. revealed truth) of itself adhere, while the will keeps the mind applied to its object....

.....The divine authority influences the assent in much the same manner as the principle acts in a scientific conclusion. It gives to the mind both the formal reason for its assent and the energy on account of which this assent is given. But here the similarity ends. The process of Faith is not a logical process like that of science. Faith and science are two distinct ways of arriving at knowledge; and their psychology is essentially different.⁷

2. CHILDREN AND PHILOSOPHERS

There is a well-known saying attributed to the great scientist, Pasteur. When some of his fellow-members of the French Academy twitted him about his obviously deep and sincere Faith, he calmly explained that his scientific investigations, far from weakening his Faith, only served to confirm it; and

⁷ J.V. Bainvel, S.J., Faith and the Act of Faith, pp. 56-57. (Italics and parenthetical insertions are ours.) The preliminary explanation of science and natural faith should make the last assertion of this quotation sufficiently clear. (The author acknowledges his indebtedness to Father Bainvel, not only for passages used here, but also for the general plan of sections I and II of this chapter.)

remarked: "I have the Faith of a Breton peasant, and some day I hope to have the Faith of a Breton peasant's wife."

The strength of faith in children and simple folk is a proverb; and Christ, Himself, proposed the simplicity (as well as the innocence) of a child for our emulation: "Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Mt. 18:3)

On the one hand, it would seem that a deeper study of Faith and its rational foundations is useless, since even the philosopher and scientist must become "as little children" - and on the other hand, the philosopher and scientist seem to have the advantage because they can know more thoroughly and explicitly the reasons for their Faith. In reality, the advantage on either side is accidental.

The knowledge of the preambles of Faith which the child possesses has been acquired at his mother's knee. This knowledge is none the less sure because received through the medium of tradition on SIMPLE NATURAL FAITH. This medium is sufficient for the child, giving him all the certitudes he needs about the existence and authority of God. The necessity of subjecting himself to God's authority by Faith is so clear to him that his acts of Faith never manifest wavering or hesitation.⁸

⁸ Amongst the documents prepared by the theologians of the VATICAN COUNCIL there is a fine description of the nature and value of common-sense certitudes: "Just as, through natural means provided by God's providence, the whole human race has full certitude in certain natural truths, without need of any scientific demonstrations (for they can be explained in their foundations more fully and distinctly by philosophical inquiry, but cannot be destroyed by any apparent difficulties): so in the order of God's supernatural providence the divine wisdom and goodness has endowed the Catholic Church with such outstanding characteristics that in it, without any scientific inquiry, for which in truth the greater part of mankind is not equipped, even the

The need of more thoroughly reasoned and reflective certitude about the grounds of Faith is proportioned to the stage of cultivation of mind one has reached. With advance in learning in other fields, difficulties may and do arise, especially in the agnostic atmosphere of our times. To refuse to prepare oneself for these difficulties, even though they be not actually present now, is to expose one's Faith to a gradual process of obscuring, if not eventual loss. Therefore it becomes necessary for educated men to acquire a reasoned and reflective certitude about the grounds of Faith.

In the process of acquiring this certitude, that attitude of scepticism so common in adolescents who are just beginning to discover the difficulties involved in rational and scientific inquiry may obscure for a time, even severely shake, their once child-like faith. But if true intellectual honesty and good-will are not lacking, these mental growing-pains soon disappear. Wisdom comes, if intellectual pride does not close the mind's doors, and Faith is strengthened, confirmed against all storms and temptations. With wisdom, the child-like simplicity of the true philosopher whose mind is open to truth wherever he finds it, returns. The only obstacle to child-like Faith will be lack of good-will.

B. SUPERNATURAL ACT OF FAITH: DEFINITION

From the explanation of Faith thus far given, the definition of the act of Faith should be easily understood, even though we could go on endlessly discussing problems connected with Faith, which might obscure the issue without either throwing light on it or casting doubt on our main conclusions.

uneducated can acquire a readily understandable compendium of motives of credibility which beget complete certitude. Apologetic studies can confirm these motives by clearer and fuller explanations; but no opposing arguments can be brought forward which would beget any prudent doubt that would undermine these motives of credibility. (Collectio Iacensis, VII, coll. 533.)

