

***Dei Filius* II: On Divine Revelation**

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With chapter 2 of *Dei Filius*, the First Vatican Council's Constitution on the Catholic Faith moves on from the confession of faith in God, the Creator of all things, to the fact of God's revelation to us human creatures. The chapter covers first natural revelation through creation and the possibility of our natural knowledge of God, then why we also need a further revelation which is supernatural, the presence of that supernatural revelation in Scripture and Tradition, and finally the canonicity, inspiration, and interpretation of the Bible.¹

The first sentence of the chapter declares that "holy Mother Church holds and teaches that God, the beginning and end of all things, may be known with certainty by the natural light of human reason."² This sentence, with its affirmation of the possibility of sure natural knowledge of God without the benefit of supernatural revelation, is perhaps the most well-known of the chapter, the most hotly debated at the council itself, and the most discussed in the secondary literature.³ Hardly any comment is

¹ Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, 43rd ed., Latin–German, ed. by Helmut Hoping and Peter Hünermann [DH], Latin–English ed. and trans. Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012]), nos. 3004–7. See also *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman Tanner, vol. 2, *Trent to Vatican II* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990) 804–11. Unless there is a question of an official English translation, translations from magisterial documents are my own.

² DH, no. 3004.

³ See, e.g.: Theodor Granderath, *Geschichte des Vatikanischen Konzils von seiner ersten Ankündigung bis zu seiner Vertagung* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1903–1906), 2:422–40; Marcel Chossat, "Dieu (Connaissance naturelle de)," *Dictionnaire de*

ever made, however, on how the second chapter begins with the statement that the Church “holds and teaches” what follows. This phrase *tenet et docet* contrasts neatly with how the first chapter began: “The Holy Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church believes and confesses that there is one, true and living God,” and so on. While chapter 1’s opening sentence spoke of the Church believing and confessing, chapter 2’s opening sentence speaks instead of the Church holding and teaching, employing the verb *teneo* (hold) in contrast to *credo* (believe).⁴

One can easily recognize a structural parallel between the two phrases: the inner act of holding in chapter 2 corresponds to the inner act of believing in chapter 1, and the external act of teaching in chapter 2 corresponds to the external act of confessing in chapter 1. I shall say something about the Church’s holding and teaching, and its overall contrast as a unit with the earlier unit of believing and confessing, before going on to say something about the wider content of the chapter in that light. I do this partly because this symposium is about not only Vatican I’s Constitution on the Catholic Faith, but also theology today. Catholic theology today is familiar with a precise distinction between “believing” and “holding,” and while it is closely related to the distinction between believing and holding found in *Dei Filius*, I do not think the two distinctions are quite the same. So, in order to avoid confusion, I shall say something about the distinction familiar in theology in today, and then say something about the distinction at work in Vatican I.

théologie catholique, vol. 4/1 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1911), 756–874; Ambrose Ryan, “The Knowledge of God Attainable by Human Reason, according to the Vatican Council,” *Franciscan Studies* 3 (1943): 364–73; Cuthbert Butler, *The Vatican Council, 1869–1870, Based on Bishop Ullathorne’s Letters* (London: Collins and Harvill, 1962), 235–47; Bernard Lonergan, “Natural Knowledge of God,” in *A Second Collection* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 117–33; Lawrence Moonan, “*Certo cognosci posse*: What Precisely Did Vatican I Define?,” *Annuario Historicae Conciliorum* 42 (2010): 193–202; Fergus Kerr, “Knowing God by Reason Alone: What Vatican I Never Said,” *New Blackfriars* 91 (2010): 215–28.

⁴ Jean-Michel-Alfred Vacant, exceptionally, did comment on *tenet et docet* (*Études théologiques sur les constitutions du Concile du Vatican*, 2 vols. [Paris: Delhomme et Briguët, 1895], 1:42, 309). He initially treated “believes and confesses” and “holds and teaches” as equivalent indications of infallible definitions, but later, when treating the particular case of natural knowledge of God, he denied that the chapter itself defined anything at this point but merely gave an exposition of what the Church teaches. The latter interpretation differed from the view expressed at the Council that definitions were made in the chapters as much as in the canons. See, e.g., *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. Ioannes Dominicus Mansi, vols. 49–53 [Vatican I] (Leipzig: H. Welter, 1923–27), 51:44, 394, 415.

