

What Is Faith? The Theocentric, Unitive, and Eschatologically Inchoative Character of Divine Faith

REINHARD HÜTTER
*Duke University Divinity School
Durham, NC*

The “door of faith” (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church.

—Pope Benedict XVI¹

I. Introduction

ON October 11, 2012, Pope Benedict XVI announced in his Apostolic Letter “Porta Fidei” a Year of Faith. It began on the day of its official announcement and will end on November 24, 2013, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. During this Year of Faith it seems to be especially fitting to inquire into the nature of faith. What is faith?² This question may initiate a philosophical inquiry into the nature and characteristics of belief and into the corresponding act of assent. The branch of philosophical inquiry to which such an investigation belongs is contemporaneously called “epistemology.”³ The question “What is faith?”

¹ “Porta Fidei (cfr Act 14,27) semper nobis patet, quae in communionem cum Deo nos infert datque copiam eius Ecclesiam ingrediendi.” These are the opening words of Pope Benedict XVI’s Apostolic Letter “Porta Fidei,” promulgated as a *motu proprio* for the indiction of the Year of Faith. (www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20111011_porta-fidei_en.html)

² An earlier and briefer version of this essay was delivered under the same title in Washington, DC on May 24, 2011, as the presidential address at the Annual Conference of the Academy of Catholic Theology, whose topic was “Faith—Theologically and Philosophically Considered.”

³ John Henry Newman’s 1870 classic *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (with introduction by Nicholas Lash; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press,

may, however, initiate an inquiry that is genuinely theological in nature and hence *formally* different from a philosophical inquiry into the nature of belief and assent.⁴ Because the aspect under which something is studied constitutes the unity of the inquiry, the formality that constitutes the unity of theological inquiry (in distinction from philosophical inquiry) is the specific intelligibility afforded by faith in revelation. The formal description “what is intelligible in the light of divine revelation” is constitutive of theology as sacred teaching, *sacra doctrina*.⁵ The following considerations are going to rely explicitly on the distinct intelligibility that divine revelation grants. In short, they form an exercise in *sacra doctrina*.

This exercise in *sacra doctrina*, however, takes place in an intellectual context quite different from the one in which Thomas undertook his theological inquiry into the nature of faith. For after the turn to the subject had achieved its first full flowering in the new anthropocentrism of Renaissance humanism, theological inquiry into the nature of faith became increasingly (though not without ongoing significant resistance from the

1979) represents a conceptually rigorous effort at clarifying philosophically matters of belief and assent, an intellectual achievement that anticipated key insights of recent analytic philosophy. For a lucid interpretation and defense of Thomistic epistemology in conversation with contemporary analytic philosophy, see Paul A. MacDonald, *Knowledge and the Transcendent: An Inquiry into the Mind's Relationship with God* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009).

⁴ “Formally” is the condensed adverbial indication of the “ratio formalis obiecti,” the precise aspect under which something is the object of a specific scientific inquiry.

⁵ In *Summa theologiae* (*ST*) I, q. 1, a. 3, Thomas Aquinas puts the matter in the following way: “Sacred doctrine is one science [*una scientia*]. The unity of a faculty or habit is to be gauged by its object, not indeed, in its material aspect [*materialiter*], but as regards the precise formality [*secundum rationem formalem obiecti*] under which it is an object. . . . [B]ecause Sacred Scripture considers things precisely under the formality of being divinely revealed, whatever has been divinely revealed possesses the one precise formality [*in una ratione formalis obiecti*] of the object of this science.” Thomas specifies further in *ST* I, q. 1, a. 7: “[I]n sacred science [*sacra doctrina*] all things are treated under the aspect of God; either because they are God Himself; or because they refer to God as their beginning and end. . . . This is clear also from the principles of this science, namely the articles of faith, for faith is about God. The object of the principles and of the whole science must be the same, since the whole science is contained virtually in its principles.” (All citations from the *ST* are taken from the translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province [New York: Benziger Bros., 1948; repr. Christian Classics, 1981].) For a philosophically astute analysis of Thomas’s reception of the Aristotelian concept of “scientia” (first and foremost from the *Posterior Analytics*) and for its analogical application to *sacra doctrina* as a *scientia* subaltern to the *scientia Dei et beatorum*, see John I. Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Dominican Thomist tradition) dazzled by the phenomenon of self-reflexive subjectivity. And consequently it became acutely preoccupied with a new question: “How can the subjective consciousness achieve absolute certitude, “certitudo super omnia,” of a truth that is genuinely supernatural? Under theocentric conditions, Thomas’s inquiry into the nature of faith began and ended with God and was thus essentially grounded in the divine truth on which the certitude of faith was understood to depend *objectively*. Differently put: according to Thomas, the certitude of faith is first and foremost a function of its cause, divine truth.⁶ Under anthropocentric conditions, however, matters changed dramatically. With Renaissance humanism, the self-consciousness of the human subject moved into the center, not only as the investigating subject, but now primarily also as the investigated object—and the absolute certitude of faith is now sought first and foremost in the primary object of investigation, the human subject.⁷ In consequence, many of the post-Tridentine Catholic theologians became preoccupied with the absolute certitude of subjective consciousness: “How can the believer become certain of the supernatural or divine nature of the motive of his or her assent to divine revelation?” And so in the context of their increasingly complex and comprehensive theological treatises “De fide,” numerous post-Tridentine Catholic theologians came to dedicate a special section to the discussion of this particular question, a section that came to be entitled “De analysi fidei.”⁸ Around 1585, Gregory of Valentia, S.J., was the first to introduce the term “analysis fidei.” From the early seventeenth century on, the “analysis fidei” made a veritable career, especially in Jesuit Baroque scholasticism.⁹ Most notably and most famously, Francisco Suarez,

⁶ Only secondarily is the certitude of faith also dependent on its possessor. See *ST* II–II, q. 4, a. 8.

⁷ Drawing upon Wilhelm Dilthey’s characterization of Renaissance humanism, Karl Eschweiler states felicitously: “All [theoretical and practical] judging was rooted and ended in the self-consciousness of the *homo-homo*.” (My translation; R. H.) (Karl Eschweiler, *Die zwei Wege der neueren Theologie: Georg Hermes—Matth. Jos. Scheeben. Eine kritische Untersuchung des Problems der theologischen Erkenntnis* [Augsburg: Filser, 1926], 33.) For a thoughtful treatment and astute analysis of the ways Eschweiler’s theology eventually became fraught with severe problems of a primarily political nature, see Thomas Marschler, *Karl Eschweiler (1886–1936): Theologische Erkenntnislehre und nationalsozialistische Ideologie* (Würzburg: Pustet, 2011). Eschweiler’s book *Die zwei Wege der neueren Theologie* has, however, lost nothing of its heuristic fecundity and analytic relevance for understanding Catholic theology and especially the theology of faith in the course of and after the modern turn to the subject.

⁸ Eschweiler, *Die zwei Wege der neueren Theologie*, 35f.