FAITH, AS AN ACT, IS: AN ASSENT OF THE MIND, IMPELLED BY THE WILL, INSPIRED BY DIVINE GRACE, TO TRUTHS REVEALED BY GOD, ON THE AUTHORITY OF GOD REVEALING:

- a) ASSENT OF THE MIND: An intellectual act by which we possess true knowledge; not a blind sentiment.
- b) IMPELLED BY THE WILL: because lack of intrinsic evidence in the truths embraced leaves the mind free to act or not to act on the motives of credibility, thus making Faith FREE and MERITORIOUS.
- c) INSPIRED BY DIVINE GRACE: Supernatural assistance elevating our natural powers, enabling us to subject our intellects and wills to Infinite Truth and Goodness; and thus uniting our intellects and wills with the Intellect and Will of God.
- d) TO TRUTHS REVEALED BY GOD: the object (subject-matter) of Divine Faith can be only God's word.
- e) ON THE AUTHORITY OF GOD REVEALING: the MOTIVE OF FAITH, which makes Faith reasonable and at the same time gives honor to God.

N.B. The last two elements will be explained more fully below (sections III and IV).

C. DEFINITION OF THE SUPERNATURAL VIRTUE OF FAITH.

A brief explanation of the virtue of Faith is necessary, not only because of its inestimable value in itself, but likewise because an understanding of the virtue of Faith throws light on some of the properties of Faith which we must examine directly. FAITH is one of the THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES. The other two theological virtues are HOPE and CHARITY. They are called "theological" because they have God as their immediate object.

THE VIRTUE OF FAITH IS: A SUPERNATURAL POWER INFUSED INTO OUR SOULS BY GOD, BY WHICH WE ARE ABLE AND WILLING TO BELIEVE ALL THE TRUTHS REVEALED BY GOD.

- a) A SUPERNATURAL POWER: a power which remains as a permanent acquisition, unless lost through deliberate rejection of Faith; but which supposes exercise by making acts of Faith, if it is not to grow weak and die out.
- b) INFUSED INTO THE SOUL: not acquired by our own efforts, because it is a supernatural power altogether above our natural capacities. Once we attain the use of reason, we are obliged to maintain it by acts, thus supporting the infused virtue by the acquired habit of Faith.
- c) BY GOD: from whom alone all supernatural gifts directly proceed.
- d) BY WHICH WE ARE ABLE AND WILLING: a supernatural "faculty" which gives us the capacity to make acts of Faith meritorious for heaven.
- e) TO BELIEVE ALL TRUTHS: as expressed in the brief act of Faith: "I believe all that God has revealed and that the Catholic Church teaches."

Notice that the VIRTUE IS A PERMANENT "HABIT" infused into the soul, which disposes the soul to acts of Faith when reason develops, and one becomes conscious of the obligation of Faith. ACTS OF FAITH ARE TRANSIENT, like any other mental and voluntary act, though they tend to produce the acquired habit of Faith by constant repetition of acts.

D. PROPERTIES OF FAITH

If we keep in mind that Faith is an act made by a human being, and therefore subject to psychological analysis, and at the same time is a supernatural act possessing properties dependent on factors beyond all human analysis, the following description of the properties of faith will provide no difficulty.

1. CERTITUDE OF FAITH: FIRMNESS

SUPERNATURAL FAITH IS THE FIRMEST OF ALL CERTITUDES. This does not mean that Faith is subjectively the most satisfying state of certitude. It simply means that objectively Faith rests on the highest possible motive of assent - the authority of God revealing; and that subjectively I make my assent conform to this highest possible motive by the energy of my will corresponding to God's grace.

All the will needs to command such an unhesitating assent of the mind is a reasonable motive excluding all prudent doubt. The reasonable motive excluding fear of error may be acquired by the way of simple faith or through the painstaking examination of the grounds of Faith by the student or philosopher. Either of these, as we have shown above (pp. 172-174) provides the mind with sufficient motives of credibility. The mind recognizes the motive as sufficient, but not compelling. Therefore, in the actual adhesion of the mind to truths revealed, on the authority of God revealing, it is the will aided by grace which makes the objectively highest motive of certitude also the subjectively highest. This may take place with or without proportionate increase of subjective satisfaction in possession of truths by Faith, but the subjective satisfaction or lack of it in no way alters the firmness or value of Faith.

2. OBSCURITY OF FAITH

Truths possessed by Faith remain obscure, because they remain truths heard, not seen. This, of course, is above all true of the mysteries revealed. Even the authority of God revealing does not give my mind light to see the connection between "Three Persons" and "One Divine Nature." Only the authority of God secures the truth of the mystery.

3. FREEDOM OF FAITH

The firmness of certitude in Faith is secured by the will freely cooperating with God's grace.

