

The Good of Authority in the Theology of Matthias Joseph Scheeben

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BOTH POLEMICS AGAINST and apologetics on behalf of the living authority of the Catholic Church can hinge on an understanding of authority as mere arbitration. The presence of living human authorities within the Church can be alternatively criticized or justified by appealing to the raw necessity of designating some person or persons to resolve disputes within a diverse and widely extended polity. The aim of this essay is to call into question just such an understanding of authority. In doing so, it will first take up the question of authority from a philosophical vantage, presenting Yves Simon's defense of authority as a natural human good. Then, it will turn to the theology of Matthias Joseph Scheeben to offer an analysis of the nature of the Church's authority in light of her character as an agent not only of God's power, but of God's truth. The aim will be to produce a positive account of the Church's authority through the prism of Scheeben's analysis of theological faith. In the course of the essay, it will be shown that ecclesial authority stands in an analogous relationship to other forms of human authority. At the same time, the Church's authority must be understood by clarifying the nature of divine faith, and the Church's role in producing the act of faith.

The twentieth-century philosopher Yves Simon provides a philosophical preamble to Scheeben's account of the living authority of the Church. In his work *A General Theory of Authority*, Simon remarks: "The issue of authority has such a bad reputation that a philosopher cannot discuss it without exposing himself to suspicion and malice. Yet authority is present in all

phases of social life.”¹ Simon notes that authority is construed, particularly in the twentieth century, as an impediment to justice, human vitality, truth, and order.² A multitude of philosophical theories underlie this resistance to authority, some radically anarchist, but more commonly of a “liberal” variety (e.g., classically liberal views of democracy and of the function of the free market). Yet, Simon argues, “authority is unmistakably present” even in those societies and their systems which claim to be anti-authoritarian.³ In response, he sets out to show why authority is natural when it comes to justice, human vitality, truth, and order, and why it is in fact essential to all of these when understood in its “plurality of functions.”⁴

Simon takes aim at a view of authority in which “deficiencies alone cause authority to be necessary.”⁵ According to this view, a gap in the otherwise free-standing vital functions of political or market order demands the heteronomous influence of an authority outside of that system. Or, in matters of judgment, an irresolvable doubt demands that, absent any reasonable criteria for practical judgment, authority should step in arbitrarily: “Not knowing which way to take, but realizing that movement in any clear direction is better than unending idleness, we let authority decide which way we shall take, and we admire its ability to substitute definite action for endless deliberation.”⁶

Simon only tangentially engages the question of authority as it relates to theology, and does not delve at all into the question of the living authority of the Catholic Church. It is therefore necessary to expand Simon’s theory of authority if we are to apply it to Christianity. Matthias Joseph Scheeben’s analysis of the relationship between the act of supernatural faith and the Church’s living authority provides the basis for just such an expansion. Scheeben views ecclesiastical authority not solely as a juridical arbiter, but as representative and instrument of God’s truthfulness.⁷

¹ Yves Simon, *A General Theory of Authority* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1962), 13.

² Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 14.

³ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 13.

⁴ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 22.

⁵ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 22.

⁶ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 18. For a variant of this view, see Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 5: “Sovereign is he who decides upon the exception.” For Schmitt, sovereignty is defined as the power to suspend otherwise lawful norms and is thus a “borderline concept”: “This definition of sovereignty must therefore be associated with a borderline case and not with a routine.”

⁷ As an example of a view that de-emphasizes the role of truthfulness in favor of power

The Church's power for juridical decision is, for Scheeben, only one of its attributes. Indeed, the communication of juridical power to the Church depends upon the investiture of that authority by which "the divine motive of faith confronts us . . . and exercises its influence on us."⁸ The Church therefore plays a necessary role not just in presenting the material content of faith, or in settling internal disputes, but as a "living organ" by which God presents himself as the formal motive for the act of theological faith. Scheeben's account of the Church's authority over the faithful relies on his account of faith as the act of religion by means of which God assimilates the intellect of the believer to divine truth.

The essay will proceed in three parts. In the first section, I outline Simon's account of authority in the context of the philosophical "search for truth." I show that for him, trust in a reliable witness is a feature of the love of truth, as well as the means by which the intellect is gradually led to its full activity. Next, I turn to Scheeben's account of faith in volume 1.2 of the *Handbook of Catholic Dogmatics*. While Scheeben's account of belief is similar to Simon's, theological faith alone has the character of a *latría* of the mind; what he calls the *sacrificium intellectus*. Scheeben turns to the First Vatican Council's *Dei Filius* to show that this *sacrificium* is not arbitrary, but reasonable from a metaphysical standpoint. Concluding the second section, I point to the "lofty nature" of faith as effecting an "intimate union" with God, showing that salvation of the intellect actually resides in the *latría* of the mind. Having argued for the authority of God

in ecclesiastical authority, one could point to the anti-liberal Joseph De Maistre. For De Maistre, authority lies in the hands of the one "who governs and is not governed, who judges and is not judged" (*The Pope Considered in His Relations with the Church, Temporal Sovereignities, Separated Churches, and the Cause of Civilization*, trans. Rev. Aeneas Dawson [New York: Howard Fertig, 1975], 1). Since De Maistre understands authority to necessarily reside in a single person, this ability to judge without being judged must rest in the monarchic authority of the pope. De Maistre understands the Church as, most fundamentally, a political body or empire, which requires an absolute authority due to its vast geographical extension: "The idea of *universality* alone suggests this form of government [papal monarchy], whose absolute necessity rests on the dual reasons of the number of subjects and the geographical extension of its empire" (3). De Maistre goes as far as to state that a defense of papal authority "by no means requires [support] by theology," due to the fundamental identity between the principles of ecclesiastical and political sovereignty (4). It becomes clear in Scheeben's analysis of ecclesiastical authority that apologetics rooted only in naturalistic political principles cannot do justice either to the supernatural character of the Church's mission or to her unique charism as envoy of God's truthfulness.

⁸ Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *Handbook of Catholic Dogmatics*, vol. 1.2, trans. Michael Miller (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2019), no. 765.

as recognized in the act of theological faith as a positive good, I turn to volume 1.1 of the *Handbook* to show how, for Scheeben, this authority is communicated by means of the human authority of the Church.⁹ Through her investiture with ambassadorial authority, the Church is empowered to represent God as the formal motive of faith. Further, the Church's authority must be *living*, capable of producing divine faith throughout history, as well as governing the kingdom of believers.

Authority and "The Search for Truth": Yves Simon on Philosophy and Authority

At the beginning of *A General Theory of Authority*, Simon observes that the "aversion to authority derives energy from sublime sources. Its really formidable power originates in the loftiest inclinations of the human soul."¹⁰ The reaction against authority proceeds from the desire to preserve the most dignified human capacities, such as reason and sociality, from heteronomous control that would prevent their independent flourishing. Simon devotes his second chapter to detailing the essential role of authority in matters of practical judgment. In the third chapter, he turns to the more difficult question of authority's role in the search for truth. While practical judgment takes the form of an answer to a practical question "what ought we to do?" theoretical judgments answer the question "what are things?" They concern "states of affairs," "facts," or "theories."¹¹ But if theoretical judgments are concerned with determining the character of reality itself, how could authority assume a mediating role between the human intellect and reality without restricting the intellect's capacity for knowledge?

