

FAITH AND REASON

WHOOEVER has the use of reason can have faith only by the use of his reason.

Hence adults who have reason are bound under faith to use their reason.

There are two ways whereby reason can sin against faith; first, by misuse; second, by disuse.

Faith is not the outcome of reason, but is the gift of God. Yet lack of faith is not the gift of God but the outcome of reason.

Many minds sin against faith by the misuse of their reason. Perhaps a greater number of minds sin against faith by their 'disuse of reason.

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An act of reason is one in which there is no faith but only reason. An act of faith is not one in which there is no reason but only faith. Indeed an act of faith is at once an act of reason and an act of faith; just as an act of writing is at once the act of the writer's pen and an act of the writer's intelligence; or again an act of vocal prayer is a physical (natural) act of the body and a supernatural act of the intelligence and will.

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St. Thomas was chid by the Risen Redeemer not merely for his lack of faith but for his lack of reason.

St. Thomas did not believe those who saw the Risen Redeemer. But St. Thomas had no reason—or no sufficient reason—for disbelieving those who saw the Risen Redeemer. His failure of faith was rooted in a failure of reason. He thought that the only evidence for a fact, such as the Resurrection, was the self-evidence of the fact.

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Another St. Thomas gives us the principles for solving these difficulties which seem too paradoxical for solution. Speaking of *voluntarium* in human action he makes the obvious and fundamental distinc-

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tion between what is voluntary by itself; and what is voluntary in its cause. The will may will either an act or the cause of an act.

St. Thomas usually makes the matter clear by taking drunkenness for an example. By all the civilised laws of his age whoever committed a crime in his drunkenness was judged guilty of the crime committed. If through drunkenness he stole, he was judged guilty of theft. If through drunkenness he took human life, he was judged guilty of manslaughter. Indeed with a sense of humour or history St. Thomas maintained that if through drunkenness a monk did not rise to matins he would be guilty not only of being drunk but of not rising to matins.

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The principle, here so self-evident, may be applied elsewhere. Thus if a man professing to disbelieve—as some do profess to believe—the laws of Arithmetic, *e. g.*, that two and two made four, and having a debt of four thousand pounds paid first two thousand and then one thousand, his failure to pay the full four thousand would be judged a crime of theft.

Or again if a man through denying the law of Causality discharged a loaded revolver at the head of his enemy he would be judged guilty of manslaughter if not of murder.

And there are few countries where a Christian Scientist, responsible for the death of another, is not liable to some punishment by civil law.

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Now although a man's intemperance may make him responsible for manslaughter, yet intemperance as such is not manslaughter. But the man whose intemperance leads him to manslaughter is *bound under justice* not to be drunk.

Again, if a man's attitude towards the laws of Arith-

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metic or of Causality is a moral fault which leads to theft or murder he is bound under justice not to deny the laws of Arithmetic or Causality. Yet the laws of Arithmetic or Causality, as such, do not bind in justice.

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If then an adult who has the use of reason can have faith only by using his reason on the credibility of the witness and on the possibility of the truth to which he bears witness—*this act of the reason binds under faith*. The human reason, though not ultimately capable of faith, is ultimately responsible for faith.

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We must distinguish between these two statements: 'X—— is a matter of faith,' and, 'I am bound under faith to accept X——.' Only *mysteries* are matters of faith, as such; because the truths called mysteries are not discoverable or demonstrable by reason.

Yet certain other truths discoverable or demonstrable by reason may be necessary preliminaries to faith. If these preliminaries are not accepted the further and related matters of faith are not accepted. To reject these preliminaries is causally to reject some matter of faith. Therefore these preliminaries which are of themselves matters of reason bind under faith, if the rejection of them means the rejection of faith.

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Pius IX issued a Dogmatic Bull proclaiming the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. His proclamation makes the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception binding on our faith. The chief reasons why Catholics accept the doctrine as binding on their faith are: first, Popes are infallible in defining doctrines; second, Pius IX was Pope; third, Pius IX proclaimed the doctrine.

Of these three necessary preliminaries the first is essentially a matter of faith. The second and third

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are matters of reason. Yet the denial of the two preliminaries which are of reason will cause the same denial of the Immaculate Conception as would be caused by a denial of the preliminary which is of faith. Thus if a theologian felt certain that Pius IX was simoniacally and therefore invalidly elected he would argue that Pius IX not being Pope could not issue an infallible definition which was binding on his faith.

