Faith as Thinking with Assent

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One finds this criticism of "neothomism", that it simply asserts that reason will never go against faith. Where it seems to do so we just know that our reasoning has gone wrong somewhere. The openness necessary for the discovery of truth is here lacking, comments John Macquarrie (*Twentieth Century Religious Thought*, London 1971, SCM; ch. 18, sect. 89).

The Thomist position, however, might rather mean that we would never be asked to believe something unreasonable. Here the view sets no restriction whatever upon thinking. It rather makes a statement about the nature of Christian belief, containing an implicit invitation to think the data of revelation through so that the (rational) necessity of it can be seen. Yet this statement is also one, again, positive, about the nature of man and his thinking.

What we do find in Thomas Aquinas himself is a doctrine that reason naturally needs a (supernatural) guidance which it must trust and rely on, as the tides need the moon. Whether or not this guidance should ever be construed as a limit is at least an open question, however, though it clearly was in the system under which Aquinas himself lived. Yet the whole event of revelation, as is more proper to just the idea of a revelation, can rather be seen as a great opening up.

There is, besides, a conceptual difficulty in the idea of truths beyond the reach of reason. The original postulate of a harmony between faith and reason, if thought through, might seem to demand revision of this and some related ways of understanding "supernatural" truths. Therefore one might ask, in the opposite direction (not necessarily the other "extreme"), whether they might not all be assimilable to those truths that Thomas says are revealed only because too few men with too great time and difficulty would attain to their discovery. The claim therefore is that they are accessible to reason. Unfortunately there is a tendency here, hardly discouraged by Thomas, to reduce revelation to declaring to people what they should believe. It is as if revelation as a notion is always slipping down and away from the original richness of an epiphany.

Once revealed truths are accepted their superior rationality becomes clear, as the Christian Trinity, it is claimed, is a superior and more viable conception than that of Allah. However, if we concede that some philosopher has shown that a solitary divine

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person is inconceivable, there seems no reason in principle why another philosopher might not postulate, or urge as probable, either a plurality of divine persons or the operation of relations within the divinity, equivalent to thought-*processes* perhaps, or both.

Reason in any case has and has had a great task presented to it by dogmas such as that of the Trinity, as the early example of Augustine illustrates. Nor have reasonable and unreasonable ways of understanding this mystery (which the dogma sought to identify) yet been exhaustively distinguished. As with Christology, the careful choice of official wording can never fully conceal that many earlier understandings of these mysteries, inclusive of those with the highest sanction, get contradicted. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* is another example. There is no telling, to take a further example, how far a richer, more philosophically cogent notion of eternity might go in modifying the doctrines and dogmas of the creation of the world "in time" or of the "pre-existent" Christ (Cf. H. McCabe, *God Matters*).

The discovery, and it is no less, of evolution is a more obvious example still of how reason is compelled to reinterpret "supernatural" truths, rather than to submit to their dictation in the way envisaged in earlier Thomism. Doctrines of the soul and special interventionistic creation are under great pressure to give way to what to many seems a grander conception. In this conception the emergence of man in God's image and even of Christ as definitive God-man is seen as built into creation from its first instant or, in terms of the Hegelian dialectic, from its first postulate (we do not need to make our temporal mode of perception essential to the process or structure).

Here we need to relate these ideas to the historical development within Christendom. The original impulse to definitions of dogma came very largely from the secular authority, desirous at best of preserving peace within his or her realm, at worst of bending Christian belief in a more manageable direction, inclusive of altering power-structures within the Church to harmonize with such factors as, perhaps, the Imperial move to Constantinople or the general dominance of men over women in society, this latter coinciding with the gradual reduction of an original metaphor of sacrifice to a more literal sacrifice-theology in harmony with previous Roman religious practice and a felt need for the offering of sacrifice for the temporal security of state and society (Cf. Damien Casey, "The 'Fractio Panis' and the Eucharist as Eschatolopical Banquet", Mcayley University Electronic Journal, 18 August 2002 and www.womenpriests.org).