Simon turns to an evaluation of the person in authority in matters of truth—the "witness." While an authority in practical matters has the character of a leader, the witness does not share in the leader's position of superiority over others in matters of governance. The authority of the witness "is nothing else than truthfulness as expressed by signs which

⁹ In using the phrase "positive good," I do not mean to introduce a technical term into the argument. I merely mean to distinguish the idea of authority as a means by which human beings are led to truth according to their nature and the idea of authority as a kind of harsh necessity which results from the fundamental inability of human beings to know. In the first cause, authority plays a perfective role, while in the second it is only a consequence of inescapable human imperfections.

¹⁰ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 13.

¹¹ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 81–82.

make it recognizable in varying degrees of assurance.”¹² The witness has authority because of something outside himself, namely, the true things to which he attests. At the same time, Simon asserts that when we encounter a trustworthy witness, “yielding to their testimony is a duty and a matter of honesty.”¹³ To believe a credible witness under the right circumstances, then, is to perform not only an intellectual but also a moral act.

While belief is morally obligatory in numerous cases (in everyday social intercourse, in the scientific division of labor, or in historical matters), it is necessary to recognize the substitutional and provisional character of authority. Human beings will always rely on the testimony of reliable witnesses in the course of their affairs, but they nevertheless pursue “objective” knowledge—the exercise of their own rational insight—in other matters. As John Henry Newman puts it, credence may suffice in a number of matters, yet the responsible thinker will seek to attain speculative certainty in others.¹⁴ The teacher, who perhaps most often inhabits the role of the “witness” in theoretical matters, must aim at propelling his students beyond the “credence” they originally lend to the propositions he delivers, and toward the ability to achieve a demonstration of theoretical truths.

The simple consideration that the role of authority in theoretical matters is entirely substitutional makes it easy to understand both how docility to reliable witnesses proceeds from the love of truth, and how the love of truth stirs an indefatigable eagerness for a cognition in which authority no longer plays any part. If truth is loved, the main thing is to know it. If truth cannot be known obviously, it is

¹² Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 84.

¹³ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 84.

¹⁴ See John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1979). Both “credence” and “speculation” are types of notional assent. Newman defines “credence” thus: “What I mean by giving credence to propositions is pretty much the same as having ‘no doubt’ about them. It is the sort of assent which we give to those opinions and professed facts which are ever presenting themselves to us without any efforts of ours, and which we commonly take for granted, thereby obtaining a broad foundation of thought for ourselves, and a medium of intercourse between ourselves and others” (60). He defines “speculation” thus: “I use [speculation] . . . to denote those notional assents which are the most direct, explicit, and perfect of their kind, viz. those which are the firm, conscious acceptance of propositions as true. This kind of assent includes the assent to all reasoning and its conclusions, to all general propositions, to all rules of conduct, to all proverbs, aphorisms, sayings, and reflections on men and society” (75).

good to know it by way of belief. Likewise, when it is impossible to live with a friend, we still say that we remain close to him.¹⁵

The substitutional role of authority in theoretical matters determines the moral obligations of both students and teachers. Students who love truth will submit to the authority of the teacher as the initial step in their own progress toward science: "Teachable minds have the privilege of understanding that a provisional belief often is the best, or the strictly indispensable way, to science."¹⁶ But the teacher must also understand his role as provisional if he is to serve truth over his own ego: "As for the teacher whose ambition is to be believed permanently, he is guilty of extreme dishonesty, no matter how true his propositions."¹⁷ Education is meant to culminate in the student's capacity to demonstrate theoretical truths—to form their own judgments through demonstration.

To draw a parallel again to Newman's language, Simon distinguishes the mere "apprehension" of propositions from knowledge:¹⁸ "In the simplest case a theory proposes to connect with each other, by the copula *is*, a subject *S* and a property *P*. I do not yet know if it should be said that *S is P*; the synthesis is merely enunciated, and I do not know, as yet, if it conforms to reality."¹⁹ Knowledge is only secured when demonstration shows "that there exists a relation of conformity between the interconceptual synthesis and the real world." When the "objectivity" of a proposition has been recognized, assent is "promoted from a state of weakness and potency to a state of firmness and actuality."²⁰

According to Simon, "the determination of theoretical assent involves neither authority nor liberty: it is an issue settled by objectivity alone."²¹ The "power" disclosed in demonstration is that of the object of knowledge in its "independence." Yet to say that the mind is "forced or constrained to assent" by the object or by the demonstration is to use "inadequate

¹⁵ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 93–94.

¹⁶ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 96.

¹⁷ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 97.

¹⁸ Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 29: "By our apprehension of propositions I mean our imposition of a sense on the terms of which they are composed." Apprehension is distinct from assertion, in which the proposition is held in "the absence of any condition or reservation of any kind, looking neither before nor behind, as resting in themselves and being intrinsically complete" (25).

¹⁹ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 86.

²⁰ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 86.

²¹ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 87.

language.”²² Following Aristotle, Simon talks about the relationship of the knower to the object of knowledge as one of “passion.” Yet the passion of the intellect is not the same as the passion of the body. While the latter is “heteronomic” insofar as, when acted upon by a bodily object, “the subject acted upon loses some determination, for which another determination, issued from an external agent, is substituted,” the passion of the intellect is autonomic because the reception of object of knowledge brings the intellect from a state of potency to a state of full activity.²³

The law of the mind resembles the law of the object in the way in which potential and actual being resemble each other. The intellect is, in potency, and desires to be, in act, what the object actually is. By receiving the determining influence of the object, by becoming the object, determinately, exactly, in precise coincidence, it is, in a very deep sense, changed into itself.²⁴

Simon follows *De anima*, where Aristotle states: “What possesses knowledge becomes an actual knower by a transition which is either not an alteration of it at all (being in reality a development into its true self or actuality) or at least an alteration in a quite different sense from the usual meaning.”²⁵ For Aristotle, this transition is the *soteria* of “what is potential by the agency of what is actual.”²⁶ In Simon’s words, this transition is a *soteria*—a remedy—because it saves the knower from the “alienation which is ignorance, error, doubt.”²⁷ Indeed, it is only in “objectivity”—in the achievement of knowledge through demonstration—that full “intellectual vitality” can be achieved: “The victory of objectivity is also a victory of intellectual vitality.”²⁸

But if intellectual vitality demands that the intellect arrive at the capacity for science, how does the authority of the witness remain standing as a positive good? Does Simon’s account of objective knowledge subvert his governing thesis, that authority is not simply the result of a deficiency? In one sense, Simon’s explanation of the role of authority in the search

²² Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 90.

²³ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 91.

²⁴ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 91.

²⁵ Aristotle, *De anima* 417b (*Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon [New York: Random House, 1941]).

²⁶ Aristotle, *De anima* 417b.

²⁷ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 91.