Moreover, the obscurity of Faith just mentioned shows why the will is free in commanding or not commanding the assent, since the mind is forced to assent only to those truths it distinctly sees under the light of compelling evidence.

It should likewise be noted that even those who have thoroughly reasoned out the preambles of Faith until they see clearly the connection between them and God's authority, have not always the full force of their reasoning before them, but rest on previously known certitude. Thus the motive of Faith - God's authority - is accepted at its full value, though the reasoning which threw light on its value be now grown dim. In the author's opinion, it is possible for the will to choose the motive of God's authority, without consideration of the preambles which show its reasonableness, in preference to the motive of God's authority seen in the full light of that reasoning still fresh in the mind; and that the former is a more meritorious act because it seeks above all to do honor to God, and not to give satisfaction to one's own mind.

4. UNIVERSALITY OF FAITH

Faith must embrace all that God has revealed. This is evident, because the same motive guarantees every revealed truth equally. As soon as I become aware that God has revealed a truth, I must accept it for the same reason that I accept every other revealed truth. I may inquire into its meaning, if the truth provides any specious difficulties or apparent contradictions to other truths known as revealed, or as certain from other sources; but I cannot positively doubt or deny it without being guilty of heresy and deliberate rejection of Faith.

E. NECESSITY OF FAITH

Without faith it is impossible to please God.
For he that cometh to God must believe that He is,
and is a rewarder to them that seek Him. (Heb. 11:6)
He that believeth not shall be condemned. (Mk. 16:16)

We are said to be justified by faith on this account, because faith is the beginning of man's salvation, the foundation and root of all justification, "without which it is impossible to please God," and to join the company of His children....⁹

THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF FAITH for salvation, and the reasons for its absolute necessity, require no further comment after reading these scriptural passages and the dogmatic statement of the Council of Trent. The only question that might trouble one is: HOW CAN MEN COME TO A SUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE OF FAITH TO BE SAVED?

There is, perhaps, no question on which more useless speculation and anxiety are wasted than this one. Without learning fully the details of God's ordinary providence, which has marvelously designed a sure and easy way of salvation, and without realizing that God's extraordinary providence can plan for those outside the Church infinitely more wisely than we can conceive, men are inclined to find fault with God. If men would strive to cooperate more fully with God's plan by a life of deep faith, ardent charity, and energetic zeal, and leave to God the problem which only infinite wisdom can solve, they would find greater peace for themselves, and bring to many others the peace and joy of finding the sure and certain way of salvation.

A firm grasp on the following truths should help those who are so ungrateful as to mistrust God's infinite love to keep their mental equilibrium.

1. God wills all men to be saved, provided they freely cooperate with the grace He gives to all, and do not reject the means He offers them.

2. "God so loved the world that He sent His only Son"

⁹ Council of Trent, Sess. VI, c. 8. DB. 801.

to save all men - those of the Old Law through belief in His coming, those of the New Law through belief that He has come, and through acceptance of His truth.

3. The normal means of salvation, by the will of Christ who earned our redemption, is THROUGH THE CHURCH HE ESTABLISHED - including the whole hierarchy of His appointed teachers, and the abundant channels of grace He has left us in the Church.

4. The extraordinary means of salvation - God's plan for those who through no fault of their own do not come to a knowledge of the Church - is not completely known. Since we know from His own words that God wills all men to be saved, we know that He will provide sufficient means for all to believe that minimum which St. Paul tells us is indispensable: "That He is, and is the rewarder of them that come to Him."¹⁰

F. VALUE OF FAITH

Since Faith is absolutely essential to salvation, there can be no question about its value. But if we merely view Faith negatively, we far underestimate it. It is not only the indispensable foundation of, but it actively influences, the whole supernatural life of the soul in proportion to the firmness and frequency of our acts of Faith. Gaining a deeper and deeper understanding of divine truths by frequent acts of Faith, we grow in love and union with God. We must never forget that our share of eternal happiness depends on the degree of union with God attained in this world. Divine Faith unites the intellect

¹⁰ Many theologians contend that belief in the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Trinity is likewise necessary for salvation. This should be kept in mind by anyone assisting a dying person, not yet baptized. The mysteries should be proposed simply, according to the capacity of the one instructed, and an act of Faith elicited, as his condition allows.

with God, as Charity unites the will. ¹¹

LOSS OF FAITH comes only by deliberate rejection. But the way to this loss is paved by many acts of infidelity to God's law and many refusals to cooperate with His grace. Just as the principal means of strengthening Faith is exercising it by making acts of Faith, so the weakening of it comes from lack of exercise, as a man who is confined to bed for many months loses the power of walking, and must learn the process over again.