The *Profession of Faith* in use in the Church since 1989, after quoting the Nicene Creed, continues as follows: “With firm faith, I also believe everything contained in the word of God, whether written or handed down in Tradition, which the Church, either by a solemn judgment or by the ordinary and universal Magisterium, sets forth to be believed as divinely revealed.”⁵ But to this primary profession of what is usually called theological or divine faith, since it is a response to God’s revelation, there is then added the following: “I also firmly accept and hold each and every thing definitively proposed by the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals.”⁶ A third category, which pertains to non-definitive teaching and to which the appropriate response is “religious obedience of will and intellect,” need not detain us here.⁷

The Latin of “I accept and hold” is *amplector et retineo*, and in the 1989 *Profession*, it is said in definite contrast to faith and belief as an assent distinct from but related to that of divine faith itself. Though officially translated as “hold”—which might also have rendered *teneo*—*retineo* seems to connote guarding and preserving something, holding onto it, rather than merely holding it. The difficulty in interpreting such formulas (including terms such as “profess,” “hold,” and so on) is indicated by the fact that the previous *Profession of Faith*, which had come into use after the Second Vatican Council, used precisely the same phrase, *amplector et retineo*, for assent to what includes defined dogmas of faith.⁸ The difference between the two twentieth-century *Professions* is that, while the earlier *Profession* referred *amplector et retineo* to revealed dogmas which, as such, fall under divine faith, the current *Profession* instead transfers the phrase to an assent clearly distinct from divine faith, though intimately related to it.

In this we find reflected the distinction normally made in Catholic theology between two objects of the Church’s infallibility,⁹ a distinction also made by those present at Vatican I.¹⁰ The primary object contains those things believed by divine faith as divinely revealed. In contrast, the secondary object contains those things that are not in themselves divinely

⁵ See DH, no. 3011, for chapter 4 of *Dei Filius*.

⁶ DH, no. 5070. For amendments to canon law arising from this point, see *Ad Tuendam Fidem* in no. 5065. For the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith’s doctrinal commentary, see nos. 5071–72.

⁷ See Robert Ombres, “The New Profession of Faith and Oath,” *Priests and People* 3 (1989): 339–43.

⁸ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59 (1967): 1058.

⁹ E.g., Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Magisterium: Teacher and Guardian of the Faith* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007), 59–99.

¹⁰ See e.g., Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 52:1226–227.

revealed, but are closely connected with the truths of faith such that the faith itself cannot be adequately proposed or defended without the additional holding of those other truths, and so the Church's infallibility extends to them too. So, while there are some truths which are directly revealed and so are believed by faith, there are others that are firmly accepted and held in connection with faith. Were we to suppose that *Dei Filius* was making precisely the same distinction when it spoke in chapter 2 of the Church holding and teaching rather than, as it had done in chapter 1, of believing and confessing, we might suppose that the content of chapter 2 was not *de fide*, strictly speaking, but was rather to be held on the basis of what is believed. The Council seems, however, to have been making a closely related but slightly different distinction. I am not suggesting that the two distinctions are mutually exclusive, but merely that the one is not the other, and we should not confuse them, if we are to gain a more precise understanding of what exactly *Dei Filius* was proposing in chapter 2.¹¹

The term "holds" has its own history of different use, perhaps more complex than that of *amplector et retineo*. An example of its historic employment is in reference to the dogma of faith regarding the existence of purgatory. The Council of Trent, in its Decree on Purgatory, of December 3, 1563, had commanded the bishops to see that the "sound doctrine of purgatory" be "believed [*credi*], held [*teneri*], taught [*doceri*], and preached everywhere [*ubique praedicari*]."¹² What it is for the doctrine to be believed, taught, and preached is clear enough, but what does holding the doctrine add to its being believed? I suggest that, in context, "hold" brings out the connotation of firm adherence or preservation, not unlike the meaning of *retineo* in today's *Profession*. Of the four pertinent verbs in Trent's decree, only one found its way into the *Tridentine Profession of Faith* (promulgated by Pope Paul IV in 1555) regarding purgatory. A considerable variety of terms expressing assent is found throughout this *Profession*, but the verb chosen out of the four for purgatory was *teneo*: "I steadfastly hold that there is a purgatory." This Profession was still in use in the time of Vatican I, and a version of it was recited during the Council's second public session on January 6, 1870. However, while acknowledging the undoubted complexity in the history of the theological use of "hold,"

¹¹ For a useful discussion of "believe" and "hold" at the Council, but which does not cover chapter 2, and which seems slightly to confuse the distinction with the one that would later appear in the 1989 *Profession of Faith*, see Michael Nicolau and Joachim Salaverri, *Sacrae Theologiae Summa*, vol. 1, *Theologia Fundamental* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1958), 817–19.