²⁸ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 90–91.

for truth hinges on the imperfection of the human intellect. Unlike the angelic intellect, the human intellect does not have immediate knowledge, such that rational demonstration is unnecessary.²⁹ Instead, the intellect must move from potency to act to reach perfection. However, the thrust of Simon's argument is to show that the role of authority in the search for truth is in accordance with human nature, such that authority (if exercised well by the right persons) does not impose itself on the human intellect as a constraint. Instead, the teacher recognizes the substitutional character of their authority, and recognizes further that this substitution is "provisional and pedagogical."³⁰ Conversely, those who love truth submit themselves to credible authorities as beginners, in "preparation for an understanding or a vision that is not yet possible."³¹ In the penultimate chapter of *A General Theory of Authority*, Simon points out that his presentation of authority applies to the Christian act of faith.

Christian faith merely substitutes, provisionally, for clear knowledge: statements of the Holy Scripture on this subject are unmistakable, "We see now through a mirror in an obscure manner, but then face to face." "Now faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that are not seen." The center of Christian life is not found in faith and authority: it exists in a world of clear intuition. But between this true center of Christian life and our present condition there stand death and much natural dread.³²

Simon highlights the analogy between the role of authority in the Christian life and in philosophical development, but leaves this insight undeveloped. Authority leads the believer, as it does the student of philosophy, beyond itself toward a possession of the fullness of truth. In the case of the Christian life, however, the possession of this truth is "clear intuition" as opposed to scientific demonstration. Simon's pointing us to Aristotle's description of rational demonstration as a *soteria* of the mind only deepens the analogy. Just as the conformity of the mind with the nature of the thing known brings the mind fully into act, the "clear intuition" that characterizes the beatific vision completes a journey toward a supernatural *soteria*. The role of faith and authority in the progression of the Christian

²⁹ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 58.

³⁰ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 161.

³¹ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 161.

³² Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 161.

life toward the beatific vision will now be further developed by turning to Scheeben's analysis of the theological virtue of faith.

Scheeben on Faith and Authority

In this section, I turn to Scheeben to develop Simon's insight that theological authority is a positive good, leading the Christian toward the fullness of vision. Scheeben offers a complex unfolding of the manner in which Christian faith relates to authority. In this discussion, it will be important to notice some aspects of *theological faith* which make it fundamentally distinct from human faith. As Scheeben will spell out, notable distinctions between theological and natural faith derive from the absolute "dignity" and "majesty" of divine authority, the efficient causality which God exercises in the infusion of faith, and the resultant supernatural elevation of the mind which occurs through faith. Having mapped Scheeben's account of God's authority, it will then be possible to show why human authority in the Church, far from being a constraint on the faithful, is essential and necessary to establish the union between God and man which is enabled by the act of faith.

Scheeben's treatise on faith in the *Handbook of Catholic Dogmatics* 1.2 begins with a definition of belief as such. He writes:

In the *proper and strict sense of the word*, we understand belief to mean a firm *assent* or a *decisive judgment* of the mind, which relies not on personal insight or cognizance of the object thereof, but rather *on the insight or knowledge of other intelligent beings that has been made known to us*, or a *conviction* that is not *produced by our own initiative* but rather *in us*, by another intelligent being who *proposes* his insight to us as the grounds and criterion for our conviction. Accordingly, because the motive for belief lies in another intelligent being as the author of our conviction, therefore the motive is called *authority*, and the actual belief itself is called *faith on authority*, in order to distinguish it from all acts by the same name; in contrast, any conviction based on one's own insight is called *knowledge*, like this insight itself.³³

This rich definition lays a basis for his ensuing development of the character of theological faith, so it is necessary to pause to unpack its elements.

³³ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 617.

First, insofar as belief indicates a “firm assent” or “decisive judgment,” it is to be distinguished both from “credence” (as Newman defines it) and “opinion.” Scheeben’s emphasis on the firmness of the assent of belief follows St. Thomas, who says that, while faith “is firmly attached to one alternative,” opinion “decides for the one side [of an argument] but with fear of the opposite.”³⁴

Second, the “motive” of belief is not derived from our own insight, but rather from that of another. It is precisely because his insight acts as the “grounds and criterion” for our conviction that this other intelligent being is called “author” of our conviction. Indeed, it is his authority itself which is the motive. This means that the authority of the witness as such stands in for rational principles which might act as premises for our own syllogistic reasoning. Thus, belief needs to be distinguished from knowledge, in which the motive of assent is our own insight. At the beginning of Scheeben’s treatment of faith, before he has proceeded to theological faith, the formal motive of belief comes to light as its defining feature. That is to say, before any consideration of the material received from an authority—of the content of the authority’s insight—Scheeben wishes to show that belief unfolds from a self-reflective judgment that is itself made on the basis of authority rather than knowledge.³⁵

Scheeben goes on to distinguish between “human faith” and “theological faith.” He says:

Theological faith, generally speaking, is the believing acceptance through which we assent to *the word of God in the manner corresponding to its dignity and force*. This kind is called *divine* faith (*fides divina*) as opposed to human faith that is founded on human authority; *supernatural* faith insofar as it is accomplished in a supernatural manner by both the will and the intellect so as to be able to serve as a beginning of supernatural salvation (and therefore to be *fides salutaris*), and therefore has God not only as its objectively motivating author but also as its interior cause.³⁶

³⁴ See Aquinas, ST II-II, q. 2, a. 1 (trans. T. C. O’Brien in *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 31, *Faith: 2a2ae*, 1–7 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006]).

³⁵ See Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 157: “That mode of Assent which is exercised thus unconsciously, I may call simple assent. . . . But now I am going to speak of such assents as must be made consciously and deliberately, and which I shall call complex or reflex assents.”

³⁶ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 654.

Two aspects of theological faith distinguish it from human faith. First, divine authority is of an absolute character. The “dignity and force” which underlie the word of God are unconditional and infallible. We might also point out that, unlike the human witness that Simon describes, God does not have authority because of something outside of himself. Indeed, God as the one who speaks through an external word presents to mankind not an object of knowledge beyond himself, but reveals himself as the supreme object of human knowledge. Nor does he lack superiority over the believer. God is therefore categorically superior to any human witness.

Second, while Scheeben has stated that in belief a conviction is “produced . . . in us,” such that we subjectively receive the insight of the authority, theological faith comes to be in a “supernatural manner.” It is not simply that the human mind takes on the content of the word of God as a material object, but in fact God operates as an efficient cause on the faculties of intellect and will to engender faith. As Scheeben says later, “[faith] is called for and supported by God not merely externally and objectively through the motivating and sustaining force of His authority, but also is *brought about and upheld internally and subjectively through His prompting and supporting grace* and consequently is a *supernatural act of virtue*.”³⁷

Simon argued for submission to a credible witness as an act of “honesty” and “duty.” As was noted, even acts of human faith have a moral component. However, the act of theological faith is both prompted and supplied in a supernatural manner, and is thus directed to its object through a supernatural act on the part of the human being. For Scheeben, then, the act of faith is not simply an intellectual act, but is a “religious act of virtue” and is *latreutic* in character.³⁸ This “distinguishes (theological faith) from *every other form of reasonable or unreasonable belief*, with which it has been lumped together in the modern era, partly by rationalists and partly by unclear fideists.”³⁹

Scheeben emphasizes that the act of theological faith is a form of *latria* which is specific to the intellect. It is a *religiositas mentis* or *sacrificium intellectus*.⁴⁰ Thus, the intellect and not only the will submits to God. Yet Scheeben faces two sets of difficulties concerning the *sacrificium intellectus*. First, the “rationalistic views of the age” regard the *sacrificium intellectus* as an offense to reason. Second, the theological tradition contains a dispute between accounts that emphasize the will and the intellect respectively in

³⁷ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 657.

³⁸ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 657.

³⁹ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 657.

⁴⁰ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 670.

the act of faith. Scheeben takes William of Paris as representative of the former camp insofar as he “emphasized and elaborated most decisively and most thoroughly” the “obedience of faith.”⁴¹ While William grounds the *sacrificium intellectus* in the obedient response to God’s *imperium* as Creator, the Thomists “express God’s authority in a narrower sense . . . by saying that the motive for faith is the *prima veritas* or primordial truth.”⁴²

In response to rationalism, Scheeben must show that the *sacrificium intellectus* which is given through obedience to God’s *imperium* is a reasonable sacrifice (*obsequium rationale*). In adjudicating the dispute between “voluntarism” and “intellectualism,” Scheeben must show that their respective emphases on the command of God and on God’s truthfulness as formal object can be synthesized.⁴³ Scheeben finds an answer in chapter 3 of *Dei Filius*, where God’s *imperium* and his infallibility are linked. Man responds to God by rendering “the homage of intellect *and* will,”⁴⁴ and this response is grounded in the metaphysical relationship of creature to Creator. *Dei Filius* states: “Since man is totally dependent upon God, as upon his Creator and Lord, and since created reason is absolutely subject to uncreated truth, we are bound to yield by faith the full homage of intellect and will to the God who reveals.”⁴⁵

The submission of reason to *Deus revelans* does not restrain or confine the intellect, but rather is completely fitting, since created reason is

⁴¹ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 673.

⁴² Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 673.

⁴³ This synthesis cannot be analyzed here in all of its detail. Though Scheeben is not, of course, innovative in identifying the critical role played by the will in faith, he attempts to grant the intellectual character of faith its full due while preserving the centrality of the will and of the affections. Indeed, Scheeben insists that the *pia affectio voluntatis* is the “actual root of faith” (see *Handbook* 1.2, no. 651). John Courtney Murray gives a concise enunciation of the character of Scheeben’s attempt at a synthesis between the roles of the intellect and the will in faith through presenting faith as a “compound act”: “. . . that is to say, an act compounded of an intellectual and a voluntary aspect. Obviously such a concept is as such a theological commonplace—the freedom of faith is defined doctrine. He does indeed maintain, and quite properly, that the intellectual assent as such ‘forms the genuine substance and essence of faith’; but he insists far more on the inseparability of the intellect’s action from that of the will, both in the genesis of faith and in its internal constitution. His characteristic formula is that *pius credulitatis affectus* ‘belongs to the substance of faith.’”

⁴⁴ Emphasis mine.

⁴⁵ Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, ed. Peter Hünermann, 43rd ed. [DH], English ed. Robert Fastigi and Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), no. 3008. See Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 656.

dependent upon uncreated truth. At the same time that *Dei Filius* places God's authority as "Creator and Lord" alongside his status as uncreated truth, the document also points directly to God's infallibility as the motive of faith. *Dei Filius* goes on to say "faith . . . is a supernatural virtue whereby . . . we believe that what [God] has revealed is true, not because the intrinsic truth of things is recognized by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, who can neither err nor deceive."⁴⁶ Scheeben will gloss this passage as an account of the motive of faith specifically according to its "intellectual aspect":

The motive for the *act of cognition* in faith or of the *assent* itself—and consequently the *formal motive* . . . and the *formal object* (*obiectum formale*) of faith according to its intellectual aspect—is generally, as becomes clear from the words of the Vatican Council, God as the one "qui nec falli nec fallere potest," "who can neither err nor deceive." . . . The motive is therefore God, as the one who in His external word or testimony *offers the content thereof infallibly as the content of His own infallible knowledge, in order to determine and to substantiate our assent.*⁴⁷

The Thomists are right, then, to insist that God as *prima veritas* is the motive of the intellectual assent of faith. Because God is "unoriginated principle of all knowledge and of all knowing beings and therefore also prince of all minds," he must command the assent of rational beings to whom he has revealed himself. Scheeben's gloss on *Dei Filius* also serves to undermine the spirit of rationalism as it appears in theology. Against Juan de Lugo and Josef Kleutgen, Scheeben argues that the assent of faith cannot be given on the grounds of our own insight—even our philosophical insights into the attributes of God such as omniscience or infallibility.⁴⁸ Instead, "God, precisely as the first and deepest, firmest and soundest root of all truth, offers Himself as the reason for our assent."⁴⁹

But this intellectual assent has much more than a logical character. Indeed, the intellectual assent of faith cannot be extricated from the movement of the will toward God, and thus from faith "according to its ethical

⁴⁶ DH, no. 3008.

⁴⁷ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 674.

⁴⁸ See Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 681. Scheeben understands Lugo and Kleutgen to advocate a "logical-mechanical view of faith as a syllogism through which we demonstrate to ourselves the truth of the content of faith."

⁴⁹ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 674.

aspect.” Further, in making the intellectual assent of faith, the believer not only receives the “insight” of God through the material content of his external word; he also enters into a “most intimate union with God.”⁵⁰ While the *sacrificium intellectus* might appear to the modern rationalist as a forfeit of the most excellent of human powers, Scheeben actually deems it the means by which the mind can attain to its highest dignity through contemplation of God. As John Courtney Murray says, it is one of Scheeben’s “dominating ideas . . . that faith is a participation in the knowledge of God.”⁵¹ Faith maintains a “specific sublimity” insofar as it achieves not just a likeness between God’s mind and the human mind, but a profound communion:

The believer, prompted by grace, strives to conform his judgment to God’s judgment through submission to God’s authority and trust in his truthfulness and to unite his conviction to God’s infallible insight as closely and as firmly as possible and to found it thereon; and the support of grace makes it possible for him to accomplish this union in such a way that the most intimate communion, interpenetration, and affinity comes about between the believer’s knowledge and God’s knowledge, so that therefore the divine force and dignity of the latter is transplanted to the former and shapes it into a commencement and anticipation of eternal life.⁵²

It is in this “interpenetration” of the human and divine minds that Scheeben grounds his claim that theological faith transcends even the most elaborate or certain philosophical insight. The “transcendental knowledge” which contemporary philosophers pursue, he asserts, is in fact only obtainable through faith, which “really accomplishes through humble attachment to God what [the modern philosophers] tried to accomplish through proud, excessive demands on their natural powers of reason.”⁵³

In his work *Nature and Grace*, Scheeben presents faith as a commencement of the journey toward the beatific vision: “Nothing more sublime or profound can be said about faith than that it is a preparation and anticipation of the beatific vision.”⁵⁴ In the *Handbook*, he clarifies that this view

⁵⁰ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 674.

⁵¹ Murray, *Matthias Scheeben on Faith*, 58.

⁵² Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 660.

⁵³ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 717.

⁵⁴ Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *Nature and Grace*, trans. Cyril Vollert, S.J. (London: Herder, 1954), 235.

of faith is by no means innovative, but rather traditional. He holds that, though this was largely the consensus of the Scholastic theologians, it has been eclipsed by the varieties of rationalism evident not only among the modern philosophers, but also among theologians.⁵⁵ We notice here a conformity with Simon's closing insight about authority and the search for truth. Faith substitutes for vision, but at the same time, prepares the believer for that vision. The beatific vision stands as the supernatural analogue to the *soteria* of the natural potencies of the mind which is brought about by scientific demonstration.

In the beatific vision, then, faith has a terminus that is on the one hand analogous to the philosophical *telos* of rational "objectivity," and at the same time transcends it. But it should also be noted that, for Scheeben, it is not only the beatific vision that transcends philosophical insight, but even that faith which unites the mind and will to God *in via*. Divine faith motivated by God's status as unoriginated truth transcends philosophy even in this life, and brings the mind to an "interpenetration" with a supernatural object even before the mind attains perfect vision. Indeed, in his *Mysteries of Christianity*, Scheeben further elaborates the mystery of grace as an adoption of the believer into the communion of the Holy Trinity. There is an uplifting of the entire soul that occurs through the interior influence of God that simply does not lie within the soul's natural powers.⁵⁶

Though this topic cannot be discussed adequately here, it is important to note that Scheeben does not present a fideistic account of the role of human reason. The role of reason in theology and the relationship between

⁵⁵ See Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 658: "There was even less talk in the aforesaid systems (particularly those of Hermes and Günther), not so much as a hint, of the intrinsic relation that ought to have been mentioned at the same time between theological faith and the beatific vision, which is just as important for the supernatural character of faith as it is for the supernatural character of revelation, and which therefore even in the older theologians, especially after St. Thomas, was selected as the starting point for the definition of the nature of faith."

⁵⁶ See Murray, *Matthias Scheeben on Faith*, 67: "The doctrine of faith as the anticipation of the beatific vision finds its natural insertion into these two fundamental mysteries of the supernatural order, our adoption as the children of God in the image of His Son, our participation in the divine nature, and the consequent communion in the divine life with which we are thus 'graced.'" See Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity*, trans. Cyril Vollert, S.J. (London: Herder, 1968), 169: "But we must . . . say that grace and charity constitute the dignity of the sons of God inasmuch as they render the soul conformable to God. But also because they make God's own Spirit the property and innermost possession of the soul. . . . The indwelling of the Holy Spirit seals the relation of adoptive sonship [inasmuch] as His procession from the Father and Son crowns and completes the relation of the natural sonship."

philosophy and theology are dealt with in the second chapter of *Handbook* 1.2. In this account Scheeben shows that he by no means wishes to deny the dignity of human reason, especially when it is brought into relationship with God through the act of faith and becomes capable of theological wisdom. Yet it is critical to observe that this sophisticated use of human reason to cognize the content of faith depends entirely on the formal motive of God's authority and truthfulness as its starting point. If this starting point is neglected, human reason in fact misses its opportunity for the strengthening and elevation of its own powers. When theological faith is construed as dependent on human insight, rather than God's authority as the source of all truth, the trajectory of the intellect toward transcendence is subverted. The intellect then falls short of the dignity which is made available to it by grace.⁵⁷

This section has striven to clarify the role of God's authority in the theological act of faith. It has been shown that Scheeben presents an analysis of faith which elaborates on Simon's insight concerning the role of authority in Christian life, presenting a systematic epistemological account both of human faith and of divine faith. Scheeben insists that through the *latria* of the mind which constitutes the act of theological faith, the intellect rises to a dignity much greater than the demonstrative philosophical knowledge in which Simon locates the full vitality of the intellect. This elevation of the intellect depends upon the *sacrificium intellectus* as the means by which God draws the human mind into "intimate union." This union reaches its fulfillment in the beatific vision. In Simon's terms, the *sacrificium intellectus* through faith culminates eschatologically in "clear intuition." Yet even in this life, faith effects an "intimate union" with God, transforming the intellectual assent of faith into a meritorious act of the virtue of religion and raising the believer to a lofty dignity beyond his natural powers.

While Scheeben notes the analogy between natural and theological faith, it must be reiterated that the term of the intellectual movement begun by faith is not the propositional demonstration which Simon identifies as scientific knowledge. For Simon, the teacher helps the student arrive

⁵⁷ See Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 822: "Now just as [faith] attains a supernatural moral nobility and value on the basis of this supernatural freedom, so too it strives essentially for the state of a supernatural and divine freedom of the mind, for the freedom of the children of God, for freedom from error and doubt, and for the full, unhindered, and untroubled possession of the highest truth in the bosom of Eternal Truth. Its childlike sense is consequently the most sublime high-mindedness and leads to the most sublime intellectual greatness and strength, while unbelievers in their idle arrogance and false sense of freedom fall back into the weakness of children."

at the point of conformity between the mind and the object of knowledge through syllogistic argumentation. Though Scheeben offers an extensive treatment of the cognition of the object of faith through theological science, it is crucial to emphasize the transcendent and, indeed, divinizing character of the submission of the intellect in theological faith.⁵⁸ By reason of the supernatural character of revealed truths, the object of theological faith simply transcends the natural capacities of the intellect. Correspondingly, the theological virtue of faith transcends even the most perfect exercise of the natural intellectual virtues. The act of faith motivated by God's authority, then, does not compromise but rather elevates the human mind, and indeed the whole human soul.

The Need for a Living Human Authority

Having examined Scheeben's account of divine authority in the act of theological faith, I now move to the question of the role of human authority. It will be the purpose of the following section to show that, for Scheeben, the authority of the Church is not reducible to her juridical power. Rather, her authority is rooted in her role as the medium by which divine life is communicated to believers through faith. The Church is not *first of all* an arbiter of disputes or even a "leader" in Simon's sense of the world. Rather,

⁵⁸ Scheeben engages the relationship between faith and reason in theological science in section 2 of *Handbook* 1.2. Though it does not belong to this study to explain Scheeben's account of the nature of theological knowledge and the act of theological reasoning, it suffices to recognize that Scheeben understands the vital role played by human reason in attaining a more profound understanding of the supernatural mysteries revealed by God. Following *Dei Filius* again, Scheeben opposes the two possible consequences of "modern rationalism." See *Handbook* 1.2, no. 855: "In opposition to modern rationalism, which sometimes declares impossible any understanding of the doctrines of the faith and sometimes claims to have an absolute understanding of and complete insight into them, the *Vatican Council*, after assigning to faith its specific object in the mysteries, established the Catholic doctrine about the truly possible understanding thereof excluding both extremes. On the one hand it teaches that *an understanding, and indeed a remarkably productive one is possible*. . . . On the other hand it teaches that this understanding is not of the same kind as the insight into natural truths, and in particular is *more obscure* and *more incomplete* than the latter." The *sacrificium intellectus* is necessary because the believer cannot assent to the mysteries of the Christian faith through a syllogistic demonstration. Yet, having received and assented to the mysteries of faith on the authority of the One who reveals, the Christian can proceed toward a greater understanding of these mysteries, particularly in their relationship to each other and "from the analogy with the objects of [reason's] natural knowledge" (*Dei Filius*, ch. 4).

she is a “teacher” given license to present the truth by the very source of truth: God who can neither err nor deceive. At the same time, just as the theological act of faith itself responds both to God’s sovereignty or *imperium* and to God’s truthfulness as *prima veritas*, the Church’s teaching role as agent of divine truth necessarily implies an authentic power to demand assent as well as to govern and judge. Thus, the Church is *both* leader and teacher, but only insofar as she is the ambassador of God’s truthfulness.

For Scheeben’s account of the Church, I turn to *Handbook* 1.1, where he presents “the objective principles of theological knowledge.” Having laid out the character of divine revelation “as the principle of [theological] knowledge in us” in the first chapter, Scheeben turns to the “transmission” of divine revelation in chapter 2.⁵⁹ In the opening of chapter 2 Scheeben states: “Although it is *meant for all people of all places and times*, divine revelation is still *not immediately bestowed on all*. . . . In order for it to be *effectively proclaimed to all people, other arrangements are necessary, which are distinct from it but nevertheless come from God*.”⁶⁰

Recall Simon’s account of the teacher in chapter 3 of *A General Theory of Authority*. The authority of teachers, he says, “originates in a law that these people did not make.”⁶¹ It is important from the outset to note that Scheeben distinguishes between divine revelation and the “medium” of its transmission. The question, of course, is the nature of this “medium.” Here, Scheeben must engage the disputes between the Catholic and Protestant positions, which he claims “are *diametrically opposed*.”⁶² Scheeben distinguishes between “Modern”/“New” and “Old” Protestantism. Modern Protestantism is more forthright in proclaiming this principle as the way of grasping the meaning of revelation. Old Protestantism, on the other hand, claimed to eschew an individualistic principle but “*produced in fact the opposite of its goal*, by making the Faith a plaything of the moods and imaginations of each individual.”⁶³ While New Protestantism adopts a “natu-

⁵⁹ Mattias Joseph Scheeben, *Handbook of Catholic Dogmatics*, vol. 1.1, trans. Michael Miller (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2019), no. 1.

⁶⁰ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.1, no. 57.

⁶¹ Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, 84.

⁶² Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.1, no. 56.

⁶³ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.1, no. 59. See John Henry Newman, “Faith and Private Judgment,” in *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations* (London: Longmans and Green, 1921), 192–213, at 201: “Protestants, generally speaking, have not faith, in the primitive meaning of that word, this is clear from what I have been saying, and here is a confirmation of it. If men believed now as they did in the times of the Apostles, they could not doubt or change. No one can doubt whether a word spoken by God is to be believed; of course it is; whereas any one, who is modest and humble, may easily be

realistic" view of the meaning of revelation as "exclusively religious-moral edification," the Old Protestantism adopts a "*pseudo-mystical way* and thus [tries] to base the *firmest and fullest supernatural faith thereon*."⁶⁴ Instead of "religious-moral edification," Old Protestantism understands the meaning of revelation to lie in the "comforting certainty of the forgiveness of sins."⁶⁵

Both of these forms of Protestantism adopt what Scheeben calls an "*indifferentist attitude* toward the objective transmission of revelation," such that they "protest against a revelation that approaches each and every individual authoritatively, or against a living, exterior, divinely-ordered authority which makes the claim to interpret revelation authentically in the Name of God and which authoritatively obliges obedient, universal, and unified faith in this revelation."⁶⁶ In confronting Protestantism, Scheeben must confront the very dispute which Simon engages in his philosophical account of authority. He must show how a living human authority, rather than acting as an impediment to the transmission of divine revelation, in fact serves as a necessary condition for this transmission, such that the individual Christian (and Christians collectively) can receive faith most perfectly through the medium of the Church.

The individualistic principle in Protestantism, Scheeben says, reduces the entire concept of revelation to its subjective effects. In this way, it denies the objectivity of revelation as proceeding "from God as the Creator and Lord of Mankind."⁶⁷ As was shown in the last section, it is by virtue of this status as Creator and Lord and unoriginated principle of knowledge, that God himself serves as the grounds and criterion for the act of faith. Though Old Protestantism may point to the "record" of revelation left in Scripture as some version of an "unoriginated principle," it mistakes Scripture for the formal motive of faith. This record indeed presents God's external word, but to make it the grounds of faith is to confuse the external word with the one who speaks that word, thus in fact diminishing "the power and sovereignty due to the Word of God."⁶⁸

The motive of faith cannot in any way be rooted in the individual who receives the external word of God, or even in the written record of the divine word. Instead, faith is the intellectual assent made to what God has revealed because of God's identity as the "first and deepest, firmest

brought to doubt of his own inferences and deductions."

⁶⁴ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.1, nos. 60 and 59.

⁶⁵ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.1, no. 69.

⁶⁶ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.1, no. 59.

⁶⁷ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.1, no. 60.

⁶⁸ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.1, no. 60.

and soundest root of all truth,” which lifts the mind and will toward God and effects an “intimate union” of the human mind with the divine Mind. The same reasoning that governs Scheeben’s account of God’s authority and truthfulness as the formal motive of faith governs his account of the Church’s *causal* role not only in transmitting the material content of revelation, but in serving as a representative of that formal motive.

Along the lines of the Apostle’s saying, “faith through hearing,” the Church’s proposal also has influence and importance for faith because she, being the living proclamation of God’s word, carried out in His name, with His authority, and in His power, causes God Himself to speak to us, and consequently the *divine motive of faith confronts us through her and in her and exercises its influence on us*.⁶⁹

As Scheeben explains, faith is produced in the human soul by the interior influence of God. In this sense, the primary cause of the generation of faith is God himself. Yet the Church exercises a kind of secondary causality precisely by acting as the means by which God’s word confronts human beings as testimony of *Deus revelans*. At the same time, the Church is not, so to speak, a “dead” instrument with a merely material nature, nor does it act merely as *ministra materiae Dei* or of the material object of faith, “but rather as *ministra Dei loquentes* or as the organ and envoy of God himself who speaks.”⁷⁰ The Church as “living organ,” “envoy,” and “ambassador” receives a participation in God’s authority and his power through divine delegation, and does not rest passively as the “mirror” in which the material object of faith becomes visible.⁷¹ As envoy or ambassador of God’s *imperium* and of his truthfulness, the Church is able to speak authoritatively for God and, further, to demand the response of faith.⁷² As Scheeben explains,

⁶⁹ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 765.

⁷⁰ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 765.

⁷¹ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.2, no. 765: “The importance of the Church’s proposal for the faith is nevertheless not restricted to the fact that it serves the faith *somehow* as a detailed and infallibly correct *representation of its material object* or holds that material object up to faith as though in a conduit or a mirror, as that might also happen more or less through a lifeless book. In that case only a purely material difference would exist between Catholic faith and divine faith.”

⁷² It is important to note that, at least in the context of the second chapter of *Handbook* 1.1, Scheeben is not speaking specifically about the Church’s sacramental ministry as the means by which she “produces” faith. Rather, he is drawing attention to the vicarious role the Church plays vis-à-vis God as the formal motive of faith. Insofar as the Church is a “living envoy,” she is entrusted with God’s truthfulness and authority.

an “envoy” or “ambassador” not only receives the mission of transmitting the sovereign’s message, but is enabled to act vicariously in the name of the sovereign.⁷³ The motive for submitting to the envoy is not the authority the envoy possesses in his own person, but rather the authority of the master who sends the envoy. Similarly, the Church justifiably demands the assent of faith to what she proposes as true not because of any authority proper to her human members as such, but insofar as these human members are invested with divine authority.

In *Handbook* 1.1, Scheeben offers further distinctions concerning the attributes of the “agents,” “organs,” or “envoys” of God who are the successors of the apostles. These agents, Scheeben says, are “divine envoys who appear in God’s Name and carry [God’s word] publicly by dint of a divine *commission* and divine *authority* and with divine *power* conferred on them by God.”⁷⁴ But these respective conferrals are in fact distinct moments of the Church’s trusteeship. The *commission* to preach proceeds from “God’s promise” and a “divine sanction” that invests the Church with infallibility when it comes to the proclamation of the external word. But this commission, Scheeben goes on to say, “would suffice . . . merely to prompt faith.”⁷⁵ The investiture of the Church with God’s *authority* enables the Church not only to prompt faith but to “produce it also” according to the “title” or *Recht* which God bestows. Finally, the bestowal of God’s *power* is the basis of the Church’s judicial function, by which it can “demand *imperatively* the acknowledgment of the truth that is proclaimed and . . . support this demand through punishments.”⁷⁶

While Scheeben posits the preaching office of the Church—the proclamation of the external word—as a primary function of the apostolate, it is important to note that the proclamation of the word cannot be an exhaustive definition of the Church’s charism. Indeed, to reduce the Church’s commission merely to a presentation of the material *to be believed* would be to make the Church a “mirror” of the material object rather than an envoy.

As he says in *Handbook* 1.2, no. 765, it is through the Church that the “divine motive of faith . . . exercises its influence on us.” Scheeben does not include a treatment of the Sacraments in the texts under consideration here.

⁷³ Scheeben distinguishes between mere messengers and envoys: “The word of God, being the glad *tidings* or *message* of God to mankind, cannot and should not be spread merely by arbitrary *town criers*, or even merely through simply *messengers* or *heralds* of God. The proclamation must instead be carried out by *true ambassadors*, i.e. envoys equipped with God’s power and authority” (*Handbook* 1.1, no. 74).

⁷⁴ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.1, no. 67.

⁷⁵ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.1, no. 68.

⁷⁶ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.1, no. 68.

It is crucial here to recall Scheeben's adjudication between "intellectualism" and "voluntarism" in his treatment of faith. Just as *Dei Filius* connects God's absolute sovereignty as Creator with his status as First Truth, the Church herself is invested simultaneously both with plenipotentary power and with the fullness of divine truth. Thus, Her authority as such proceeds from a vicarious participation in God's *imperium* and his truthfulness. When it comes to the Church's authority, it is necessary to maintain the synthesis between God's sovereign power and his supreme truthfulness which lies at the basis of Scheeben's analysis of the act of theological faith.

Scheeben insists on the primacy of the Church's mission to produce the theological act of faith and thus to communicate divine truth. The teaching authority of the Church comes to light as more fundamental than her disciplinary or juridical authority. Yet Scheeben carefully identifies how the Church differs from any merely human teacher by virtue of her investiture with God's sovereign power. As Scheeben states, "the whole efficacy and nature of the apostolate is greatly illumined by the concept of teaching, if the latter is correctly *defined and filled with content*, but both would be just as greatly obscured by the same concept if it were understood merely according to a human analogy."⁷⁷ The teaching authority of the Church is necessarily "far more sublime" than any authority of a human teacher—so much so that Scheeben insists that "the only analogy is found in parents with respect to their children."⁷⁸

The Church as *magister* possesses a "power to teach" symbolized by the *cathedra* or the teacher's chair. Scheeben's account of the magisterium can be compared with and distinguished from Simon's account of the "teacher." As was shown, Simon distinguishes between the "leader" and the "teacher" insofar as the former possesses a personal, directive authority. The latter possesses authority only indirectly and in reference to the objective truth that is outside himself. While the Church certainly possesses a purely *received* authority and testifies to God as the supreme authority and First Truth, her authority is also both personal and directive. As "envoy" and "organ," the Church is invested with the personal authority of God as well as directive and judicial power. It is for this reason that Scheeben likens the authority of the Church as *magister* to paternal authority rather than, for example, the authority of a professor. Just as faith is a response both of intellect and will to God's sovereignty and truthfulness, the Church's authority exercises a claim on intellect and will together. It therefore

⁷⁷ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.1, no. 83.

⁷⁸ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.1, no. 83.

extends both to questions of “what is the case?” and “what is to be done?” to borrow Simon’s language.

As has been shown, Scheeben understands the Church to exercise a “causal role” in “producing faith.” It is clear, however, that this causality is exercised by the Church only insofar as she is an “organ” of God’s authority by which she has received not only a commission to preach the external word, but the power to demand the obedience of faith which is due to God. For Scheeben, the defense of the authority of the Church depends on her capacity to produce supernatural faith in the God who reveals. This issues in a characterization of the Church as an “envoy”—an authoritative personal representative—of God invested with the proclamation of divine truth through her magisterium. The more expansive governmental and juridical powers of the Church over the “empire” of Christians must originate first of all in the Church’s magisterial competency to produce supernatural faith by acting as a representative of God.

The question of authority, then, is *not reducible* merely to the question of judicial power, though they are intimately related. Authority, as the motive of faith, has to do with the transmission of truth from God to humankind. Whatever judicial powers the Church possesses exist for the sake of guarding the truth and promoting genuine faith in believers. Scheeben roots the magisterium of the Church in God’s own “magisterial power”: the Church’s proclamation “is called *authoritative* insofar as the one responsible for it also formally represents God’s magisterial power over the creation subject to Him and as God’s *real representative* participates in it.”⁷⁹ It is due to this investiture with God’s magisterial power that the representative—the “living organ” or “envoy”—“can *imperatively demand* faith and at the same time *oblige* others to carry it out, as is the case in a human situation with a judge.”⁸⁰ The Church exercises an authority over both the intellect and the will, insofar as she authentically and credibly presents the truth about God and acts as an ambassador of the supreme sovereign and Creator to whom obedience is owed.

It has been established that the authority of the Church exists for the sake of the transmission of divine revelation and that the Church represents God as the formal motive for the assent of faith. It is in light of this “trusteeship” that the Church has any power to bind or loose. But Scheeben makes a further argument for why the Church must be a *living* representative of God. The individualistic principle underlying both

⁷⁹ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.1, no. 68.

⁸⁰ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.1, no. 68.

forms of Protestantism threatens to disperse and render ineffective the revelation which God has intended to transmit to mankind. Indeed, this individualism, Scheeben states, *must be* contrary to God's own provisions if his intention is to bring mankind into "intimate union" with himself. Scheeben says:

The revelation cannot possibly have been put into the world by God in such a way that the document or word containing it was exposed to the four winds, so as to wait until the men who by chance are able or willing to do so seek it and, each according to his temperament, insight, and ability, recognize its existence and find out its content or explain it for themselves.⁸¹

By making faith a product of chance, of human emotion, or of personal insight, the individualistic principle turns out to contradict the formal motive of faith as Scheeben has explained it: God's own authority and truthfulness, which raises man to a supernatural dignity and communicates otherwise unobtainable knowledge. The Church has been invested by God with the authority to preach the Gospel, to bring about the act of theological faith in individuals, and to authoritatively interpret the contents of revelation because of God's intention to gather humankind into a "kingdom of truth." The Church exercises a living authority in service of God's majesty and his truthfulness and communicates supernatural life to mankind throughout time and space.

For Scheeben, the Church's status as a living authority is derived from the character of revelation itself as a life-giving principle: "[Revelation] should be a *fruitful principle of supernatural knowledge and life and a supreme law of faith, thought, and action for all men, as a whole and individually, through which [human beings] are to be united in one kingdom of truth and holiness, whose King is God Himself.*"⁸² Scheeben affirms the political character of the Church, but the Church, unlike any natural political regime, is a "kingdom of truth and holiness."⁸³ It is a sovereignty rooted in God's status

⁸¹ Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.1, no. 65.

⁸² Scheeben, *Handbook* 1.1, no. 62.

⁸³ Here, Scheeben's view can again be contrasted not only with that of De Maistre, but with that of De Maistre's modern disciple Carl Schmitt. Schmitt repeatedly equates God's sovereignty with his judicial power, comparing the God of pre-Enlightenment monotheism with the "invisible person" that stands as omnipotent judge behind even the most positivistic modern legal orders: "There always exists the same inexplicable identity: lawgiver, executive power, police, pardoner, welfare institution. . . . The

as Creator but also as “unoriginated principle of knowledge”—as *prima veritas*. God’s sovereignty is not ordained simply toward the maintenance of order within his kingdom, but first of all toward a communication of his own divine life and his own “insight” to mankind.⁸⁴

Conclusion

The motive of this investigation was to pursue a line of thinking about the nature of authority proposed by Yves Simon as it relates to the reality of living, human authority within the Church. Though Scheeben and Simon may seem to be distant figures, they share a similar account of the subordination of the mind to the credible authority of witnesses. They also seek to respond to modern political liberalism and philosophical rationalism, albeit with distinct philosophers and political figures in mind. Yet I have tried to argue that Scheeben produces an account of authority which, like Simon’s, combats the idea that authority as such acts only as a constraint on the mind and ruins its proper vitality. Though Simon offers a glance at the relevance of his philosophy for faith, Scheeben develops his insights systematically and in view of rigorous distinctions.

It is fitting to conclude with a brief review of the analogies and distinctions between the respective accounts of Simon and Scheeben. They are in agreement concerning the nature of authority in matters of natural truth. For Simon, the student assents with trust to the propositions proposed by the teacher. The teacher, on the other hand, recognizes that his authority springs from the truth itself rather than his own intellect or will, and aims to lead his students to the full activation of their powers of intellect through rational demonstration. As was shown in the second section of this paper, this is precisely how Scheeben characterizes the natural act of belief. Assent is given to propositions because of the trustworthiness of the authority. The student thus makes a “firm assent” to what he receives

‘omnipotence’ of the modern lawgiver, of which one reads in every textbook on public law, is not only linguistically derived from theology” (*Political Theology*, 38).

⁸⁴ Here I use a term operative in Scheeben’s account of natural and theological faith in *Handbook* 1.2 (see nos. 617 and 657). For Scheeben, the use of the term helps establish the analogy between natural and theological faith insofar as the submission of the student to the teacher is given on account of the superior insight of the teacher. But, clearly, when applied to God, “insight” should not signify the product of any ratiocinative power. The term, then, should not connote any univocity between the divine and human modes of knowing, but rather indicate that God is trustworthy because of his infinitely perfect knowledge of himself and of all creatures.

from the teacher due to the latter's insight. The teacher thus becomes the "author" of that assent.

While Simon had pointed out that the Christian life does not have its "center" in faith and authority but rather in the "clear intuition" granted by the beatific vision, Scheeben contends that the theological act of faith in fact possesses an even greater "majesty" and "dignity" than demonstrative philosophical knowledge. Though the act of faith is not brought about by the clear vision of God in his essence, it takes on the character of an act of religion—a *latria* of the mind—and brings the believer into "intimate union" with God even in this life. Therefore, Scheeben adds to Simon's account a robust argument for the act of theological faith as elevating, bringing the believer even now into the life of grace by which he is supernaturally unified with the object of belief. Further, Scheeben clarifies that, because the Church is invested with both God's sovereignty and his truthfulness, she possesses a uniquely dignified status as a teacher who also possesses authority to demand assent as well as to govern. The Church, then, is both a "leader" and a "teacher" according to Simon's categories. The salient point remains that the Church's authority to govern can never be disentangled from her identity as bearer of divine truth. But in her role as God's ambassador, the Church transcends the natures and capacities of all other "leaders" and "teachers."

Scheeben's theology of faith, it was shown, is intimately bound together with his articulation of the Church as an "agent," "organ," and "envoy" of God. The Church is relegated neither to a mere presentation of the material object of faith nor to a judicial role of resolving practical disputes, but rather possesses an ambassadorial authority to produce faith in the souls of believers. The authority of the Church is dependent entirely upon her vicarious representation of the truthfulness of God. The living, human authority of the Church as the agent which produces divine faith in the souls of believers is responsible for the invigoration and elevation of the soul to the dignity and majesty of "intimate union" with God. The Church indeed exercises juridical and disciplinary authority, but only insofar as she is first the "envoy" of God's truthfulness. In his treatment of the act of faith Scheeben turns to *Dei Filius* to synthesize the intellectualist view of God as *prima veritas* with the voluntarist view of God as *imperator*. Similarly, Scheeben's treatment of ecclesiastical authority synthesizes the power to demand faith, as well as the exercise of juridical authority, with the mission of transmitting divine truth. Just as authority and truthfulness are united in God's essence, so must they be co-present as grounds for the Church's authority and mission.

Scheeben gives an account of the political character of the Church as a kingdom not only of power and judgment, but of “truth and holiness.” Revelation offers a “supernatural principle of life,” which the Church transmits authoritatively throughout time and space, with God as its sovereign. It is because of her competency to produce supernatural faith throughout space and time that the Church, despite her political characteristics of authority and power, transcends any merely human kingdom. The Church alone is “trustee” of the divine truth which is received on God’s authority and raises mankind to the lofty stature of adopted sons of God. As Augustine says, “incomparably fairer is that Supernal City where victory is truth, where dignity is holiness, where peace is happiness and where life is eternity.”⁸⁵ The Church is the means by which God’s kingdom is established on earth in order to lead the faithful toward the “Heavenly Country,” where we “will find the one and true God, Who ‘will set no bounds or duration to your estate, but will grant empire without end.’”⁸⁶

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⁸⁵ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 2.29, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁸⁶ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 2.29.