Lack of exercise of Faith usually goes hand in hand with other causes which bring about the final rejection of Faith. These causes work on the intellect and will, undermining either the rational foundation of Faith, or weakening that good will which is necessary to make an act of Faith; or both.

Examples of the former are: exposing oneself to difficulties against the faith without being prepared to meet them by philosophical and solidly intellectual religious training; attendance at secular schools; reading books explicitly or implicitly attacking the faith, (and this is true of very many modern "best sellers"); or consorting with agnostic companions when one is no match for them. All these are fraught with great danger to Faith. Catholic grade and high school training are not sufficient preparation for meeting these dangers.

Examples of influences undermining the will are: books which vividly present and defend immorality of any kind; habits of sin usually leading to neglect of practice of one's Faith; and worst of all - intellectual pride which refuses to give God the rational submission of intellect and will which every creature owes His Creator.

¹¹ To our knowledge, the most adequate and most beautifully developed explanation of "Faith as the foundation of the supernatural life," is in Abbot Marlon's Christ, the Life of the Soul, p. 121 ff.

If we would keep our Faith secure, and attain to that deep peace and joy which it brings to those who embrace it whole-heartedly, we should follow the advice sublimely expressed by St. Paul:

Wherefore we also having so great a cloud of witnesses over our head,
laying aside every weight and sin which surrounds us,
let us run by patience to the fight proposed to us:

Looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of Faith.

Who having joy set before Him,
endured the cross, despising the shame,
And now sitteth at the right hand of the throne of
God..... (Heb. 12:1-2)

III

THE RULE OF FAITH

HOW AM I TO KNOW WHAT I MUST BELIEVE? i.e.
by what norm can I be sure what God has revealed, in
order that I may apply the motive of Faith; the
authority of God Revealing?

We have already seen the answer to this question but, before we define the Rule of Faith more precisely, it would be well to sum up again certain truths established in CHRISTIAN ORIGINS, I, and in the preceding chapters of this volume, especially Chapters IV, VI, and VII. We are concerned, of course only with PUBLIC REVELATION, since private revelation is binding only on the one who receives it.

SUMMARY OF TRUTHS PREVIOUSLY ESTABLISHED

1. God has made a revelation binding on all men. This includes a) the OLD TESTAMENT, insofar as it has not been transcended by the new. b) The NEW TESTAMENT, the REVELATION OF THE SON OF GOD.

Since Christ, the Son of God, is the Father's own revelation of Himself to men, and since it was not God's plan that Christ should personally bring that revelation to every individual: we receive this

revelation according to the plan determined by Christ:

2. Christ established a Church which He commanded to "Teach all things, whatsoever I have commanded you." He thus made the rulers of His Church an authoritative teaching body, whom all men are bound to hear and obey. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be condemned."

3. He endowed His Church with outstanding Marks found only in the Catholic Church which we have conclusively proved to be Christ's excluding all false claimants; and He made the Church so obviously a divine institution that all men of good will, learned or ignorant, can see:

The Church herself, by her remarkable increase, her lofty holiness, her boundless fruitfulness in all kinds of good works, by her catholic unity and unconquerable stability, IS HER OWN GREAT AND PERPETUAL MOTIVE OF CREDIBILITY, THE IRREFUTABLE TESTIMONY OF HER DIVINE MISSION.¹²

4. This Church He so guides by His Holy Spirit that, not only through the infallibility of her head, or of her bishops gathered in council or in their common teaching of Faith throughout the world, but also through the whole system of her teaching, down to pastors and teachers, fathers and mothers, from whom the child receives its instruction in the Faith, each member of the Church can learn the true Faith and say with certitude: "THIS TEACHING IS THE WORD OF GOD. I BELIEVE ALL THAT GOD HAS REVEALED AND THAT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TEACHES."

¹² DB. 1794.

A. THE COMPLETE AND ULTIMATE RULE OF FAITH

The very nature of Christ's plan manifests to us ONLY ONE COMPLETE AND ULTIMATE RULE OF FAITH; that is THE LIVING VOICE OF THE LIVING CHURCH. This rule is sometimes referred to as ACTIVE TRADITION: i.e., the teaching and handing on to successive generations, by authoritative teachers, of all Christ's doctrine.

Consequently the Church today, and in particular, the present reigning pontiff with the bishops ruling the Church throughout the world, constitutes the ultimate norm by which my Faith must be guided. This will appear more clearly when we examine the partial norms and their relation to the ultimate rule of Faith.