¹² DH, no. 1820.

of which its historic use regarding purgatory is only one example, I intend to explore the meaning of “holds” in chapter 2 of *Dei Filius* against the immediate background of the word’s use in the preparation of the conciliar documents themselves.

The phrase “holds and teaches” came to be introduced into chapter 2 of the constitution after an intervention by the Dominican archbishop of Saragossa and later Cardinal Manuel García y Gil, on March 4.¹³ García y Gil had been elected to the Deputation on Faith, and was among those who scrutinized the first draft by theologian Josef Kleutgen, S.J., at committee stage, after the earlier schema by Johann Baptist Franzelin, S.J., had been set aside. Kleutgen had put “believe and confess” at the beginning of chapter 1, but began chapter 2 with only “the Church teaches.”¹⁴ García y Gil suggested a lengthy rewrite of the whole sentence on natural knowledge of God, but the only part of his suggestion that made it into the revised draft printed on March 14, and so appeared in the final text, was the insertion of “holds and.”¹⁵ The resulting phrase “holds and teaches” thus reproduced more or less a phrase, *tenet ac docet*, already present in the draft’s preamble.¹⁶ I suggest that in both cases what the Church “holds and teaches” is not said in strict exclusive contrast to what the Church believes and confesses, but represents a broader category under which matters of faith definitely fall, but which matters of faith do not exhaust. From the first discussions of the pre-conciliar theological commission on September 24, 1867 it was clear that the documents would tackle not only heresy but also other errors which were not opposed to faith per se, but went against further undoubted and certain truths beyond what was strictly to be believed.¹⁷ I suggest that “holds and teaches” was not restricted to this second kind of truth, but was designed to encompass both kinds.

We have a sense of this meaning being already in place from the pre-conciliar theological commission’s discussion of a draft document on marriage on September 10, 1868. The preamble announced that it would cover various matters that “no one from now on should dare to believe.”

¹³ Vito-Tomas Gómez García, *El Cardenal Fr. Manuel García y Gil, O.P.: Obispo de Badajoz y Arzobispo de Zaragoza (1802–1881)* (Valencia: Nacher, 1990).

¹⁴ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 53:165. In Franzelin’s draft, the possibility of natural knowledge of God had at first been introduced with “we declare” and was later modified to “it cannot be doubted that” (50:60).

¹⁵ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 53:185.

¹⁶ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 53: 164. The preamble to Franzelin’s draft had similarly spoken of what the Church “holds and teaches” (*tenet et docet*; 50:59).

¹⁷ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 49:619–20.

It was recorded that one of the consultors made the point that, since “believe” indicates an act of faith, and not all of the points dealt with in the document on marriage were dogmas of faith, the text should be amended from “believe” to “hold.”¹⁸ In this way the text itself would recognize that its scope, while including truths of faith, went beyond them. And this is indeed what later appeared in the revised schema, namely, that “no one from now on should hold, preach or teach” other than in accordance with the content of the document.¹⁹ Since the Council had to be closed prematurely on account of the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, the schema was of course never finally voted on.

The distinction also showed itself after the final approval of *Dei Filius* in the debates leading up to the definition of papal infallibility in the constitution *Pastor Aeternus*. The draft formula which had previously been circulated to the Council’s membership said the pope was infallible when he defines “what in matters of faith and morals is to be held [tenendum] by the universal Church.”²⁰ This use of “held” (rather than, say, “believed”) reflected the common position among theologians that, while ecclesial infallibility included matters of faith, it extended beyond them to further certain truths, that is, the secondary object of infallibility. Some proponents of papal infallibility at the Council, however, felt that the definition should be more cautious, since, while it was the case that the extension of ecclesial infallibility to matters of faith was already something believed within the Church, its extension to further truths was in contrast something held by theologians to be only certain, rather than believed as such. In this situation they felt it safer to make explicit only the pope’s infallibility regarding what was strictly *de fide*, rather than speak more broadly of matters to be held.²¹ Thus Bishop Konrad Martin of Paderborn proposed replacing the draft’s “hold” with saying that the pope is infallible when he defines “what is to be believed by the universal Church as of Catholic faith.”²² After some unsatisfactory compromise formulas were explored,²³ the process turned full circle and the original formula, more or less, appeared in *Pastor Aeternus*.²⁴ My point is that both sides in this dispute recognized that,

¹⁸ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 49:652.

¹⁹ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 51:719.

²⁰ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 53:243.