Thus it is only by a rather doubtful analogy that the meeting, three centuries earlier almost, at Jerusalem described in Luke's *Acts* can be seen as the first of a series of ecumenical councils. Nor did it define any dogma, the main achievement being that people met and learned to understand one another. Instead, some rather minimal disciplinary measures protective of Jewish sensibilities were passed, minimal in

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that they did not distinguish between moral and ritual desiderata ("abstain from fornication and things strangled"). Such distinction had been a main point of Christ's teaching, however, at least as this is recorded in the then still to be written Gospels.

Discussions about faith and reason and their relation as traditionally conducted relate to these dogmas. Today such discussion often centres around the *interpretation* of dogmatic formulae. This is clearly part of an attempt to make dogma consonant with reason, rather than the other way round (though there, obviously, there would be no question of "making": the harmony of faith and reason is itself "dogmatic" in form). One can thus go so far as to find a given formulation infelicitous or misleading, never needing to say it is wrong.

Examples here are legion, and here we are not repeating the examples of in-depth intellectual penetration of elements of faith (not necessarily "articles") discussed above. We are examining the more superficial but historically acute phenomenon of reservations and revisions with regard to entrenched verbal credal propositions.

The faith-reason presumption is perhaps that such formulations can always be "saved" (one speaks of "saving the appearances"). But it is not always so. Not a few theologians, it is plain, are unable to take the more recent Marian dogmas seriously, while Hans Küng thinks that nobody should be obliged to believe in the virgin birth, a doctrine which anyhow wears a different face, so to speak, now that we know that the woman contributes half of the genetical constituents of the new human being. Jesus might seem in danger of being seen more as a Marian clone than as one begotten of God. The Immaculate Conception, too, only retains its sense so long as we adhere to a literalist Augustinian view of "original sin" fast vanishing from our comprehension. These considerations in turn demand reassessment of papal infallibility as defined in council and even a critique of the rational provenance of this notion as such, for which Küng suggests "indefectibility" should be substituted when speaking of the Church, as expressing no more than our confidence in Christ's presence among those who trust in him as long as life, theirs individually or that of the world, lasts.

But the two concerns, with formulae and with realities, do eventually merge. Believers confess *resurrectionem mortuorum et vitam venturi saeculi* and a second coming in glory *judicare vivos et mortuos*. Here already in the pages of scripture we find interpretation, e.g. in John's Gospel: "and this is the judgment, that men preferred darkness to light . . . because their works were evil." We may see this as part of the ongoing effort, showing that confidence in reason that Aquinas makes explicit, to make the tradition intelligible, first to a wider audience, then to ourselves. One can hardly deny that a kind of spiritual imperialism ("salvation is of the Jews", John represents Jesus as saying) underlies the development of Paul's thought, leading

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him to abrogate the Law, to interpret Christ's death as a destruction of the Law itself, upon which Jewish exclusivity had been based. This leads to an intensification of the cosmic, universally mutual community of acceptance and forgiveness recorded as preached in Christ's own life. Paul solves his own problems by seeing the Old Testament, his "Bible", as more suitable for interpretation than for simple acceptance. "These things happened in a figure" and so on, a method later on attributed much more comprehensively, however, to the protagonist of the Gospels himself. Thus, "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so shall the Son of Man be lifted up . . . "

At its highest point, though, such interpretation as it were negates itself, becoming the means to a more deeply inspired literalism, as in the (probably authentic) argument for resurrection from God's identifying himself to Moses, in the "inspired" page, as the God of Abraham and Isaac, who had died. Yet God is God of the living, *ergo* . . . Awareness of resurrection though is not here necessarily attributed to the Mosaic writer himself.

Belief in resurrection had been reached by pre-Christian Jews in a rational process, arguing from the consistency of divine justice in a way echoed by Kant and even Plato, starting out from a dualist anthropology. It is reason too, which exerts pressure within theology away from a materialistically "miraculous" view of the accounts of Christ's own resurrection. Such pressure is not necessarily reductionist. "Even if we knew him in the flesh we know him so no longer." Indeed, with the eclipse of dualistically spiritualist anthropologies by the monistic evolutionary record a confidence in resurrection or its equivalent (what?) beyond death, of course by the divine will or second creation, appears more clearly as a simple religious and moral response to human existence and community feeling, a basic intuition not other than Julian's "All shall be well" in the fourteenth century. Again, the interpretation passing from *after* to *beyond* death, from a later time to an exit from time, begins in Scripture. Thus Martha knows that all will rise "at the last day" (John's Gospel). Jesus replies "I am the resurrection", so death is already conquered, goodness knows how. *Omnis qui vivit et credit in me non morietur in aeternum*. The *et credit in me* need not be seen as a restriction but more as explication of *vivit*.