B. PARTIAL RULES: SCRIPTURE - TRADITION

For our convenience, under God's inspiration, sacred writers have preserved a large portion of God's revelation in the "books" which make up the Bible - the Old and New Testament. Throughout the centuries of the Christian era the Fathers and Doctors of the Church have commented on and explained the Scriptures, and have more fully developed their meaning and implication.

1. SCRIPTURE (the Old and New Testaments) contains much, but not all of revealed truth. It was not until the Protestant revolt that there was any widespread attempt to substitute the dead letter of a book for the living voice of the Church. Without minimizing the importance of the Scriptures, their inadequacy as a complete rule of Faith can be seen from the following considerations:

a) Scripture does not contain the whole of revelation. Christ nowhere commands His Apostles to put down all His teachings in writing, and we know that some truths of Faith which the Church has always taught are not contained in Scripture.¹³

b) Scripture does not interpret itself, as the

¹³ Cf. CHRISTIAN ORIGINS, I, 91-93.

confusion immediately engendered by the doctrine of private interpretation clearly manifests.

c) Scripture itself is given to us and guaranteed only by ACTIVE TRADITION, i.e. by the Teaching Church.¹⁴

2. TRADITION, taken PASSIVELY, is the written record of what the Church has taught at any previous age. It is learned principally from the writings of the Fathers. It is really more inclusive than the Scriptures, at least from a doctrinal point of view, because, besides containing most of the Scriptures, it likewise tells us of many teachings known previously only through oral tradition.

Tradition likewise needs an interpreter, and is therefore inadequate as a complete rule of Faith. An interpreter is especially necessary to distinguish which teachings of the Fathers are matters of Faith, and which are only human reasonings about doctrines of Faith.

Doctors of the Church - great theologians canonized for their holiness of life and declared Doctors of the Church because of their enormous contributions to understanding of the Church's teachings - can likewise be used as a partial rule of Faith, since in their writings can be found complete syntheses of Catholic teaching, and valuable collections of patristic sources which show what doctrines are universally taught by the Fathers.

The difficulty of using both of these partial norms is: One must make sure that a doctrine (if not defined by the Church) has been universally taught by the Fathers as an article of Faith. If there is any dispute, the only court of appeal is the present teaching magisterium.

The examination of these partial rules of Faith only serves to emphasize the importance of THE

¹⁴ ".....hanc veritatem et disciplinam continet in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus," DB. 783.

LIVING VOICE OF THE LIVING CHURCH. It is this teaching authority in the Church which:

- a) Has given, preserved, and interpreted the Scriptures;
- b) Preserved, handed on, explained passive tradition.
- c) Defined, clarified truths contained in written and oral tradition when disputes arose.
- d) Approved and guaranteed the teachings of the Fathers.
- e) Still guides, purifies, and guarantees the teaching of theologians.
- f) Continues to teach and guide the faithful through its Hierarchy and their auxiliaries - the pastors and teachers in churches and schools.

IV

THE OBJECT OF FAITH

The Motive of Faith - the Authority of God revealing, - makes it manifest that I CAN GIVE ASSENT OF DIVINE FAITH ONLY TO TRUTHS REVEALED BY GOD. The Rule of Faith shows me that the TEACHING CHURCH IS THE NORM BY WHICH I CAN LEARN WHAT IS REVEALED.

But since the Church's teaching authority extends to the buttresses of Faith as well as to the edifice of Faith itself, we must learn more precisely when our assent to the Church's teaching is an act of Divine Faith, when it is an irrevocable assent to God's teachers in matters supporting Faith but not actually revealed, and finally when it is a reverent obedience of mind and will to the teaching authority God has placed over us.

A. THE DEPOSIT OF FAITH: DIVINELY REVEALED TRUTH

"WHAT HAS BEEN HANDED DOWN" (Quod traditum est) is an expression coined by the earliest Christian generations to distinguish divinely revealed truth

from merely human developments of that truth as well as from spurious "revelations." Probably no single individual who has walked this earth, save the Man-God, Jesus Christ, ever knew all that is explicitly and implicitly contained in this DEPOSIT OF FAITH which is HANDED ON BY THE CHURCH. All we are certain of is that Christ gave to His Church the whole of His Revelation, commissioning her to "teach all things, whatsoever I have commanded you," and that He promised His Holy Spirit to His Church to guide Her in this work - "But when He, the Spirit of Truth is come, He will teach you all truth..." (Jn. 16:13) "He will bring to your mind all things, whatsoever I have told you." (14:26)

On the basis of these statements of our Lord, and in accordance with the constant conviction of the Church, we know that REVELATION WAS COMPLETED WITH THE APOSTLES. After the death of the Apostles, to whom those words were addressed, there will not be any new public revelation, i.e. a revelation binding on all men. Consequently those new sects which claim to have a new revelation (Church of Latter Day Saints, Holy Rollers, New Apostles) are ruled out of court by the contradiction between their claims and Christ's words to His Apostles.