²¹ For an English translation of the relevant diary entry of Bishop Ignatius von Senestr y of Regensburg, who supported “hold” in the definition, see Butler, *Vatican Council*, 376–78.

²² Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 53:249.

²³ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 53:250, 255.

²⁴ DH, no. 3074.

while talk of holding truths included matters of faith, strictly speaking, it went beyond them to include more. At Vatican I “hold” was a more global, generic term which included faith, but more besides.

These interventions give us a context for understanding the opening of *Dei Filius*’s chapter 2: “Holy Mother Church holds and teaches.” All that is to come is not something only held rather than believed, but, given the generic meaning of hold, will be either a truth of faith, strictly speaking, or instead a sure truth connected to faith. One might have thought that inclusion in an anathema would be a reliable guide that something was *de fide* rather than of lesser authority. After all, the pre-conciliar commission originally planned that the canons would condemn only heresies, strictly speaking.²⁵ However, this point of method had inevitably been dropped when Franzelin’s draft set aside the basic distinction between chapters and canons, and the point was not revived when Kleutgen’s draft restored the distinction of chapters and canons. Kleutgen was satisfied to follow the same method as Trent, which he took to have allowed the canons’ anathemas to range beyond matters of faith to define things that were not in themselves revealed.²⁶ So it would seem that the canons of *Dei Filius* are not restricted to what is *de fide*, strictly speaking.

With regard to the chapter’s first point, however, there seems never to have been any real doubt during the council that what was under discussion was meant to be a matter of faith, namely, natural knowledge of God. Vatican II would certainly interpret Vatican I in this way nearly a hundred years later when *Dei Verbum*, its Constitution on Divine Revelation, introduced its quotation of Vatican I on natural knowledge with the words “the Sacred Synod confesses” (*confitetur*).²⁷ In this way Vatican II clarified that Vatican I’s teaching on certain natural knowledge of God is *de fide*, though the matter was hardly in any doubt at Vatican I itself.

The bishop of Orléans, Félix Dupanloup, for example, was in no doubt that this was what was at stake when, during the general congregation on April 7, only five days away before the vote on the whole constitution, he attacked the idea that the certainty of rational knowledge could be defined as revealed. When St. Paul spoke in Romans 1 of knowledge of God had from things God had made, Dupanloup thought it was not clear that either this knowledge or a knowledge that these things were created by God, was certain.²⁸ He was, however, very much in a minority, and his intervention

²⁵ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 49:654.

²⁶ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 53:329.

²⁷ DH, no. 4206.

²⁸ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 51:354–58.

served only to manifest that the consensus was the other way. I think it is fair to say that, for the other bishops, a clear perception of God's invisible nature, and of his eternal power and deity, which St. Paul said had left people without excuse for not honoring him, could be nothing less than certain. This leaves us with the question of how this natural certainty was understood more precisely by the Council, and the implications for theology today.

It is reasonably well known that, while *Dei Filius* defined the possibility of certain natural knowledge of God, it did not at the same time say anything about "demonstration."²⁹ That term did not even appear in the text which so exercised Dupanloup over certain knowledge. It had been included back in Kleutgen's first draft, though not in chapter 2 but in its corresponding first canon, which condemned those who denied that God "can be known with certainty and demonstrated" from the things he had made. In the meantime, it had disappeared, after the theologians decided to go for either one phrase or the other. When the revised text came to be circulated to the Council fathers, Bishop Henri Maret, who was dean of theology at the Sorbonne, proposed an amendment to add to chapter 2 the word "demonstrated," which was seemingly intended as clarificatory of what "certain knowledge" means. Though Maret, like his fellow countryman Dupanloup, was opposed to defining papal infallibility, his early sympathy for traditionalism had lessened, and their contributions to the debates on revelation came from different angles.³⁰

Replying on behalf of the deputation on April 4, the prince-bishop of Brixen, Vincent Gasser, conceded that "certain knowledge" and "demonstration" might seem to be equivalent up to a point. However, there was a difference, and he said that the deputation had opted for the "softer" rather than the "harder" terminology. This seems to suggest that "demonstration," as the tougher phrase, while including the meaning of certain knowledge, adds something extra, which toughens it up. It seems to me that this something extra involves certain knowledge taking the form of a conclusion to a rigorous philosophical argument. So while demonstration includes certain knowledge, the two are not quite the same thing. And so, Kleutgen, for example, in his manual published eleven years after the Council, characterized denial of certain knowledge as heretical, but denial of demonstrability as of some lower rank of error, say rash or proximate to faith at most.³¹ We

²⁹ Kerr, "Knowing God."