⁹ The principled anthropocentrism of Renaissance humanism began to have a tangible effect on Jesuit Baroque scholasticism. The flowering of this effect took

S.J., in his treatise *De fide*,¹⁰ and Cardinal Juan de Lugo, S.J., in his respective treatise *De virtute fidei divinae*,¹¹ set off and framed a complex and highly involved discussion of the “analysis fidei” that deeply influenced all subsequent treatises “De fide.” Even for the opponents to this form of “new theology of faith,” Suarez and Lugo became the standard points of reference and of critique.¹² Concordant with the modern turn to the subject, in most of the subsequent treatments of the “analysis fidei” the rational psychology of the *act* of faith took the center stage of the philosophical and theological energy invested into the theological treatise “De fide.” Eventually, this treatise dealt almost exclusively with a critical inquiry informed by rational psychology into the ultimate foundation of certitude (“certitudo super omnia”) of the self-reflexive subject, that is, of subjectivity *per se*. Under the influence of the Enlightenment, the anthropocentric emphasis only intensified, to the point of reducing faith to an exclusively natural rational act of belief (rationalism) or to an essentially a-rational taste or feeling for supernatural truth (fideistic traditionalism)—though not without notable exceptions.¹³ Eventually the First Vatican Council, in the dogmatic

shape in what eventually came to be called “Molinism.” The “*liberum arbitrium*” with which Renaissance humanism was obsessed (see Erasmus of Rotterdam in his dispute with Martin Luther) became the linch pin for the Molinist construal of how God’s grace and the human will relate in the order of operation. God’s grace and the human will are two independent, co-ordinated factors, upon the concord or discord of which the course of events depends—a course of events that, according to Molina, falls fully under the scope of divine foreknowledge of future contingents. Fueled by the anthropocentric turn of Renaissance humanism, the post-Tridentine Jesuit Baroque scholasticism of Molina, Suarez, and Lugo conceived of human free will as a genuine partner of the divine salvific will.

¹⁰ Francisco de Suarez, S.J., *De triplice virtute theologica: fide, spe, et caritate*, Vol. XII in *Opera Omnia* (Paris, 1856–78).

¹¹ Juan de Lugo, S.J., *De virtute fidei divinae* (Lyon, 1646).

¹² For an accessible summary with encyclopedic fecundity and characteristic evenhandedness, see Avery Dulles, S.J., *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), esp. 54–58 and 105–7. And for a comprehensive analysis of the various accounts of the “analysis fidei” from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, see Aloys Schmid, *Untersuchungen über den letzten Gewißheitsgrund des Offenbarungsglaubens* (Munich, 1879).

¹³ The Dominican Thomist tradition resisted these developments consistently. Other exceptions reflecting a different intellectual pedigree would be Johann Adam Möhler’s *Symbolik, oder Darstellung der dogmatischen Gegensätze der Katholiken und Protestanten nach ihren Bekenntnisschriften* (1832), Johann Evangelist von Kuhn’s *Einleitung in die katholische Dogmatik* (1859), and John Henry Newman’s Catholic *oeuvre*. Dulles perceives a notable resemblance between Adam Möhler’s pre-Vatican I theology of faith and Matthias Joseph Scheeben’s post-Vatican I theology of faith. Both abandon anthropocentrism. Dulles states: “In its essentials

constitution on the Catholic Faith, “*Dei Filius*,” exposed and condemned the errors of what arguably are two distinct though mutually exclusive offshoots of anthropocentrism—a naturalist rationalism and a supernaturalist fideistic traditionalism.¹⁴ Both reduce divine faith: the former to a “rational faith,” a rational examination—propelled by real doubt—and eventual justification of the truths of faith before the bar of reason (a pure interior natural rationalism of the self-reflexive subject);¹⁵ the latter to a fideistic and a-rational, purely tradition-mediated “givenness” of the faith that would habituate and form the person linguistically and affectively for the eventual reception of an interior supernatural and supra-rational self-manifestation of God (a pure interior supernaturalism of the subject).¹⁶ After the Fathers of the First Vatican Council had reasserted the proper doctrinal framework for a Catholic theology of faith, the later nineteenth century and the twentieth up to the Second Vatican Council witnessed a lively debate over the “analysis fidei” among the likes of Joseph Kleutgen, S.J., Matthias Joseph Scheeben, Pierre Rousselot, S.J., Hans Urs von Balthasar, and the Dominican Thomist School.¹⁷ The debate of these years might best be characterized by the tension caused, on the one hand, by the attempt to mediate what were seen to be legitimate modern anthropocentric concerns with the older theocentric patristic and medieval tradition

Scheeben’s approach to faith resembles Möhler’s final position. Both of them were opposed to systems that base faith on inner experience or rational self-assertion, thus making it, in effect, a conquest of the human spirit. Instead they called for a radical shift whereby anthropocentrism is abandoned. Faith, they affirmed, is a reverent submission to a word that comes from above, a personal word of address from a gracious God. Only those who are willing to become like little children, trusting in the word of another, can enter into the household of faith” (Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 91).

¹⁴ Regarding the former, see DH 3010 and 3014, and for the respective canons, see DH 1035 and 1036. Regarding the latter, see DH 3009, and for the respective canon, see DH 3033. Here as well as in the following, DH stands for Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, revised, enlarged, and, in collaboration with Helmut Hoping, edited by Peter Hünermann for the original bilingual edition, and edited by Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash for the English edition. 43d ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012).

¹⁵ For the prototype of this trend, see the works of Georg Hermes (1775–1831).

¹⁶ For the prototype of this trend, see the works of Louis Eugène Bautain (1796–1867).

¹⁷ Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, chapters 4 and 5. For an exhaustive study of the complex debates over the inner constitution of the act of faith in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Catholic theology, see Roger Aubert, *Le problème de l’acte de foi: Données traditionnelles et résultats des controverses récentes* (Louvain: E. Warny, 1958).

and, on the other hand, by the attempt to overcome what was understood to be an anthropocentric distortion by a theocentric rectification. (My essay quite obviously belongs to this latter strand.) What has become ever stronger though, it seems, in the second half of the twentieth century, that is, after the Second Vatican Council, is a considerably deepened turn to the subject endowed with libertarian and self-transcending freedom. In not a few quarters of contemporary Catholic theology, the act of faith has become the fulcrum of the unfathomable freedom of self-transcending subjectivity, the act of all acts—in which we achieve ultimate self-realization—even if such self-realization be conceived dialectically as the very self-abandonment to an Other.¹⁸ The subject who believes asks what the nature of the act is that he or she undertakes when he or she believes; what kind of epistemic status the beliefs of the believing subject have; what the nature of the certitude is that pertains to those beliefs; how the subject acquires these beliefs by way of the intellectual and volitional operations of the mind; how the beliefs the subject holds might have developed historically and might still be developing; how they are psychologically, socially, and culturally informed or even conditioned; and how those beliefs might inform the subject existentially and pragmatically.

And so, much of contemporary Catholic theology of faith in Europe and in North America seems errant in the maze of self-reflexive subjectivity, Catholic theology now being predominantly absorbed with the autonomous rationality—of the subject; with the existential authenticity—of the subject; with the prelinguistic, primordial religious experience—of the subject; with the unfathomable libertarian freedom—of the subject; with the primordially and inescapably graced nature—of the subject; with the unavoidable construction of religious meaning—by the subject; and last but not least, with the socio-historical, cultural, and economic location—of the subject.