The task of the Church is to preserve and to hand on the Deposit of Faith. The Church is the only competent judge of what is contained in that Deposit of Faith. This is clear from what we have seen above concerning the RULE OF FAITH. But the intelligent layman may and should be curious to know by what norms the Church determines which doctrines are revealed, especially when the expression of a dogma does not obviously correspond to any explicit statement of scripture, or to any clearly and constantly expressed belief contained in tradition. A fuller knowledge of these matters should lead to a more intelligent Faith.

1. IN REVELATION, some things are ESSENTIAL, some ACCIDENTAL. ESSENTIALS are those truths which help man to attain his last end, such as mysteries to be

believed, laws to be observed. ACCIDENTALS are truths related in connection with these mysteries or laws, such as historical incidents. Where it is clear God has revealed them, BOTH ARE TO BE BELIEVED. What is only accidentally connected with dogmatic truths need not necessarily be preserved.

2. Some things in revelation are EXPLICITLY REVEALED, others only IMPLICITLY REVEALED. The former involves no difficulty, because the statements are usually so clear that no one can twist their meaning: e.g. the Birth, Passion and Death, Resurrection of our Savior.

What is implicitly revealed is a truth inevitably contained in explicit revelation, but which appears clearly only on reflection. It is clearly revealed that Christ is truly man, therefore we must conclude that He has human intellect and free will. It is also clearly revealed that Peter was made the foundation of Christ's Church and that the Church was to continue to the end of time; therefore it is implicitly revealed that the foundation (the office of Peter as Primate) of the Church is to continue to the end of time, and therefore that office now exists. Both explicitly and implicitly revealed truths are objects of the act of Faith; but truths revealed only implicitly become objects of explicit Faith when defined by the Church, (or when I become certain that they are inevitably contained in explicitly revealed truths.)

B. DEFINITIONS OF FAITH: PRIMARY OBJECT OF INFALLIBILITY

1. A DEFINITION OF FAITH (DOGMA) IS: A solemn declaration of the Church stating that some truth belongs to the deposit of Faith, or giving an authoritative declaration of the immutable meaning of some truth contained in the deposit of Faith, or both.

"What has been handed down" is the Church's criterion in defining doctrine. The truths may be clearly or obscurely expressed in Scripture or Tradition; they may be explicit or implicit. In either

case they are part of the Deposit of Faith which is the PRIMARY OBJECT OF THE CHURCH'S INFALLIBILITY.

To definitions of Faith (Divine Faith, defined), the Church demands of all the faithful a complete and irrevocable assent.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE

It is apparent from what has been said about things implicitly revealed that there will arise the need of clarifying and making more explicit what was before obscure and implicit. This need becomes especially acute when heretics, as is their wont, seize on some narrow aspect of a revealed truth to the exclusion or denial of other truths also revealed. But even aside from this extreme of heresy, the human mind seeks to know more and more fully the content and meaning of revelation.

When need arises, the Church will usually give fuller and clearer statement of doctrines formerly only implicitly believed. Nothing new is added to the deposit of Faith, but the implications of truths are made explicit, and our minds are enriched by fuller knowledge of our Faith.

3. FUNDAMENTALISMS AND MODERNISMS

Fundamentalists are those Protestants who attach supreme importance to the literal interpretation of the Bible. Aside from their rejection of that notable portion of revelation which has come down through oral tradition, these Fundamentalists in their handling of the Scriptures condemn themselves to the confusion and contradiction which has broken Protestantism up into so many sects. They are likewise inconsistent since they cannot preach or teach without interpreting, and as soon as they interpret, they are going beyond the literal word. It was obviously to avoid this that Christ gave His truth to a living Church, teaching with authority and endowed with infallibility. The Fundamentalist accusation that the Church has admitted new doctrines is really

an accusation against Fundamentalism for refusing to admit the implications of doctrines.

Modernists, on the other hand, would dissolve all revelation in a curious mental alchemy of sentimental rationalism. We have already shown in CHRISTIAN ORIGINS, Chapter V, that Modernism is the climax of the movement toward anti-intellectualism, and consequently full of inherent absurdities and contradictions. But the Modernist accusation that the Church is narrow, rigid, and obscurantist, merely emphasizes the fact that the Church is conscious of her obligation to preserve intact the whole of the revelation committed to her.