³⁰ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 51:262. On Maret's earlier sympathy for traditionalism, see Bernard Reardon, *Liberalism and Tradition: Aspects of Catholic Thought in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 186–89.

³¹ Josef Kleutgen, *De Deo Ipso* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1881), 98.

should note here that in no way does the fact that Vatican I's deputation on faith kept the term "demonstrated" out of the document mean that the Council rejected the possibility of demonstration. It simply means that the Council ended up not making demonstration part of its explicit doctrine, and no more than that. Just because a council comes not to speak about something does not necessarily mean it rejects it.

What then is the effect on the final text itself of speaking of certain knowledge instead of demonstration? It seems to me that this takes the focus of the text away from the formal activities of professional theologians and philosophers, and puts the full focus onto human beings in a general way. Theologians, including St. Thomas Aquinas, have known that people can come to be certain of God's existence from his creatures without expressing this knowledge in the syllogistic form of a strict demonstration, with explicit premises about not being able to go back to infinity in *per se* chains of causes, or whatever it might be.³² One can see an extension of this interest in how St. John Henry Newman, in his *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, completed in the same year as the Council closed, explored how human beings in fact often come to certainty in ways other than by following a strict philosophical demonstration.³³ And in today's *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, there is talk of "ways" of approaching God from creation, proofs of his existence in the sense of "'converging and convincing arguments,' which allow us to attain certainty about the truth."³⁴

That the text of Vatican I is in principle open to such a range of thinking about how we can come through natural revelation to be certain of God's existence is perhaps suggested by the range of thinking present at the Council itself. While Kleutgen was a devotee of Aquinas's five ways of proving God's existence,³⁵ many of the bishops would have been more familiar with the approach of René Descartes, especially what is known as the ontological argument. When Maret of the Sorbonne proposed the addition of demonstration to chapter 2, he also proposed an alternative, longer amendment, which said that certain knowledge and demonstration were achieved "through metaphysical, cosmological and moral arguments." It was easy for Gasser to see where Maret was coming from, thanks to the latter's speech in the general congregation back on March 28. Maret had said that the text, in affirming support for cosmological arguments, could

³² See, e.g., Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* I, ch. 3, and *Super Psalmos* 8.

³³ John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985).

³⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §31.

³⁵ Kleutgen, *De Deo Ipso*, 100–111.

be taken to be excluding metaphysical arguments which took their starting point from the content of the human mind. These Maret characterized as Augustinian, including St. Anselm among St. Augustine's followers.³⁶ Gasser countered Maret's proposed amendment with the reply that knowledge from creatures did not exclude a metaphysical argument, as one could just as well argue from the image impressed on the immortal human soul as one could from the traces present throughout all creation. He added that no one was going to condemn Anselm, whatever they thought of his ontological argument.³⁷ All this suggests that *Dei Filius* is in principle open to theologians, including theologians today, exploring a wide range of approaches to natural knowledge of God's existence.

But if *Dei Filius* is so open in general, what approaches does it not leave open for Catholic theology? From one of Gasser's responses to proposed amendments we learn that its emphasis on the certainty of natural knowledge arose partly in response to the French encyclopedists and to German critical philosophy and the limitations posited in their accounts of the scope of reason's speculative power.³⁸ In other words, it arose at least partly in response to different forms of rationalism. From the perspective of *Dei Filius*, then, to whatever extent a Catholic theologian might appropriate something of these philosophies, say from Kant, that can never go so far as a denial of certain natural knowledge. Moreover, one approach which admitted certain natural knowledge, but was in fact implicitly ruled out, is what is known as "ontologism," where natural knowledge of God arises only from an intuition of the divine being essential to the human mind. This had already been rejected by a decree of the Holy Office in 1861,³⁹ and despite a desire from some bishops at the Council for an explicit reiteration of this condemnation in chapter 2, the deputation left this more complicated matter for another day, which never arrived.⁴⁰

What took up a good deal of the Council's attention was the fact that the opening of chapter 2 and its canon 1 also ruled out what was known as "traditionalism."⁴¹ Indeed, in his initial presentation of the text to the

³⁶ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 51:167–69.

³⁷ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 51:276.

³⁸ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 51:274. He was replying to Gandolfi's proposed amendment, which introduced an element of mitigated traditionalism by reference to the context of natural reason in adult society (51:262).

³⁹ DH, no. 2841.

⁴⁰ See Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 51:273, for the proposed amendment of Bishop Pietro Rota of Guastalla; for Gasser's reply to, see 51:262.

⁴¹ See Reardon, *Liberalism and Tradition*.

Council, Archbishop János Simor of Hungary, who as an opponent of defining infallibility had ended up on the deputation “by a mistake,”⁴² related that the main target here was in fact traditionalism.⁴³ Traditionalism and its account of revelation may be understood as correlative to the fideism explored earlier in this symposium by Patrick Gorevan. This intentionally Catholic-friendly French and Belgian response to the rationalist rejection of any role for supernatural revelation and tradition in the name of human reason had already attracted a negative judgment from the magisterium. What had concerned the Roman magisterium from the 1830s onwards was any going to the opposite extreme of undermining human reason in the name of revelation and tradition, including the denial of the possibility of natural knowledge of God, which was being made in the name of a primitive supernatural revelation at the origin of humanity. But traditionalism came in a number of forms, from its basic emphasis on human reason as always situated within a communal and linguistic setting, through a general conclusion that it was activated by a primitive revelation made by God to Adam, to a particular denial that God’s existence could be known without such a supernatural revelation at the origin of humanity, then transmitted to subsequent generations. Louis Bautain and Augustin Bonnetty had both subscribed to theses presented to them, which, in contrast to radical traditionalism, included a thesis on the possibility of certain natural knowledge of God.⁴⁴ One view at the Council was that the matter had in that way been closed by Rome and was best not dragged up again by the Council.

Bishop Francesco Giuseppe Gandolfi of Città Vecchia, who seems to have been sympathetic to a milder form of traditionalism, was also concerned that no legitimate theological opinion be excluded by the Council.⁴⁵ When he expressed his regret at the text, the Dominican García y Gil responded spontaneously on behalf of the deputation with a clearer distinction between milder and more radical forms of traditionalism.⁴⁶ What was condemned in *Dei Filius* was not the milder view that there had been a primitive revelation, but rather the more radical idea that God could not be known with certainty without that supernatural revelation taking place. This position surely has implications for theology today. St. John Paul II’s encyclical *Fides et Ratio* recognized the importance of *Dei Filius*

⁴² Butler, *Vatican Council*, 147.

⁴³ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 51: 46–47.

⁴⁴ DH, nos. 2765, 2812; cf. no. 2751.

⁴⁵ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 51:119–22 (cf. 51:70).

⁴⁶ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 51:122–23.

for Catholic commitment to the power of natural reason as well as to supernatural faith.⁴⁷ To be sure it is relatively unusual for any theologian today to speculate about a revelation being made to the first human beings or indeed about anything pertaining to the first human beings. However, the Council can still be cited by those critical of theologies which, by way of a modern or postmodern perspective, underplay the reach of natural human reason. For example, Aidan Nichols, O.P., writes in his critique of John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory*: "And notably, in posing the question of God, Milbank cannot do justice to the affirmation found in the "Catholic reading" of Scripture . . . at the First Vatican Council that the divine existence is naturally knowable by human reason; like Hans Küng in *Does God Exist?* he could only maintain that, at any rate, trusting oneself to an ultimate mothering reality is the sole alternative to Nietzsche's nihilism."⁴⁸

After the constitution affirms the possibility of natural knowledge and so of natural revelation through creation, it immediately affirms God's revelation of himself and of his decrees "by another and supernatural way," quoting the opening verses of the Letter to the Hebrews, according to which God spoke through the prophets and then by his Son. I take this supernatural revelation to include God's revelation of himself as Trinity, and of his decrees regarding say the Incarnation, redemption, the Church and sacraments, and the Last Things. Here, and in the accompanying canons 2 and 3, the text has turned from traditionalism to focus more strongly against rationalism.

Chapter 2 also affirms at this point that this supernatural revelation is responsible for the fact that truths attainable in principle by human reason alone can also be known with ease, firm assurance, and no error mixed in, even in our present condition. While the text avoids theological speculation about the different conditions of human nature, it is clearly envisaged that human reason is to some extent weakened by the fall, such that it is in fact difficult for reason alone to manage what it can in principle achieve on its own. The influence of Aquinas on the text is evident: supernatural revelation helps weakened reason achieve with ease what otherwise would have been not impossible for it, but difficult.⁴⁹ It seems to me that here chapter 2 has passed on to something the Church holds and teaches which is not divinely revealed. This is confirmed by the fact that Vatican II, having confessed natural knowledge of God, again quotes Vatican I, but this time

⁴⁷ St. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1998), §52.

⁴⁸ Aidan Nichols, "Non tali auxilio": John Milbank's Suasion to Orthodoxy," *New Blackfriars* 73 (1992): 326–32, at 329.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] II-II, q. 2, a. 4.

says merely that the Church “teaches” (*docet*) that supernatural revelation makes it easier to know what we could in principle know by reason.⁵⁰

An important point which is immediately clarified is that this does not explain why supernatural revelation is “absolutely” necessary for us. This would seem to be because human reason alone can still grasp knowledge of God, though our present condition makes that difficult to some degree. Instead, the explanation of why supernatural revelation is absolutely necessary is that God, out of his infinite goodness, has ordered human beings to a supernatural end. In witness of this supernatural end 1 Corinthians 2:9 is quoted—“eye has not seen”—but it is expressed theologically in recognizably (though not exclusively) Thomist terminology as “supernatural.” The connection between this end and the knowledge required to attain it is also recognizably Thomist. The end to which God has ordered us is supernatural, and so a revelation that is supernatural is required for us to have the knowledge needed to reach that supernatural end.⁵¹

Gandolfi had another worry here, which he mentioned in his speech and which touches on current interests in theology. Gandolfi thought that, in saying God had of his goodness called us to a supernatural end, the text might be taken to imply the alternative possibility of a merely natural end for human beings in a state of what is called “pure nature.”⁵² Such a broadly Thomist reading of the text seems fair enough to me, and indeed explicit reference to a “natural beatitude” had appeared back in Franzelin’s draft.⁵³ That phrase had not appeared in Kleutgen’s draft,⁵⁴ possibly to avoid opinions legitimately debated among theologians. Thomists and others normally appealed to pure nature to safeguard the gratuitousness of our being ordered to a supernatural goal: the goal is a free gift because God could have done otherwise. Gandolfi’s problem, however, was that pure nature was only a theological opinion and the text seemed to rule out any position that sought to secure divine gratuitousness without appeal to it. His proposed amendment, however, which switched the emphasis to our needing revelation to live well, at the same time obscured the precise nature of his worry about Kleutgen’s text.⁵⁵ Gasser, in contrast to his response to Maret, only took into account the formula of Gandolfi’s proposed amendment, and so the concern behind it was never truly addressed by his

⁵⁰ DH, no. 4206.

⁵¹ See *ST I*, q. 1, a. 1.

⁵² Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 51:121–22.

⁵³ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 50:71.

⁵⁴ See Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 53:231.

⁵⁵ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 51:265.

response.⁵⁶ I call attention to this because of current interest in Henri de Lubac's position on pure nature from the middle of twentieth century and the wider debate it engendered.⁵⁷ It is interesting to note that, as far as I can see, de Lubac made no mention of the concerns expressed by Gandolfi at Vatican I.⁵⁸

The remainder of chapter 2 was an update of Trent on what we would now call Scripture and Tradition. It first links what has been said about supernatural revelation to what Trent's Decree on the Reception of the Sacred Books and Traditions had said about the presence of the "truth and discipline" of the Gospel in Scripture and Tradition.⁵⁹ So, if one wants to know where this supernatural revelation is present, it is specified by *Dei Filius* as the Church's "universal faith" that it is found in the written Scriptures and unwritten traditions coming from Christ and from the apostles by the Holy Spirit. While this presence of supernatural revelation is identified as a matter of faith, not all the matters touched on here could be identified as strictly *de fide*. While it may seem obvious that the divine inspiration of a book can be known only by divine revelation, it has by no means been directly revealed by God that the correct list of books is exemplified in a named historic version or translation of Scripture, such as the Vulgate, or that a specific Council, such as Trent, has given the correct list, or even that that particular Council was such as to have had authority to promulgate a definitive list. However, with its more generic heading of "holds and teaches," such matters are not determined explicitly in the text, but are left to theologians to ponder over.

What chapter 2 in fact does next is simply to make a succinct statement renewing Trent's decree, such that those books are to be received in their

⁵⁶ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 51:280. Granderath realizes that Gasser made some kind of mistake, but takes him to have supposed that Gandolfi's objection hinged on supernatural revelation rather than end (*Geschichte des Vatikanischen Konzils*, 2:435–36).

⁵⁷ See, e.g.: Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God according to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters*, 2nd ed. (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2010); Steven Long, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010); Bernard Mulcahy, *Aquinas's Notion of Pure Nature and the Christian Integralism of Henri de Lubac: Not Everything is Grace* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011); Jacob W. Wood, *To Stir a Restless Heart: Thomas Aquinas and Henri de Lubac on Nature, Grace, and the Desire for God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019).

⁵⁸ Henri de Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 2000), restricts himself to the general observation that the Council avoided whatever was simply an opinion of a theological school (272–73).

⁵⁹ DH, nos. 1501–5.

integrity as sacred and canonical which were listed by Trent and were contained in the ancient Vulgate. Having followed Trent thus far, the text now turns to more contemporary issues by adding an explanation of why the foregoing books are received by the Church as sacred and canonical. Whereas the earlier paragraphs of the chapter had made its positive doctrinal presentations with the errors of various “movements” of thought (such as traditionalism) in view, the concern here seems to have been more with the defective content of textbooks then in use in seminaries. The canonicity of biblical books was sometimes explained in terms of a mere approval of them by the Church subsequent to their human composition or with reference to the fact that they contained revelation with no error mixed in.⁶⁰ In response, *Dei Filius* taught that the biblical books were not canonical for such reasons but because they were inspired, that is, because they had been authored by God.

In this way Vatican I was more explicit about the inspiration of the texts themselves than Trent had been, as can be seen especially in canon 4 of chapter 2, which condemned those who denied the biblical texts were divinely inspired. The Council thus gave encouragement to theologians, including theologians today, to reflect not simply on the inspiration of the human authors, but on what it means to say that texts they authored are themselves inspired.⁶¹ Moreover, in view of more recent interest in the Church’s reception of the biblical books as canonical, it is useful to note that, for the Council, inspiration is something prior to canonicity and cannot be reduced to it. The Church recognizes the authority inherent in these texts and so is subject to them, rather than the Church seeing herself as conferring authority on them from above.

Chapter 2 then closes by renewing a further Tridentine Decree on the Manner of Interpreting Sacred Scripture. This disciplinary decree had laid down that no one should interpret Scripture on matters of faith and morals pertaining to the building up of Christian doctrine “contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers” of the Church or “contrary to the sense that Holy Mother Church has held and holds” (*tenuit et tenet*).⁶² I would not of course venture so anachronistic a view as that Trent

⁶⁰ See James Tunstead Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810: A Review and Critique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 50–58.

⁶¹ For a recent consideration of issues relating to inspiration and canonicity by a former member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, see Denis M. Farkasfalvy, *A Theology of the Christian Bible: Revelation—Inspiration—Canon* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018).

⁶² DH, no. 1507.

formulated *tenuit et tenet* in view of the broader theological meaning of the verb in use at Vatican I. However, the quotation of it in chapter 2 does seem of a piece with that later use, because any particular “sense” affirmed definitively by the Church of some portion of Scripture need not itself be divinely revealed. But what *Dei Filius* was in fact concerned to do was to give an interpretation of Trent’s decree that guarded against a minimalist interpretation of it, where someone might avoid a denial of dogma, but at the same time avoid a more positive engagement with the Church’s reading of Scripture.⁶³

Pius IV’s *Tridentine Profession of Faith* had already addressed this to some extent by placing immediately before acceptance of Trent’s negative prohibition a more positive acceptance of Scripture “according to the sense which Holy Mother Church has held and does hold, to whom it pertains to judge concerning the true sense and interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures.”⁶⁴ What Vatican I’s constitution did was to treat the issue at a doctrinal and not merely disciplinary level, thereby manifesting the doctrine at work implicitly in the prohibition.⁶⁵ It achieved this by teaching the need for positive commitment to ecclesial interpretation, while adding in the final version that the negative prohibition is a consequence of that positive commitment.

Putting together a positive formulation that did not seem to introduce a new law restricting the freedom of Catholic exegetes or set up the Church and the Fathers as two rival tribunals for the correct interpretation of Scripture had proved a challenge for the deputation.⁶⁶ There was therefore some disappointment among the bishops that its final draft, which contained only the new positive formula and not Trent’s negative one, spoke of the Church only and not also of the consensus of the Fathers, as Trent had done.⁶⁷ A number of bishops proposed amendments to insert such a mention of the Fathers in the positive formula.⁶⁸ In the end, their desire was satisfied by the appending of the old negative prohibition, with its mention of the Fathers, to the positive formulation.

With that declaration, the decree then passes on to chapter 3, from the topic of revelation to the correlative topic of faith. N-V

⁶³ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 51:286–87.

⁶⁴ DH, no. 1863.

⁶⁵ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 51:286.

⁶⁶ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 51:267.

⁶⁷ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 51:34.

⁶⁸ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 51:266–67.