Or again he might argue that the definition neither in intention nor in form was *ex cathedra*. From this false preliminary he would argue rightly to the (false) conclusion that the definition was not infallible; and therefore was not binding on his faith.

Yet it is not a matter of faith, or in other words, it is not a matter revealed by God, that Pius IX was not simoniacally elected! To accept the fact that Pius IX was Pope is so little a matter of faith that even atheists accept it. But explicitly to deny the fact that Pius was Pope may bind under faith because it would be implicitly to deny a matter of faith which we are bound to accept.

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A full acceptance of these principles of faith and reason will enable us to see the havoc made by the modern acceptance of Descartes' universal hypothetical doubt. If the only scientific attitude towards principles and facts is to doubt about them, the mind must soon lose itself in the endless formless infinite of the tri-dimensional. We can not only doubt about principles and facts; we can even doubt about our doubts. We can doubt about *cogito ergo sum*. Meanwhile before we have rescued one plank of certitude from our wreckage of doubt death comes with its certitude to end our doubts, for better or for worse.

Descartes, though so unreliable a philosopher, was too good a Catholic not to be shocked—were he now

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alive—by the sinister following in the sphere of ethics of the principles he formulated in the sphere of physics and metaphysics. Men and women—not always, like Hume, in their youth—are beginning to ask that the Decalogue should not be taken for granted. Indeed some are broaching and practising such theories of individual and social conduct that the Decalogue is a list of the Ten Laws that ought to be broken. Self-expression demands as its first moral principles, ‘There is no God—there is no one to worship.’ Consistently enough it goes on to say that ‘the family as a social institution has not only outworn its usefulness, but has begun to infect the earth.’ Moreover ‘thou shalt not commit adultery’ and ‘thou shalt not steal’ become meaningless in a world where no one has any property or any wife or husband to lose.

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It is with no easy conscience that we theologians can see this loss of faith that springs from a misuse or disuse of reason. If the blame of this loss had to be apportioned perhaps we might have to bear the heavier burden of blame. Too often have we presented the problem of Faith and Reason heedless of that divine condescension towards modes of thought which one day uttered itself in the words ‘I have many things to tell you but you cannot hear them now.’

Forgetful of the current meaning which men give to certain words common to us and them we have given them a meaning which is all our own.

Again how often have we presented the problem of Faith and Reason in such a way that, to the modern scientific mind, Faith seems Unreason—or as a wounded mind once put it, Faith is certitude beyond the evidence. Some even of our modern theologians fail to realise that an instrumental cause moved by an agent retains its own act under the agent’s move-

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ment. When a mind and will move a chisel to carve a word, which is an intellectual product, the chisel retains its own physical act. Yet some theologians seem to think that under the divine supernatural movement which results in an act of faith the human reason cannot retain its own act. This theological stricture of thought may perhaps spring from the same inaccurate opinion that if the Maker of the human will moves it, as an efficient cause moves its effect, the resultant act of the will is not free.

Again, what but sympathy can we have for modern minds who hear the anathemas of ignorant Catholic writers? It is now some fifty years since Cardinal Newman—then in his eightieth year—had to write a pamphlet on Inspiration, in order to reassure human intelligence that it would not be asked, under the guilt of heresy, to give the same internal assent of divine faith to the doctrine of the Trinity or the Incarnation and to the fact that St. Paul left his cloak at Troas, or that the dog of Tobias wagged his tail. *Erubescens dico!* My readers will acquit me of levity, when they realise that I speak from experience, having failed to convince two theologians on two different occasions that it was blasphemous to say, ‘I believe in God the Father Almighty . . . and in Jesus Christ our Lord . . . I believe in the Holy Ghost . . . and that St. Paul left his cloak at Troas—and that the dog of Tobias wagged its tail.’

Whilst the profound psychology and theology of St. Thomas’s treatise on Inspiration and Revelation are still largely unknown we may expect the bewildered modern mind to meet the repelling ignorance which Cardinal Newman was unsuccessful in dispelling. Yet behind this so much ignorance there is so much zeal that we will not allow even our experience of fifty years to close this article otherwise than on a note of hope.

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