The Church's answer to the Fundamentalist is that she teaches nothing but what has been handed down; to the Modernists that she preserves and hands on all that has been handed down.

C. OTHER DEFINITIONS AND DECISIONS: SECONDARY OBJECT OF INFALLIBILITY.

As we indicated above, the Church is the only competent judge of the extent of the deposit of Faith. Likewise the Church is the only competent judge of the extent of her infallibility. In giving these few rules by which we can guide ourselves to a more intelligent profession of our Faith, we are merely indicating the principal means by which the Church has, in the past, determined these doctrines which she proposes for our belief.

In analyzing the solemn teaching of the Church, we find that the Church exercises the fullness of her infallible teaching authority to demand an irrevocable assent to matters which are not explicitly, and apparently not even implicitly, revealed. These definitions and decisions embrace what are usually called matters of ECCLESIASTICAL FAITH. They are so intimately connected with Faith that one could not deny them without implicitly denying some article of Faith. They are to be believed not on the word of God, since He does not reveal them, but on the word of the Church.

God's infallible teacher.¹⁵

1. THEOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS AND DOGMATIC FACTS

When, from a revealed truth, and from some truth known from natural reason, a conclusion is drawn, this is called a theological conclusion. E.g. It is revealed that God, the Son, is the Word of the Father. It is known from reason that the "word" proceeds from the intellect. Therefore the Son proceeds from the intellect of the Father. If the Church defines that the Son proceeds from the intellect of the Father, this is a theological conclusion in the strict sense of the word, (not in the broader sense in which any results of reasoning made by theologians on the data of revelation would be called theological conclusions) and this truth must be believed by all the faithful on the word of the Church.

The most famous instance of a declaration of dogmatic facts is linked with the history of Jansenism. Certain propositions contained in a book called Augustinus, written by Jansenius, were condemned by Innocent X as heretical. Some of the author's friends and followers protested that they were not intended in a heretical sense. The Church declared itself competent to judge whether the propositions condemned were the true sense of what the author wrote, and Alexander VII explicitly declared: "In the sense intended by Cornelius Jansenius we declare and define them condemned."¹⁶ The Church, of course, was not judging the subjective intention of Jansenius to be heretical, but that, if he was using the words in their ordinary meaning, the sense of what he wrote was heretical.

¹⁵ Some theologians quarrel with the term "Ecclesiastical Faith," but they agree that what is embraced by this term must be believed. They include these matters under "implicitly revealed" truths.

¹⁶ DB. 1098 Cf. also DB. 1092 and 1350.

The reason for the Church's infallibility in defining theological conclusions and dogmatic facts is that without infallibility in these, the buttresses of Faith, the Church could not fulfill the very purpose for which she was made infallible - to preserve intact the deposit of Faith. Denial of theological conclusions or dogmatic facts logically leads to denial of some revealed truth.

2. DISCIPLINARY DECREES, CANONIZATION, APPROVAL OF RELIGIOUS RULES.

From the mind of the Church as expressed in solemn documents, and from the common teaching of theologians, we know that the Church is likewise infallible in her disciplinary decrees, in the canonization of saints and in the approval of rules or constitutions of religious orders. The reason here is the Church's infallibility as custodian of morals, rather than of doctrine.

Disciplinary decrees. When we say the Church is infallible in laying down these decrees, such as the code of Canon Law, all that we mean is that they must be accepted as a good means to achieve the purpose intended - well-regulated Church discipline. We do not have to acknowledge them as the best means, nor are they immutable, but we must recognize them as good, and abide by them.

In Canonization, the Church proposes some departed soul for our veneration, by a definitive declaration that he has been received into the Church triumphant. If the Church were not infallible in such declarations, she would be doing grave injury to the worship over which she is supreme custodian - especially the Sacrifice of the Mass and the Divine Office - since each canonized saint is given a place in the Church's liturgical calendar.

In approval of religious rules, the Church solemnly states that the mode of life prescribed by this rule is conducive to perfection. Could the Church err here, she would be proposing, with the

most solemn approbation, a mode of life as leading to perfection, when it actually might be useless or bad.

In each of these three cases, the Church's infallibility is supported by the same line of reasoning: God founded the Church as the guardian and guide of morals (as well as of truth). If the Church were not infallible in these three matters touching morals (and implicitly doctrine), she would fail of her purpose. We cannot admit this without denying the efficacy of the divine promises.