The appearance of Christ and his message, as indeed the appearance of man and his eternal destiny derivable from his intellectual nature, has to be seen as written into evolutionary history from the beginning. Obscurely, this already lies behind the difference between Scotus and Aquinas as to whether the divine purpose of incarnation was consequent upon sin merely. The historicization of sin in the apparently contingent tale of a Fall in Eden has obscured the necessity, a necessity of divine perfection of love, of the development, perhaps best charted by Hegel who, incidentally, offers us an interpretation of the *Genesis* story (hardly an account) difficult to improve

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upon (*Encyclopaedia, Logic* 24). Here spirit and determinate nature are as it were naturally at war with one another, even though man is of course also naturally inclined to live reasonably, to order his (other) inclinations. The advent of reflection, Hegel argues,

> involves a thorough-going disruption, and viewed in that light, might be regarded as the source of all evil and wickedness – the original transgression.

The spiritual, he says, "sunders itself to self-realisation".

> But this position of severed life has in its turn to be suppressed, and the spirit has by its own act to win its way to concord again.

Hegel adds that while "we" accept the dogma of Original Sin we must give up seeing it as consequential upon an accidental act of the first man. He might have added that *a fortiori* then we must give up doctrines of the original preternatural gifts and of the "wounds" of original sin unless, again, suitably reinterpreted.

For Hegel "the theological doctrine of original sin is a profound truth" and he has only sarcasm for the "modern enlightenment, "which" prefers to believe that man is naturally good . . . so long as he continues true to nature." There is of course a terminological problem here. For Hegel it is natural for man to feel the call to strive with his spirit against the too easy path, and Aquinas's account of *lex naturalis*, inclusive of the virtues naturally needed for *ardua*, difficult things, says the same.

This might seem obvious. The effect, however, is that sin is demythologized to something natural and to that extent necessary. It is no longer an offence both infinite and gratuitous, placing us under divine wrath. Such wrath is rather a moment in a dialectic, as indeed the very idea of a salvation *history* seems already to suggest. Catholics have sometimes decried this tendency to equate createdness with sinfulness as a Lutheran aberration. It was this, one might concede, so long as the idea of sin retained its full Augustinian force. Read the other way, however, we have here little more than the Thomistic dictum that "what can fail sometimes does".

What is important for Hegel is the uncovering of rational necessity behind what religion presents, in narrative fashion, as merely contingent, contingency being of the essence of narrative and narrative being of the essence of a "salvation history", such as Christianity or Judaism, but not Islam, presents us with.

It is claimed here that the Thomistic postulation of a harmony between faith and reason is detachable from a restrictive ecclesial-disciplinary context. With creeds and dogmas is associated a passing over from affirmative proclamation itself identical with belief to a limiting definition of what is believed itself identical with a command as to what *shall be* believed, since whoever denies it is *anathema*, i.e. accursed.

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The idea of a reason out of harmony with the creeds and therefore erroneous was anyhow too simple where it ignored, unthomistically, the fact that one thinks from a certain point of view, as good is pursued in every action. Thus the criticisms of modern atheism have been progressively assimilated by today's believers and Nietzsche, wishing to be the "Antichrist", becomes, even in his own estimation, "the crucified". Not only does all reasoning lead to the Good News but reasoning itself continuously purifies and reinterprets it, revealing even an unsuspected necessity. This necessity indeed is why there is and can be no restriction upon reason. Reason cannot be guided and controlled by faith, as can a given individual's thinking. But where what I had taken on faith shows itself to me, after careful consideration of course, as unworthy of reason then I no longer believe it, but either reinterpret or reject the content. It is sometimes difficult to say which of these we do. Thus a certain interpretation of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (Council of Florence 1439) is rejected (even by Rome in the 1950s), yet the dogma still expresses the truth of a common spiritual life in the community of love for which we were born.

It is a matter of a historical passage from division to unity, from duality, of creator and created, grace and nature, reason and faith, to the one order which reason reflects, reconciling necessity and freedom.

> As soon as you are in the world of love or goodness there is hardly any sense in opposing freedom and necessity (Georges van Riet, "The Problem of God in Hegel", *Philosophy Today* Summer 1967, XI, 2/4, p. 88).

Under this dualism, of sacred and secular, lived Thomas Aquinas, Joan of Arc (where the strain was showing) and medieval man, as we call him, in general. For many it is *the* Catholic attitude, to which Newman liked to present himself as converting, *all* his beliefs now depending upon the infallibility of the church to which he had submitted. This can seem at once sophisticated subtlety and the purest simplicity, being in fact a total abdication. If all theologians simply submitted to the Church there could be no theology, nor could there ever have arisen a church in the first place. We need, again, the idea of interpretation, which is creative, like the writings of St. Paul and those of Newman himself. Of course traditionally, as in "neothomism", one operated in a sort of halfway-house, where this or that was decided, and hence matter for submission (to a "*magisterium*"), while one was theologically free for what remained, though only if one did not contradict the former "truths", i.e. true propositions, as a "certain nucleus of doctrine" (Macquarrie). Here though one lacked that "radical openness necessary for the discovery of truth" and hence compatible with and needed for the love of truth. For reason, as dialectical, everything is revisable or can appear as such through

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being capable of being improved upon, in a yet deeper interpretation. In mystical literature this has always been recognized.

In fact we have experienced how the Church herself has recognized this, as Catholic theologians take to themselves the fruits of centuries of research by their Protestant colleagues. The revolution has extended to the Church's own self-understanding. We can now see how despite formal excommunications the Christian ferment has continued in "separated brethren", that originally somewhat patronizing phrase (a variant upon "non-Catholics") now becoming accepted as applying to all communities. Nor is this position contradictive of acceptance of the "Petrine office". Peter too can be in the wrong camp at times, as St. Paul long ago made clear. We should accept him (*tu es Petrus*) while requiring that he accept us, so that we need never say "Get thee behind me Satan", as so many have felt compelled to do, rightly or wrongly, from Jesus up to, it would appear, the Shia Moslems (if America, as "the great Satan", is a historical fruit of an original Roman mission to, say, Canterbury). But the Shia too will not stick fast in this *impasse* of interpretation forever. They have not yet perhaps begun to engage in those conscious dialectical exchanges of "subjective" spirit with which we Westerners are at home, but the same spirit, thinking itself, is at work in their history too, "objectively", as part of the whole.

This "objective" part of the process is found in our history also and I mentioned earlier the need to relate our speculations to that history. The (partial) negation of the Catholic faith-command system at the Reformation was in turn negated in the Baroque period through into the apogee of the Romantic restorations, and we are now witnessing reintegration. The Protestants and humanists, we might hazard, are now vindicated as being often the Church's truest sons. We may look forward to a similar rapprochement with Eastern Christianity, the frequent superiority of whose insights is tacitly acknowledged in Aquinas's so thoroughly Latin writings. Beyond that one can raise the question of an integration with Islamic views and the Jewish Christian theology, eclipsed by political annihilation and Greek speculation generally. A straw in the wind here, Hans Küng points out, is that Vatican II implicitly accords to Mohammed the status of prophet, while years ago the supposedly reactionary Belloc treated Islam as simply a Christian heresy like, in his eyes, Protestantism. After that, or concurrently, we may witness and work for assimilation, which as mutual becomes integration, of and with "far eastern" world views, a process already maturing well in Japan in particular, but also in India and China.

The phenomenon of individual "conversions" can acquire in the light of these perspectives an at times rather negative quality. I am mainly concerned with conversions to Roman Catholicism. In the Baroque period, even during the Reformation itself, they clearly bear

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an aspect at least of political conservatism, of tenderness for a departed order. Nor is there much doubt that Catholic missionary activity is often partly motivated by a wish to make up the numbers, and therefore the power, lost to the dissident groups which have always developed with time in areas where the church is more established. This was even true of England and Germany, Augustine and Boniface responding to Byzantine coolness toward the Papacy as others not much later did to the massive centuries-long Islamic siege. When, later, the Portuguese came ashore first in India and said they were looking for Christians they did not only mean the separated disciples of St. Thomas. A rearguard crusade with an army of new recruits is more what they had in mind, and Francis Xavier was for a while a most effective tool, a stress on the necessity of baptism serving both parties, the political and the mystical, rather well.

There is no intention here to deny the properly Gospel motive of such proclamations, easily descending though it does, among more primitive peoples, to mere proselytizing backed up by what can seem to the miracles. Still, failure at home promotes renewed effort abroad, in Church as in state.

Thus Thomas More, not a convert of course, yet a prime case of martyrdom for individual conscience, in part died protesting loyalty to the hitherto established order. "I die the King's good servant; but God's first." That the point at which the established order was questioned was that of a marriage is purely incidental, though certainly the right to change partners (or churches) is widely accepted today, and is distinguished in both cases from the "whoring" condemned by the Old Testament prophets.

The "ideology" behind the conversions, the dogma backing up their political stance, and one does not need to be a Marxist to see it in that way, was belief that the Roman Church was the church founded by Christ, the one true church. The Protestants countered with their doctrine of an invisible church. This idea has lately gained more and more acceptance among Catholics, to the point where the idea of a visible institutional church, never formally given up, becomes in everyone's perception relegated more and more to the sidelines. One began by speaking of those who are invisibly members of this visible Church, as it were halfway to self-contradiction, then of a "baptism of desire" so extensive as to render actual baptism a mere form, then of anonymous Christians, an originally liberal expression in intention but now seen as insulting to those who do not regard themselves as Christians of any kind.

That these or similar developments or at least that development as such was bound to occur was a well-kept secret until it became acute for John Henry (later Cardinal) Newman nearly two centuries ago now. Yet it was already implicit in Augustine's definition of faith, of believing, offered at the end of his life, as "thinking with assent"

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(*De praedestinatione sanctorum* 2.5, PL 44.963: "*credere nihil aliud est quam cum assensione cogitare*"). For thinking is a movement, a process. The retirement of the orthodox, after the first few generations, behind ritualized credal repetitions was from the first in conflict with the thinking which, says Augustine, just is believing, so that in that way living faith is inevitably an irritant. To think of something, especially thinking of it continually, is to be ever transforming it.

Attempts at reconciliation, of thinking and creed, were mainly restricted to mysticism. For we have seen how even in Thomism the theologian was barred from thus thinking what was defined or canonized. Well, the official Church later came even to canonize people! The process allowed or tolerated within mystical life and literature, however, in the Church, is not philosophical or sapiential in the normal sense. Rather, one begins with the verbal formula and stays there, attempting to go behind it into dark regions of unutterability. According to St. John of the Cross these are to the credal statements, inviolable as these are, as gold to silver. A variant on this, or one way of expressing it, is the constant repetition of a phrase such as is noted in the *Philokalia*, along with the teaching that this will bring enlightenment.

Repetitiveness, we know, can be life-giving or enhancing. It is the method, in music, of many composers, such as Schubert, but it is not thinking. If there is process, if mystics do get anywhere, then it is at the cost of thinking, though the surprisingly insightful remarks orthodox mystics have often come out with lead one to think that they do a lot of thinking on the quiet anyway.

It is this *process* of consenting thinking which is faith which we are claiming has a naturally centrifugal, uniting tendency, thus lending the requisite necessity of fulfilment to the Dominical prayer, *ut omnes unum sint*. The definition also confirms our opposition here to the idea, even Thomist it might seem, of faith as a limitation upon reason, an idea demanding two orders of truth, such as Augustine too firmly espoused, though this definition demolishes such a possibility in principle.

For it is reason itself, thinking with assent again, that profoundly modifies faith. Therefore there is only one order. Faith *is* reason. Why then did Augustine and others think that there were two orders, two sources of truth, philosophy and authority as Augustine says (*De ordine* II5.16; PL 32.1002)? Well, there are the enquirer's first encounters with the believers and their leaders. This *can* be construed as coming across an authority. It is an authority in that case coming from God, from the invisible world, not from any political or legislative source in the normal sense, so the idea of authority is here used analogously. There is even a hint of the primitively magical, of seeing the spiritual principle or God as literally a king (and thus "of this world"), what Berdyaev would call sociomorphism.

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For in reality this encounter is subjectively the same as, or very similar to, encountering a new book. The enquirer, like the reader, is free at every moment to proceed further or to withdraw, shut the book (contrary to what I said in "On Being So Placed", *New Blackfriars*, September 1980). If one becomes convinced of its value, and this is what is called, by a certain presumption, the gift of faith, then one determines, maybe even binds oneself, to read on. In the Christian or religious case one will read on, go on thinking with assent, for a lifetime at least (hence the saying that the world cannot contain the books that could be written about what Jesus said and did).

What Augustine obscurely understood, with his *fides quaerens intellectum*, and to a large extent practised, comes first fully into the light in Hegel's philosophy. There it becomes plain that we are not dealing with occasional exercises, as with Anselm's speculation (already pointing to the future in its stress on eliminating not just doubt but the possibility of doubt). We are dealing rather with the living substance of reason which is faith where reason assents anew to what it has once accepted. All conversions are in this sense "intellectual". Maybe reason accepted on authority more than it could "see" for itself. But this is something quite normal for reason, as it is Augustine's merit too to have pointed out. For him religious faith differs from other knowledge and philosophy on the side of the object believed, not in the kind of knowledge, a view reaching back to Justin Martyr and beyond. We may be sure, anyhow, that the faithful mind will strive to *think* what is thus accepted, as Hegel does with the trinity and the creation, following indeed in Augustine's footsteps. Hegel's bias, however, is in favour of bringing out the ultimate necessity, for reason, of what is thus believed, whereas Augustine, more superficially perhaps, would rather stress a contingent character in the believed articles as depending more entirely upon an initiative hidden from us. Yet it must be that God is necessarily a trinity if he is such at all, and the world proceeds from that necessity of love, which is one with freedom, as the Hegelian dialectic will establish.

After Thomas More we mentioned, discussing conversions, Cardinal Newman. The assessment of the greatness, or less than greatness, of this figure, as he has become, depends, it seems to me, upon his view of what he was doing in "submitting" to the Roman Church. Was he, in a word, looking backwards or forwards? Well, we should remember that he took the step in unity with an explicit confidence in development, such as we have been discussing, even if he accorded only a more restricted legitimacy to the process, not recognizing, for example, the contributions made by "heretical" groups. He may have seen the Church as the true home of development, might have agreed with Henri de Lubac that Catholicism is not just a religion, but "religion itself". Yet the notion of a "true home" of just development and its defining openness is restrictive, perhaps equivocal or contradictory of itself in genuine Hegelian fashion.

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Perceptions have changed, regarding not so much heresy (though that too) as the heretical person, in what is itself a development, perhaps a meta-development, of the dialectically interpretative kind which we have been discussing here. The word has a root meaning of choice (*hairesis*), reflecting the concern, even horror, of the first close-knit Christian communities at those who appeared to pick out from the common *tradita* just what suited them individually, besides adding personal touches of their own. But we have made it clear that there is no possibility, where belief (thinking with assent) is alive, of not doing this. There are of course socially or communally imposed limits, more stringent in one age than in another, something stressed by Newman when he meditated upon "opportuneness", a distinctly pragmatic category and hence open and liberal at least potentially. It was at any rate hardly illiberal of him to wish to forestall a definition of papal infallibility under this pragmatic rubric. One can wonder, anyhow, how deeply such pragmatism entered into the overall structure of his beliefs, as when he said in effect that if and when the doctrine is dogmatized then we shall have to believe it. Such belief, as lying under the compass of a person's will, easily degenerates into an ideological system in the sense of a tool for domination, built up of the things we must *say* or "confess", whatever we may think, thus destroying the ground-idea of belief we have found in Augustine. But these tendencies in the concepts themselves need not be attributed to Newman personally, with his quite distinct background, which included, for example, an early Tractarian attachment to the idea of the *arcana Dei* as lying among the Church's patrimony, such *arcana* including of necessity not only practices but also doctrines it could be advisable or just more devotionally respectful not to proclaim publicly. Support for such a now unfashionable view was adduced from the Pauline distinction between milk for babies and meat for adults in the faith. On such a view the Pope might well without contradiction be considered as having done better if he had kept his putative infallibility to himself!

Newman, anyhow, was open to development, presumably without limit, and so we can interpret his conversion as a step forward in the dialectic of fuller understanding, while recognizing that he saw the liberalism of his time chiefly in a negative light, as destructive of all belief. We do ourselves need to ask how the developing, all-comprehensive project of interpretation destined to take in all peoples, which is the Church, is to be distinguished from such liberalism. Alternatively, were Newman and others, such as Pope Gregory XVI, in the encyclical *Mirari vos*, wrong about liberalism?

The liberalism Newman wished to condemn "overthrows the nature of opinion" (*Mirari vos*), reducing assent to assertion as free choice (*hairesis* again) of an individual no longer seeking to know truth, in unity with it if not necessarily in submission to it, but only to assert

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himself. We may certainly see liberalism's emergence as a dialectical revenge upon those, including Augustine, who wished to see truth exclusively in terms of a submission, an act of justice rather than of spontaneous love, or without the leaven of such love at least, since justice too is good. Finding the truth must in the end coincide with being at home with oneself, as Hegel expresses it.

The true, interpretational view, on the contrary, never loses sight of the fact, the truth, that enquiry is a search for the other in its true and undiminished integrity, even if at the end of the day it would wish to confess that such a goal lies ultimately at the heart of the enquirer's own personal being or self. What is decisive is the predominance of intellect, of thought, over will, a key Thomistic thesis.

For Newman then progress, the future, even "the life of the world to come", lay with the organized Catholic Church *rather than* the somewhat petrified Protestant sects of his day. A problem was that religious *praxis* was out of tune and sympathy with modern secular civilization, and this raised difficulties for Newman's pronounced *piety*. In the Catholic world, by contrast, the Church and the clergy still dominated. In the end we shall have to reserve judgment about Newman's conversion. He certainly felt that Rome always has been and always would be right. How he would have reacted to Dostoyevsky's parable of the Grand Inquisitor we do not know.

Closely allied to the idea of heresy is that of heterodoxy, the following of *another* teaching. We have found that often what is heterodox later becomes orthodox, is synthesized or assimilated, sometimes with at least an appearance of replacing previous views, as in the modern Church's espousal of the French revolutionary ideals (affirmed as Gospel-derived by Maritain sixty years ago, however).

The upshot of all this is that we are, to borrow a phrase of Wordsworth's, confronted with "the workings of one mind". As for mind, thinking, it is surely more natural to think with assent than to withhold assent from one's thoughts. Faith then, as Augustine defined it, is a most natural thing, the natural attitude we might say. Being so natural, it cannot form a separate order "above" reason. For what can really be above reason if it is with respect to his reason that man is in the divine image? "Above" is clearly a metaphor, perhaps for what reason is not yet in a position to know. Conversely, everything is *shown* to reason, the "passive" intellect, by what is outside it, as nature, or just being alive, declares God, and in this way too we have just one order, where everything is given as to a believer. Again, the dogmas of faith seem all to be no more than a class of things we cannot *yet* see unless told of them by others more privileged. When we see God we shall certainly see that God is, necessarily, a trinity, if indeed the dogma has so exhaustively captured the intra-divine life. We have after all our just reservations about Chalcedon (a parallel

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with the Nicene and other trinitarian definitions) and so we should be open to the possibility of fresh winds of interpretation making a future understanding with those seeing themselves at present as non-trinitarians a more hopeful project. This again would not be a matter of abandoning anything so much as of putting things in a better way. The foreseen development is hardly likely to be more radical than Aquinas's assertion that *ipsae relationes sunt personae*, which many might wish to assert retains only the name of person without its substance, to say nothing of Augustine's earlier but even bolder revolution in Trinitarian thought.

The same meta-interpretation could be given of Rahner's view of the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, viz. that the removal of a certain magical, that is to say unintelligible, element is not equivalent to a reduction of the doctrine, just as the appearance of human soul and intellect, having by its nature an eternal destiny, is not reduced when one claims an emergence for it in the natural because unified unfolding of evolution. Rather, one enhances one's perceptions of the natural, of nature, itself as proceeding from the divine thinking *ab initio* (cf. van Riet, above). So much then for faith and reason. As John Paul II said recently, they are two wings. But the only two wings that are of any use or truth are a pair which sit on one bird and flap together as one where either of them is alive at all.

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