One lesson learned in retrospect is that once Renaissance humanism had entered and once Molinism had penetrated ever deeper into the maze of self-reflexive subjectivity, it seemed close to impossible for contemporary Catholic theology of faith to find the exit. All paths seemed to turn inexorably to the center of the maze—the modern subject. In light of this situation, it does not seem to be surprising that in

¹⁸ This self-reflexive subjectivity plays itself out quite differently in English-speaking Catholic theology (Terrence W. Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000] and idem, *Faith: What It Is and What It Isn't* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010]) and in German-speaking Catholic theology (see e.g. Markus Tomberg, *Glaubensgewißheit als Freiheitsgeschehen: Eine Relecture des Traktats 'De analysi fidei'* [Regensburg: Pustet, 2002]).

recent years the Magisterium of the Catholic Church has set up unequivocal theological signposts in order to guide Catholic theologians in their consideration of the question “What is faith?” into the direction of the exit from the maze of modern subjectivity. In his recent encyclical letter *Spe Salvi*, in the very important seventh paragraph, Pope Benedict XVI gives the following magisterial answer to the question “What is faith?” and thereby, arguably, offers Ariadne’s thread to an errant contemporary Catholic theology of faith. I understand *Spe Salvi*’s teaching in the crucial seventh paragraph to be nothing less than a salutary magisterial invitation encouraging a fresh start for re-conceiving the theological inquiry “De fide” in the early twenty-first century. To this end, *Spe Salvi* offers pertinent impulses that aim at overcoming the modern turn to the subject and theology’s subsequent entrapment in the maze of self-reflexive subjectivity. At the very least, the encyclical letter clearly invites theologians to rethink critically the disproportionately privileged position that the rational psychology of the “act of faith”—the “analysis fidei”—has traditionally played in many if not most modern Catholic treatises “De fide.”

The pertinent part of the seventh paragraph of *Spe Salvi* states:

In the eleventh chapter of the *Letter to the Hebrews* (v. 1) we find a kind of definition of faith which closely links this virtue with hope. . . . ‘Faith is the *hypostasis* of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen.’ For the Fathers and for the theologians of the Middle Ages, it was clear that the Greek word *hypostasis* was to be rendered in Latin with the term *substantia*. The Latin translation of the text produced at the time of the early Church therefore reads: *Est autem fides sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non apparentium*—faith is the ‘substance’ of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen. (§7)

At this point in the encyclical letter, significantly, the Holy Father turns to no other theological authority but Thomas Aquinas in order to elucidate the nature of faith:

Saint Thomas Aquinas, using the terminology of the philosophical tradition to which he belonged, explains it as follows: faith is a *habitus*, that is, a stable disposition of the spirit, through which eternal life takes root in us and reason is led to consent to what it does not see. The concept of “substance” is therefore modified in the sense that through faith, in a tentative way, or as we might say “in embryo”—and thus according to the “substance”—there are already present in us the things that are hoped for: a whole, true life. And precisely because the thing itself is already present, *this presence of what is to come also creates certainty* [my emphasis; R. H.]; this “thing” which must come is not yet visible

in the external world (it does not “appear”), but because of the fact that, as an initial and dynamic reality, we carry it within us, a certain perception of it has even now come into existence. . . . Faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a “not yet.” The fact that this future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future. (§7)

This passage is informed by a tacit yet striking theocentrism, which should not be too surprising; for in this very part *Spe Salvi* passes on an important teaching from the First Vatican Council’s dogmatic constitution on the Catholic Faith, “*Dei Filius*,” a constitution that is meant to check and correct the anthropocentric distortions of the understanding of divine faith, distortions that emerged in Catholic theology subsequent to and in response to the Enlightenment. Consider the opening lines of the constitution’s third chapter, entitled “*De Fide*,” which amount to nothing less than a formal definition of the essence of divine faith:

Since human beings are totally dependent on God as their creator and lord, and created reason is completely subject to uncreated truth (*veritas increata*), we are obliged to yield to God the revealer full submission of intellect and will by faith. This faith, which is the beginning of human salvation, the catholic church professes to be a supernatural virtue, by means of which, with the grace of God inspiring and assisting us, we believe to be true what has been revealed, not because we perceive its intrinsic truth by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God himself, who makes the revelation and can neither deceive nor be deceived.¹⁹

The passage concludes with a citation of Hebrews 11:1. In continuity with the formal definition given by the Fathers of the First Vatican Council, Pope Benedict XVI understands Hebrews 11:1 to offer a kind of definition of faith. I will follow suit in the following theological reflection on the nature of divine faith. For it seems to me that it is this kind of definition of faith—as interpreted in *Dei Filius* and *Spe Salvi*—that enables us to break free from the anthropocentrism that is the root cause of the disproportionate attention given to the psychology of the act of faith.

Given the reading of Hebrews 11:1 advanced by *Dei Filius* and especially *Spe Salvi*, three features should hold the place of primacy in a theo-

¹⁹ *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*. Vol. 2: *Trent—Vatican II*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, S.J. (London: Sheed & Ward; Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 807.

logical analysis of the nature of that faith that the tradition rightly calls “divine faith”:

First, *habitus*: “Faith is a *habitus*, that is, a stable disposition of the spirit, through which eternal life takes root in us and reason is led to consent to what it does not see.” Second, *substance*: “Through faith, in a tentative way, or as we might say ‘in embryo’—and thus according to the ‘substance’—there are already present in us the things that are hoped for.” “Faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a ‘not yet’.” “Substance” denotes here a tangible beginning of an eventual fulfillment; it indicates that faith is in a concrete way eschatologically inchoative. Third, the *Veritas Increata*, who can neither deceive nor be deceived, which—as we will see—is the all-important formal object or motive cause of the act of assent.

In light of what should hold primacy in a theological inquiry into the nature of divine faith, *Dei Filius* and *Spe Salvi* urge contemporary Catholic theologians to turn their attention to the reality that precedes and that elicits the act of faith, to the reality that makes the act of faith the kind of act it is and brings about the infused operative quality that makes possible and facilitates the act of faith. In order to get an initial handle on this change of perspective and direction, we could do a lot worse than go upstream and listen again to the very source to which *Spe Salvi* points us in paragraph seven, the theology of the *doctor communis*, Thomas Aquinas. However, lest my *ressourcement* in the theology of the *doctor communis* comes across as a merely antiquarian enterprise, I will “book-end” my considerations, with Thomas as a magisterially proposed theological point of reference on the one side and, on the other side, with a theological interlocutor who—at least to my German sense of theologically qualified time and chronology—belongs to the very immediate theological past, who is, in short, in many ways still a theological contemporary: the great nineteenth-century dogmatic theologian Matthias Joseph Scheeben (1835–88). Both Aquinas and Scheeben will assist greatly in gaining a deeper theological understanding of the magisterial signposts that point to the exit from the maze of self-reflexive subjectivity.

II. Thomas Aquinas

If, indeed, according to *Spe Salvi*, faith is the beginning of eternal life, then the direct object of faith—that which precedes and determines faith—should be that whereby the human being attains eternal life. Hence, the object of faith cannot simply be true things about God, but must be God himself. In Thomas’s crisp language: “Fidei objectum per se est id per quod homo beatus efficitur.” “The direct object of faith is that whereby [the

human being] is made one of the Blessed" (*ST* II–II, q. 2, a. 5). "Actus autem credentis non terminatur ad enuntiabilia, sed ad rem." "The act of the believer does not terminate in a proposition, but in a thing" (*res* here in the sense of reality which can be a thing or a person) (*ST* II–II, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2). In order to appreciate the act of faith and the specific infused *habitus* or principle of activity that makes the act of faith possible, one must first and foremost inquire into the relation of the act to its proper object. It is the object that specifies the act, which in turn specifies the respective *habitus*. Consequently, at the beginning of the *secunda secundae* of the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas opens his treatise on the first of the three theological virtues, faith, with a consideration of the object of faith, moves then to the act of faith, and finally considers the habit and virtue of faith. In one of his very first essays, Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., rightly regards the object of faith to be the very key to Thomas's treatise on faith.²⁰ By extension, we should add—and this is, incidentally, a side thesis of my essay—the object of faith is the key to a proper understanding of the theological significance of the three essential features of faith identified by *Dei Filius* and *Spe Salvi*: first and foremost, the *veritas increata*, secondly, the eschatologically inchoative substance, and finally, the supernatural *habitus*. Heeding this magisterial signal, a theological consideration of the question "What is faith?" should turn first to faith's object, the "obiectum fidei."

1. Obiectum

In light of the contemporary ordinary English meaning of the noun "object," "obiectum fidei" is an admittedly less than felicitous technical term, a term that had its remote origin with Aristotle's epistemological considerations and made a steep career in Western medieval philosophy and theology. Contemporary connotations of "object" collide head-on with what "obiectum" actually denotes. But once rightly understood, "obiectum fidei" provides the key to understanding what kind of act faith is, and what kind of *habitus* it is that must facilitate this kind of act.

Let me state up front in a nutshell the proper denomination of "obiectum": "The term [*obiectum*] 'object' stands for the reality, thing or person, that engages an act."²¹ What needs to be highlighted is the verb "engage."

²⁰ M.-D. Chenu, O.P., "Pro supernaturalitate fidei illustrando," *Xenia Thomistica* 3 (1925): 307.

²¹ T. C. O'Brien, O.P., "Appendix 1: Objects and Virtues," in St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*. Vol. 31: *Faith* (2a2ae 1–7), English translation, introduction, notes appendices and glossary by T. C. O'Brien. Reprint of the 1974 original edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 178.

The medieval thinkers deployed “objectum” in connection with apprehensive and appetitive powers that convey “whence the act of apprehension or appetite originates.”²² Lawrence Dewan puts the complex matter succinctly:

In the case of apprehension, “objectum” expresses movement from the thing toward the soul. In the case of appetite, it expresses movement from the soul toward the thing. This suggests that in using the word “objectum” concerning an apprehensive power, one is expected to imagine something moving from the thing apprehended to the one who apprehends: perhaps the best illustration would be sound traveling from the gong or bell to the ear. Color, for example, would be imagined as behaving somewhat similarly. The “objectum” would be what is hurled at and strikes the observer. To call something an “objectum” would be something like calling it “striking,” “a striking thing.” On the other hand, in the case of motive or appetitive powers, the “objectum” is “that which we go for,” the target of our pursuit, that at which we hurl ourselves.²³

The powers of apprehension and appetite are passive potencies; they are receptive of their objects before their specific activities are actualized. The “objectum” has a causal function upon the act of apprehension; it is from the “objectum” (let us say, color) that the act of apprehension (seeing) receives its specific determination that distinguishes it from other kinds of acts of apprehension (hearing or smelling). Since the “objectum” determines the act, Thomas takes it as operating after the manner of a formal principle. For this reason the “objectum” is denominated as “formal objective” or “formal object.” In his early commentary on Lombard’s *Sentences* Thomas offers a helpful summary of the precise meaning of “formal object”:

Because everything acts to the degree that it is actual and so through its form, and because for the passive powers the object is the actuating element, therefore that aspect of the object to which a passive power is proportioned is that which is formal in the object. And in reference to its powers and habits are differentiated, because they derive their species from this formal aspect of the object [i.e. formal objective].²⁴

I will return to the topic of “formal object” later in this essay.

²² Lawrence Dewan, O.P., “‘Objectum’: Notes on the Invention of a Word,” in idem, *Wisdom, Law, and Virtue: Essays in Thomistic Ethics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 414.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *In III Sent.* 24, 1, i. Translation by T. C. O’Brien, “Appendix 1: Objects and Virtues,” 181f.

If you gain a distinct sense that by considering the full meaning of “obiectum” you are leaving behind the epistemic presuppositions entailed in the Cartesian rupture between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* as well as those entailed in the Kantian rupture between the transcendental ego and the “thing in itself” (*das Ding an sich*)—you are right. You are, as a matter of fact, being directed to the exit of the maze of modern subjectivity with its interminable succession of aporetic epistemologies. According to the realist epistemology of the *philosophia perennis*, there obtains a primordial causal, that is, specifying, engagement of the apperceptive faculties by the “obiectum,” which precedes and indeed enables the secondary epistemological reflection of this dynamic.²⁵ Moreover, this engagement of the act by the object presupposes an order between human beings and their world. We see the color of the apple, we hear the sound of the bell, we feel the wetness of the rain. “Obiectum” denotes realities, persons, and things in view of our distinct engagement by them and interaction with them.²⁶ By virtue of our apprehensive powers we are receptive to persons and things, and by virtue of our appetitive powers we interact with persons and things. They become “obiecta,” not by any change in themselves, but by being known and desired in a term that might best be characterized as “intentional union.” As T. C. O’Brien aptly puts:

With respect to knowledge, it is the actuality of being itself that “allows” knowledge and to which the knowledge is a reaction. In the case of appetition, it is the goodness, therefore the actual being, of the object that prompts and evokes the corresponding love, desire, hope.²⁷

It is at this very point that we come to appreciate fully Thomas’s teaching that faith, hope, and charity are theological virtues—they facilitate acts of faith, hope, and charity, which have God as their respective “obiectum.” This means that God unites Himself to the human in such a way that the human can know, hope in, and love God, for—remember—

²⁵ Besides the recent book by MacDonald, *Knowledge and the Transcendent*, see the two classics of Thomist epistemology: Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge (Distinguish to Unite)*, newly trans. from the fourth French edition under the supervision of Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1959), and Étienne Gilson, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, trans. Mark A. Wauck (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986; reprint 2012).

²⁶ See chapter 5, “Perception and Abstraction,” in James Ross’s important book *Thought and World: The Hidden Necessities* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008) for a lucid and astute defense of what amounts to an essentially Aristotelian-Thomist epistemology (absent scholastic technicalities) in conversation with and critical engagement of contemporary analytic philosophy of mind.

²⁷ O’Brien, “Appendix 1: Objects and Virtues,” 182.

“objectum” denotes here the term of an intentional union of cognition and appetition. God becoming “objectum” does not change God, but it reduces cognitive and appetitive powers to certain kinds of acts—in short, it specifies them. These acts in turn specify the operative *habitus* that empower the intellect and will to perform acts that entirely surpass their natural orientation. Consider Thomas’s terse statement:

Now we derive from God . . . knowledge of truth. Accordingly, faith makes us adhere to God, as the source whence we derive the knowledge of truth, since we believe that what God tells us is true. (ST II–II, q. 17, a. 6)

However, God is not just the material “objectum” of faith insofar as we believe truths about God and in relationship to God. Rather, by clinging to God himself as the very motive of our assent to the content of faith, we reach God in his very being. And so Thomas stresses:

When we believe God [by faith], we [reach God himself] by believing [*credendo Deum attingimus*]; for which reason it was stated . . . that God is the object of faith, not only because we believe in a God [*credimus Deum*] but because we believe God [*credimus Deo*]. (ST II–II, q. 81, a. 5)²⁸

Believing God by faith, cleaving to God by hope, and loving God by charity denote three kinds of acts facilitated by the three theological *habitus* that have God as their “objectum.”

We have reached the point where we must turn to the “objectum fidei,” the “object of faith.” Because faith is essentially an act of the intellect—*cum assensu cogitare*—the “objectum” receives a title appropriate to the intellect’s orientation: *prima veritas*, first truth, a concept we encountered in *Dei Filius* under the slight variation *veritas increata*, uncreated truth.

2. *Prima Veritas*

Truth does not reside in things but in the intellect. But what is the case for the human intellect must supereminently be the case for the divine intellect. Truth resides first and foremost in the divine intellect, first truth, *prima veritas*, or with Vatican I, *veritas increata*. Jesus can truthfully say “I am the truth” because he is the Son of God, the Word Incarnate, begotten Truth. As Thomas puts it in *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 7: “[If] truth is taken properly in whatever pertains to God, it is predicated essentially; yet it is appropriated

²⁸ I have modified the English translation of the Dominican Fathers. They translated “attingere” with “reaching out to,” which does not do full justice to Thomas’s intention. Rather, “attingere” must be translated with “to arrive at,” “to reach.”

to the person of the Son.”²⁹ To predicate truth essentially of God means that truth is identical with the divine essence:

His being [*esse suum*] is not only conformed to His intellect, but it is the very act of His intellect; and His act of understanding is the measure and cause of every other being and of every other intellect; and He Himself is His own existence and act of understanding [*et ipse est suum esse et intelligere*]. Whence it follows not only that truth is in Him but that He is truth itself, and the sovereign and first truth [*ipse sit summa et prima veritas*]. (ST I, q. 16, a. 5)

All created things, in virtue of their participation in the act of being, can be said to be true insofar as they conform to their divine exemplar. And sure enough, for human beings, as endowed with intellect, this means that we can participate in God and God’s knowledge by inquiring into created truth.

But what happens when the *summa et prima veritas* becomes “objectum” of a cognitive act? Specified directly by the *summa et prima veritas*, the act must be a participation in an entirely more perfect supernatural manner of divine knowledge. “Believing God, we reach God himself” (ST II–II, q. 81, a. 5). It is thus that *prima veritas* (not truth from God or about God or in relation to God, but the prototype and exemplar of all truth) as “objectum fidei” specifies the act of faith, which in turn specifies the *habitus* of divine faith.

But now we must remember that faith is not vision: “Faith is the ‘substance’ of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). First truth in its proper species is “objectum” of the blessed in heaven. Only insofar as *it does not appear* is the first truth the “objectum” of faith.³⁰ But how then does the “objectum” engage the intellect and thus specify the act of faith? Thomas gives us a clue right at the beginning of his treatise on faith in the *secunda secundae*:

The object of every cognitive habit [*habitus*] includes two things: first, that which is known materially, and is the material object [*materiale obiectum*], so to speak, and, secondly, that whereby it is known, which is the formal aspect of the object [*formalis ratio obiecti*] (ST II–II, q. 1, a. 1).

²⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*. Vol. 1: Questions 1–9, trans. Robert W. Mulligan, S.J. (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1994), 36.

³⁰ *De Veritate*, q. 14, a. 8, ad 3: “First Truth, insofar as it appears in its proper form, is the object of the vision of heaven. But, in so far as it does not appear, it is the object of faith. So, although the object of both acts is the same thing in reality, it differs in intelligible aspect. The object thus formally different makes the species of the act different” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*. Volume 2: Questions 10–20, trans. James V. McGlynn [Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1994], 245).

We are returning now to the crucial distinction between the material “objectum” of faith (*credere Deum*), believing in God, and the formal aspect of the “objectum” (*credere Deo*), believing God himself.

3. The Formal and the Material Object of Faith

By distinguishing between the formal and the material “objectum” and by also taking “objectum” as final end toward which the will is directed, Thomas identifies a threefold relationship between the act of faith and its divine “objectum.” In order to express this threefold relationship, he adopts the popular Augustinian formula, widely used in the tradition (*ST* II–II, q. 2, a. 2). I introduced it partially already above: “*Credere Deo*,” to believe God—faith is the reverent submission to God as revealer, the acceptance of God as *prima veritas*. This is faith’s formal object. “*Credere Deum*,” to believe in God—faith is assent to what God has revealed, first and foremost about himself. This is faith’s material object. Both “*credere Deo*” and “*credere Deum*” indicate the intellect’s relationship to God. Finally, “*credere in Deum*,” tending toward God. Faith is a dynamic movement into God. This aspect signifies the intellect’s act informed by an affective union with its end, charity. This threefold relationship between the act of faith and its “objectum” does not designate three distinct acts but rather the three aspects constitutive of every consummate act of faith. Hence, while being essentially an intellectual act, trust and affectivity are integral to—as Thomas would put it—“living” or “formed” faith.³¹

When God engages the human intellect and thus becomes its “objectum,” God engages the intellect first and foremost formally, as first truth, who reveals himself in the Person of the Word—Scripture and Tradition constituting “one single deposit of the Word of God,” as *Dei Verbum* 10 teaches.³²

³¹ *ST* II–II, q. 4, a. 3: “[T]he act of faith is directed to the object of the will, i.e., the good, as to its end: and this good which is the end of faith, viz., the Divine Good, is the proper object of charity. Therefore charity is called the form of faith in so far as the act of faith is perfected and formed by charity.” O’Brien states, as tersely as rightly: “Only in one who loves God does faith reach its fully intended meaning as the beginning of eternal life” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*. Vol. 31 [2a2ae 1–7]: Faith, 125). For a brilliant and exacting study of the precise correlation between the theological virtues of faith and charity in Thomas’s theology, see Michael S. Sherwin, O.P., *By Knowledge and by Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

³² We do not have to go very far into the theological past in order to find a clear expression of the “objectum fidei” under the title of “first truth.” In 1910, in the *Motu proprio* “*Sacrorum antistitum*,” Pope Pius X states: “[F]aith is not a blind inclination of religion welling up from the depth of the subconscious under the impulse of the heart and the inclination of a morally conditioned will but is the

For most theological uses, the distinction between the formal and the material objects of the act of faith suffices, the formal object being, as *Dei Filius* states, “the authority of God revealing.” However, if we want to attain a deeper appreciation, on the one hand, of “the authority of the first truth who is revealing,” or differently put, the “truthfulness of God in speaking”³³ and, on the other hand, of what aspect of the formal object specifically accounts for faith being a supernatural, infused *habitus*—the beginning of eternal life in the believer—then we are well advised to avail ourselves of the time-honored distinction between the mediating formal object “by which” (*quo*) and the terminative formal object “which” (*quod*).

The mediating formal object “by which” (*obiectum formale quo*) is the authority of the first truth in revealing, the truthfulness of God in speaking; it is the medium by reason of which the term is attained, the personal God who is supreme and first truth.³⁴ The term attained is the formal object “which” (*obiectum formale quod*), by reason of which the material object is attained. Moreover, the terminative formal object “which” (*quod*), by way of the act of faith, specifies the supernatural disposition of faith. Romanus Cessario puts the terminative aspect of the formal object succinctly: “As a theological virtue, the virtue of faith unites the believer—through the mediation of Christ’s human nature and historical ministry—to the persons of the Blessed Trinity.”³⁵ It is this intentional union that accounts for the stable disposition of faith to be nothing less than a supernatural, eschatologically inchoative *habitus*.

III. Matthias Joseph Scheeben

In order to demonstrate that the distinction between the formal object “by which” (*quo*) and the formal object “which” (*quod*) is of ongoing theological relevance and far from simply a specious invention allegedly concocted by Baroque scholastics, I turn now to Matthias Joseph Scheeben. In his theology of faith, he conveys—in ways still pertinent for

genuine assent of the intellect to a truth that is received from the outside by hearing [*ex auditu*]. In this assent, given on the authority of the all-truthful God, we hold to be true what has been said, attested to, and revealed by the personal God, our Creator and Lord ” (DH 3542).

³³ Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 188.

³⁴ Ibid.: “In adhering to God as revealer the believer accepts God as the one whose word is supremely deserving of assent, trust, and obedience. The authority of God who speaks is inseparable from the authority of God’s word, but the word as created reality cannot be the formal object, or motive, of faith.”

³⁵ Romanus Cessario, O.P., *Christian Faith and the Theological Life* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 61.

contemporary Catholic theology—the theological substance behind the important conceptual distinction between the formal object “by which” (*quo*) and the formal object “which” (*quod*).

One of Scheeben’s unquestioned achievements as the leading German dogmatic theologian of the nineteenth century was the retrieval of the essential supernaturalism of the Christian faith in the aftermath of the grievous distortions inflicted upon the understanding of divine faith, especially by rationalism, but also by fideistic traditionalism. Scheeben developed his mature theology of faith in the first volume of his monumental *Handbook of Catholic Dogmatics*,³⁶ which began to appear in 1873, only three years after the abrupt termination of the First Vatican Council. I shall rely here, however, on a later and slightly more comprehensive version of his theology of faith, a fifty-seven column monographic entry in the fifth volume of *Wetzer and Welte’s Kirchenlexikon* from the year 1882.³⁷ In this late version of Scheeben’s theology of faith, which appeared only six years before his death in 1888, he had the opportunity to expand and nuance his earlier account, and more importantly, the opportunity to react to his critics, first and foremost his erstwhile Roman teacher, Joseph Kleutgen, S.J.³⁸ The single most important dogmatic

³⁶ The edition I have been consulting is volume 3 of Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Josef Höfer: *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik*, Vol. 1: *Theologische Erkenntnislehre*, 2d (Freiburg: Herder, 1948).

³⁷ Matthias Joseph Scheeben, “Glaube,” in *Wetzer und Welte’s Kirchenlexikon, oder Encyclopädie der katholischen Theologie und ihrer humanen Hilfswissenschaften*, Vol. 5 (1882), 616–74. We get an initial idea of the richness and complexity of Scheeben’s theology of faith from the simple fact that it takes him eleven sections—each comprising several subsections—to cover the topic in all of its aspects and ramifications. He treats of, first, the name and notion of faith as such in German, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew; second, the concept and nature of theological faith; third, the motive causes of faith, its formal object, and its character as objective divine faith; fourth, the material object of faith and its character as a transcendent faith; fifth, the motive causes of faith’s credibility and its character as reasonable faith; sixth, the Church’s presentation of God’s Word, the authority of Church doctrine and its character as Catholic faith; seventh, the grace of faith as its supernatural cause and faith’s character as supernatural; eighth, human cooperation and faith’s character as an act of human freedom; ninth, the resolution or reduction of faith to all its constitutive principles; tenth, the properties of faith that constitute or complete its specific perfection; and, finally, eleventh, the necessity of faith (that is, faith as a necessary means of salvation; and faith as a matter of obligation due to a precept). In the handbook chapter as well as in the later lexicon monograph, we encounter a fully integral, non-reductive account of the nature, structure, and plenitude of the Christian faith.

³⁸ Unsurprisingly, the conflict pertained to the “analysis fidei,” which Kleutgen once called the “crux theologorum.” For an all too brief characterization of the

point of reference for both versions of his theology of faith is, of course, the 1870 Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, “*Dei Filius*” from the First Vatican Council. All sections of his treatment presuppose this dogmatic constitution, and large portions of it consist of an interpretation and further unfolding of the Council’s teaching on faith.

1. *The Mediating Formal Object of Faith “By Which”*

Let us first turn to the mediating formal object “by which.” Scheeben illuminates the theological substance of this indispensable aspect of the formal object by drawing upon the analogy of the social phenomenon of natural authority in contexts in which assent is demanded and willingly given. He calls this phenomenon “authority faith.” Authority faith is “a firm holding as true, or a decided judgment of the mind, that does not rest on its own insight or direct acquaintance . . . with the object of that judgment, but on the insight or knowledge made over to us by another intelligent being.”³⁹ In his recent important monograph on Scheeben, *Romance and System*, Aidan Nichols felicitously renders Scheeben’s core concept this way: “To ‘believe’ in the appropriate sense of the word is to enjoy a conviction whose ‘ground and norm’ lie elsewhere, in the entertaining of truth by another.”⁴⁰ “Authority faith” arises essentially from the respect and esteem of the person who gives witness and who teaches, from the dignity of the person and his or her spiritual and intellectual perfections.⁴¹ “Authority faith” is the more perfect and the more pronounced, the more completely the one who witnesses and teaches due to his superiority over the hearer can duly claim or even command faith from the hearer. The ultimate witness and perfect teacher not only offers his judgments as the foundation for the hearer’s convictions but also prescribes his judgments as the norm for the hearer’s convictions. This authority is, of course, far from an extrinsic and presumptuous imposition upon the believer. After all, the authority of the “auctor” that stands behind every “auctoritas” and who requests assent to the truth of the Gospel is none other than the self-same “auctor” of the very act of faith itself, insofar as it is this “auctor” who makes the act of faith possible in the first place, and as its engendering principle must be cooperat-

point of conflict, see note 43 below, and for a helpfully concise discussion see Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 90f.

³⁹ *Handbuch*, Vol. 1, p. 287; translation from Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Romance and System: The Theological Synthesis of Matthias Joseph Scheeben* (Denver, CO: Augustine Institute Press, 2010), 22.

⁴⁰ Nichols, *Romance and System*, 22.

⁴¹ Scheeben, “Glaube,” 620.

ing in it.⁴² The “auctor” of faith is God, externally as well as internally. “Authority faith” is thus nothing else than one side of the self-same coin of which faith’s essential supernaturalism is the other side. Differently put, faith’s mediating formal object “by which” (*quo*) and its terminative formal object “which” (*quod*) are one and the same “obiectum,” in the words of *Dei Filius*, *Veritas Increata*, the Truth Who is “auctor” of all.

The “auctor,” exercising authority, offers himself as the reliable ground for the certitude of the requested assent. Because it is God who proposes himself in such a way, it is most fitting and proper to respond with “authority faith.” Scheeben regards the relationship between parents and children as the principal paradigm for the way “authority faith” arises naturally in human relations. The parents who speak authoritatively and thereby demand the child’s assent, vouch in virtue of their moral truthfulness that they require faith only for what they themselves understand to be true, and to the degree that, because of the proper functioning of their intellect, they can exclude the danger of error. Consequently, the content of their speech can be held true by the child based on their integrity and authority as well as if it came directly from the child’s own insight. The trust, respect, and obedience of the child to its parents are integral components of the child’s genuine freedom, its proper flourishing toward adulthood. The child’s relationship to the parents serves as the prime natural analogue of the relationship between God, the “*pater spiritum*” (Heb 12:9) and all created spirits: divine faith is grounded in a relationship in which the authority and credibility of the one who speaks are exhaustively and exclusively entailed in the divine nature of the speaker.⁴³ “Authority faith” is essentially an assent to truths because of the authority of the one who speaks. The assent of the intellect is commanded by the will in virtue of the respect and trust that the person speaking elicits and the credentials the person has. The assent proper to authority faith does not arise from a theoretical inference or a practical judgment, though such inferences and judgments may indeed precede faith proper in some way to prepare the assent integral to the act of “authority faith.” The assent integral to the act of divine faith, however, entails its own intellectual motive, because the divine credentials must, of course, be perceived and understood by the intellect in the very assent of divine faith.⁴⁴ This means that, in the case of genuine theological faith, God

⁴² Ibid., 621.

⁴³ Ibid., 622.

⁴⁴ In his 1873 *Handbuch* (312f) Scheeben had criticized Lugo’s and Kleutgen’s construal of the intellectual motive of faith as overly rationalistic, as a mechanically logical operation by way of which the believer demonstrates to him- or herself the truth of the content of faith. Kleutgen responded by charging Scheeben with

presents himself as “auctor” to the person externally by word and sign as well as internally as God Who Speaks—the intellect being illumined by the light of faith. Theological faith thus is divine faith in the sense that the authority to which the believer submits and the credibility to which the believer assents are essentially contained in the divinity by Whom the believer is addressed. This is, in short, what is at stake in the mediating formal object “by which” (*quo*).

2. The Terminative Formal Object “Which”

Let us now turn to the terminative formal object “which” (*quod*) that accounts for the intentional union between the human intellect and the persons of the Blessed Trinity. According to Scheeben, it is this aspect of the formal object of faith that, by way of the act of faith, determines the transcendent *formal* causality of the theological faith, its character as a supernaturally infused *habitus*. In virtue of the assent of faith, there comes about such an intimate and perfect union and assimilation of the believer’s knowledge with God’s knowledge that the supernatural formal causality issues in nothing short of an inchoative participation in God’s own life and knowledge and, consequently, in some tangible anticipation of the supernatural knowledge of God in the beatific vision.⁴⁵ Scheeben goes so far as to use the term “transplantation” (*Überpflanzung*)⁴⁶ in order to describe how, in this most intimate intentional union, the power and dignity of the divine knowledge comes to be implanted in the believer’s faith. Scheeben regards this “transplantation” of the power and dignity proper to the divine knowledge to be the truly divine certitude appropriate to the dignity of the Word of God communicating itself not only externally but also internally to the believer. This certitude is decidedly theocentric: it rests in an intentional union that anticipates the beatific vision. In other words, certitude is caused by the inchoative intentional union the final end of which is the formal union (by way of the *lumen gloriae*) of the intellect with God in the beatific vision. The intentional

excessive voluntarism; he regarded Scheeben’s construal as it was advanced in the *Handbuch* (replacing God’s *veracitas* as the decisive intellectual motive of faith with God’s *auctoritas*) as theoretically unsustainable. In his later monographic lexicon entry, Scheeben responded to Kleutgen’s criticism (633f) and admitted that the acknowledgment of God’s infallible knowledge and truthfulness are integral to the intellectual motive of faith. This acknowledgment, however, he insists is not produced by an implicit syllogism but rather is concomitant with the acts of reverence and attachment, trust and faithfulness produced by the will as God introduces Himself externally and internally as “auctor.”

⁴⁵ Scheeben, “Glaube,” 654f.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 625.

union means that the human intellect is elevated beyond itself by God to the very height of the divine principle and receives a certitude that corresponds to the dignity of this principle. The one who has divine faith in virtue of grace adheres to the first truth itself as it is in itself, such that the *prima veritas* can unfold itself in the intellect of the believer with the will and judgment of the human submitted to the first truth.⁴⁷

So far, we have seen Scheeben's way of substantiating what is at stake in the notion of faith's terminative formal object "which" (*quod*): a theological account that grants a profound theological intelligibility to the Church's teaching that divine faith is a supernatural, infused, and eschatologically inchoative *habitus* of the intellect.

IV. The Material Object of Faith

Let us finally turn to the material object of faith, the first truth revealed. Here I will have to be all too brief, because a proper consideration of this important topic would go far beyond the scope of this essay. In a nutshell: The material object includes God as the *res* reached by the act of faith and everything else that God reveals, not only as factually true but also what God promises and commands. Because divine faith, however, is not vision, it must be received, held, and communicated according to the means of the recipient, that is, of human life *in statu viatoris* (and not in *statu visionis*). What is utterly simple in the mind of subsistent Truth can be assented to by the believer only in a composite manner. Therefore God chooses an instrumentality conducive to human understanding and to the nature of giving assent—truth-bearing statements that can be sufficiently grasped in order to enable a simple assent. These propositions of faith can in no way be instruments extrinsic to the divine communication of the truth. Rather, as instruments of God's own truthfulness, they participate in the one formality or meaning that constitutes divine faith.⁴⁸ God as first truth in being (*prima veritas in essendo*) and God as first truth in speaking (*prima veritas in dicendo*) cannot be divorced from each other. Nor can the first truth in speaking be divorced from the proper instruments, the propositions of faith. Consequently, it is erroneous to reduce these propositions of faith to the status of "activating symbols" or "effective channels" of an essentially ineffable mystery.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ In Newman's terminology, the one who has divine faith suspends the principle of private judgment in matters of faith, while the one who lacks divine faith submits matters of divine faith to the principle of private judgment. Scheeben cites Thomas, *ST* II-II, q. 5, a. 3, ad 1.

⁴⁸ Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life*, 57.

⁴⁹ Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 194.

Such a move also jettisons the first truth as faith's formal object. Rather, assent is given to the content of the creeds because they are revealed by God, the *prima veritas*, who does not deceive and cannot be deceived. The propositions of faith are absolutely integral to the material object of the faith, the *res* that is reached by the act of faith.

V. Conclusion

We have reached the preliminary end of these reflections on the question "What is faith?" For at this point we can appreciate the full weight of Thomas's pithy statement from *De Veritate*, q. 14, a. 8: "[F]aith, which through assent unites [the human being] to divine knowledge, has God as its principal object, and anything else as a consequent addition."⁵⁰ Scheeben transposed Thomas's teaching into the image of "transplantation" (*Überpflanzung*). The "obiectum fidei" is for both theologians the key to understanding divine faith as the personal, intentional union between God and the believer. The object of faith is not an abstract reality but the Blessed Trinity, both first truth and perfect beatitude. As unitive and as eschatologically inchoative, divine faith is utterly theocentric. Divine faith is elicited by and is directed toward its "obiectum," the first truth, Who is not some abstract truth, but Subsistent Truth, the Blessed Trinity.

Now we are in a better position to appreciate the full theological implications of the teaching of *Spe Salvi* on the nature of divine faith: the "obiectum fidei" is the key to understanding the theocentric, unitive, and eschatologically inchoative character of divine faith. The *essentially* supernatural "obiectum fidei" is the key to understanding the infused *habitus* of divine faith itself as supernatural, first, *in mode (quoad modum)*, because the *habitus* is supernaturally caused and directed to a supernatural end. Secondly and surpassingly, on account of the intentional union between knower and known, between believer and the divine truth believed, the infused *habitus* of divine faith must also be *substantially* supernatural (*quoad substantiam*). Divine faith is a tangible downpayment, a substantive foreshadowing (in *Spe Salvi*'s felicitous words: "in embryo—and thus according to the substance" [§7]) of the beatific vision in glory.

What about the direction to the exit of the maze of self-reflexive subjectivity into which the modern turn to the subject got us? By now, the guide to the exit I propose should be all too plain. Considering up front the "obiectum fidei" under the title of first truth is Ariadne's thread, and it will eventually lead a modern Catholic theology lost in the maze of modern self-reflexive subjectivity to the exit. The subject as agent of the act of faith

⁵⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, Vol. 2: Questions 10–20, trans. James V. McGlynn, S.J. (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1994), 245.

is neither faith's cause of nor the arbiter of its content. Hence, by being barred from playing a constitutive role, the subject is healed and elevated to play the proper participatory role of a creature ordered and, in virtue of living faith (viz., divine faith formed and thus perfected by charity), drawn into the beatitude of the Blessed Trinity. The subject's free act of assent is facilitated by a disposition that cannot be acquired but is elicited and informed by the divine personal truth. As Scheeben aptly put it: "As little as human beings can justify themselves, as little can they make themselves have divine faith."⁵¹ The subject is far from being erased, reified, or diminished; the subject is rather rectified (should I say "eccentrified"?) and elevated in the course of being engaged by faith's object. Consequently, risking the danger of painting with an all too broad brush, I hazard the claim that in the contemporary transition from the modern turn to the subject toward the postmodern despair about and flight from modern subjectivity, genuine divine faith and its proper theological understanding must unavoidably issue in an inversion of anthropocentrism, that is, the restitution of proper theocentrism. It would be, however, an anthropocentric error to assume that anthropocentrism and theocentrism would relate to each other like two sides of the same coin, such that an inversion would be simply like turning a coin upside down. Entertaining such an erroneous assumption, however, would mean becoming imprisoned by a false image of this particular inversion. Rather, such an inversion would be more like a true "reformatio"; for anthropocentrism, in principle, must reduce God to a function of human fulfillment and happiness; and, because of the unavailability of a rationally fully satisfying theodicy, the fate of much of modern religious anthropocentrism is its eventual decline into atheistic humanism.⁵² Theocentrism, by contrast, due to the surpassing nature of the gratuitous ultimate end of the human being, viz., eternal communion with God, allows for the perfect beatitude of the human being in concert with and as part of the perfection of the whole cosmos.⁵³ Consequently, *nota bene*: neither in the inchoative

⁵¹ Scheeben, "Glaube," 656.

⁵² Eschweiler (*Die zwei Wege der neueren Theologie*, 265, n. 8) rightly observes that a certain form of modern mysticism that displays theocentric rhetoric is nothing but the acme of religious anthropocentrism ("God in *us*," Jesus in *us*"). The 1200-page study on the emergence and intellectual history of modern atheism by Cornelio Fabro, published in English translation in 1968, has lost nothing of its pertinence for coming to understand the insidious consequences that are entailed in the modern turn to the subject for our capability to behold the formal object of divine faith, the first truth: Cornelio Fabro, *God in Exile: Modern Atheism from its Roots in the Cartesian Cogito to the Present Day*, trans. and ed. Arthur Gibson (New York: Newman Press, 1968).

⁵³ Far from announcing the anthropocentric turn (as some twentieth-century interpreters of Thomas erroneously claimed), the Christocentrism of the *Summa*

perfection *in via* nor in the final perfection of the beatific vision is God ever a function of a human fulfillment and happiness that would be an end in itself to which God might offer eternal assistance—as an anthropocentric eschatology will have to assume, of course, erroneously. Rather, human fulfillment and happiness in the beatific vision are the gratuitous specific human realization of the whole cosmos participating in its final end, God, so that the life of the Blessed Trinity “may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28), as a theocentric eschatology rightly holds. By way of the simultaneously infused theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, the Christian achieves in this life an intentional union with the Triune God and—far from being destroyed—is inchoatively but unfathomably perfected.

For a precise characterization of the inchoative as well as unfathomable nature of this perfection *in statu viatoris*, I will leave the last word to the *doctor communis*. It was Scheeben’s theological genius to maximize Thomas’s profound insight in his own teaching:

As [a person] in his intellective power participates in the Divine knowledge through the virtue of faith, and in his power of will participates in the Divine love through the virtue of charity, so also in the nature of the soul does he participate in the Divine Nature, after the manner of a likeness, through a certain regeneration or re-creation. (*ST* I-II, q. 110, a. 4)

And in his discussion of the missions of the Divine Persons in *ST* I, q. 43, a. 3, Thomas famously states:

There is one special mode belonging to the rational creature wherein God is said to be present as the object known is in the knower, and the beloved in the lover. And since the rational creature by its operation of knowledge and love attains to God Himself, according to this special mode God is said not only to exist in the rational creature, but also to dwell therein as in his own temple.

This is nothing but the objective reality that “‘in embryo’—and thus according to the substance” subsists in living faith, the presence of “things that are hoped for: a whole, true life” (*Spe Salvi* 7), the life of the Blessed Trinity. The Year of Faith seems to me to be nothing less than the Church’s urgent invitation to a new evangelization that aims at rediscovering the surpassing treasure of divine faith. “The ‘door of faith’ (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church” (*Porta Fidei* 1). N·V

theologiae—Christ the incarnate “Deus pro nobis” as its capstone—is genuinely theocentric in that the *ordo salutis* is ordered essentially to the participation in the blessedness of the Triune God.