D. ORDINARY TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

Infallible decisions, whether in matters of Divine Faith or in matters of Ecclesiastical Faith, are not the ordinary way in which the Church carries out her mission of teaching all truth. By far the greater portion of the Church's teaching is in explanation of these truths and their application to problems of everyday life.

We have tried to give some practical norms by which to determine the extent and limits of Divine Faith, and the further extent of the Church's infallibility to matters of Ecclesiastical Faith. This should help the well-instructed layman to avoid that naive credulity one sometimes finds, where every word of the parish priest or the teaching sister, in matters of religion, is looked upon as an infallible pronouncement.

In our day, however, the greater danger is exaggerated scepticism, which seems to affect even good Catholics to the extent that they will not believe anything which the Church has not clearly defined.

WHAT PRACTICAL RULE SHOULD GUIDE THE FAITHFUL IN RECEIVING THE ORDINARY TEACHING OF THE CHURCH?

RULE: THE ASSENT OF THE INTELLECT SHOULD BE PROPORTIONED TO THE IMPORTANCE WHICH THE CHURCH HERSELF ATTACHES TO HER TEACHING.

DIVINE AUTHORITY TO TEACH ALL OF CHRIST'S TRUTH INSURES THE REASONABLENESS OF THE INTELLECTUAL ASSENT WHICH WE MUST GIVE TO THE ORDINARY TEACHING OF THE CHURCH. There may be truths taught in this ordinary way which will someday be defined. If they are, our assent now is an implicit act of Faith. If they are not revealed, our assent is merely that submission of intellect and will which we owe to God's authoritative teacher. How firm an assent is required we can usually discover by the solemnity with which the Church surrounds her teaching.

PAPAL ENCYCLICALS, for example, hold a place of importance somewhat between solemn definitions and ordinary teaching. In them the Pope is teaching in virtue of his office as supreme teacher and pastor, but he is not actually defining doctrine. Much of what is contained in these documents has long since been defined (witness the encyclicals on Marriage and on the Priesthood). What has not been defined, WE MUST RECOGNIZE AS GOOD AND SAFE DOCTRINE, GUARANTEED BY THE SUPREME TEACHER OF GOD'S CHURCH. This means that all that is contained in such pronouncements is a SAFE GUIDE FOR OUR INTELLECTS, and where action is in question, A SAFE GUIDE FOR OUR ACTIONS. This is what we mean when we say we must give to such pronouncements an intellectual assent.

BISHOPS ARE AUTHORITATIVE TEACHERS IN THE CHURCH. We saw in Chapter VI that they are infallible when, as a whole (though not gathered in council) they teach a doctrine as revealed. But, here again, the rule which we have given above applies. We must acknowledge them as teachers given to us by God. The only time that one of the faithful is justified in withholding assent to their teaching in matters of faith and morals and in matters intimately connected with faith and morals, is when he can clearly prove that their teaching is not in accord with the doctrine of the Church. Even when a rare case like this might occur, prudence demands that we appeal to higher authority. In doubts, established authority holds

precedence over private opinion.

With due proportion, the same rule holds towards priests and teachers working under the guidance of the Bishop. These constitute the channels through which the Church's teaching normally comes to the faithful. A hyper-critical attitude towards these sources of instruction in God's truth does harm to the critic, and may cause serious scandal to God's little ones. To admit this spirit of criticism into one's mind inevitably weakens faith, because it is a practical denial of God's providence over His Church. It is a failure to recognize, beyond the human instruments God chose to spread His truth, the supernatural and divine in the Church, CHRIST'S MYSTICAL BODY.

FREEDOM OF INVESTIGATION remains. Far from stifling initiative, the attitude of mind described in the preceding paragraphs gives true liberty and progressiveness to Catholic scholars. Freedom to err in thought and action is not the strength but the weakness of human liberty. Those moderns who demand "freedom of thought" in all matters (by which they usually mean that liberalism which refuses to recognize any norm of truth or morality) are like little boys who fret and pout when their mothers take dangerous articles away from them.

The Catholic-minded scholar, be he theologian, philosopher, historian or scientist, is eminently free to investigate truth precisely because he is preserved from serious error through obedience of mind and will to the Church's teaching. He knows that any investigations of his which lead to a contradiction of divinely revealed truth are blind alleys. Frequently he has the consolation of knowing that his investigation, more adequate interpretation of revealed truth; of knowing that his work is truly a cooperation with God because it brings to men a fuller knowledge of HIM WHO IS:

THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE.