

***Dei Filius* III: On Faith**

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The First Vatican council offers a straightforward, traditional, some might say perfunctory account of faith in its short chapter dedicated to the issue. Were it not for the particular stage in the history of thought out of which the Council emerged, one would be tempted to say that the chapter on faith is an exercise in Scholastic theology, recognizable to those who are familiar with the treatment of the same in many of the Scholastic doctors, especially Aquinas. However, given the movement of thought in the nineteenth century, especially the emergence and predominance of certain philosophical views about human nature and the self, the chapter on faith not only (re)articulates a highly traditional account of the nature of faith but also envisages an account of man without which such an account of faith would be impossible.¹

In this essay, I propose to do two things. Firstly, I will set out Aquinas's account of faith and connect it with the Council's account of the same. Secondly, I will show that this account of faith is incompatible with modern accounts of man which present him as a disunified and disengaged self. Having done that I will conclude that in order to honor the Council's account of faith, we need to return to a pre-modern view of man in which he is seen in his engaged unity.

¹ For the historical background see Roger Aubert, "La Constitution *Dei Filius* du concile du Vatican," in *De Doctrina Concilii Vaticani Primi* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1969), 46–66. This is a portion of Aubert's larger study, *Le problème de l'acte de foi* (Louvain: Warny, 1945).

On Faith

Chapter 3 of *Dei Filius* is devoted to faith. Therein the Council document affirms a number of traditional tenets pertaining to faith that can be seen defended in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas; indeed, one might argue that the text on faith is an engagement with and refinement of Aquinas's thought on the same.²

Aquinas holds that faith is a particular habit of mind by which we are disposed to believe the things of God because they are from God. As we shall see, this habit of mind has God for its object, in which case it cannot be developed in us by natural reason or practice, but comes as a gift, a grace from God. Thus, the one who has faith is already in a relationship with God, since, in accepting the gift of faith from God, the faithful is not resistant to God. Faith is the beginning of the spiritual life, whereby the truth about what is revealed is accepted by the faithful and offers a glimpse of the vision of God that will be enjoyed by the blessed.³

For Thomas, the formal object of faith is the first truth—God in himself—whereas its material objects are those things which pertain to God.⁴ The reason why God, the first truth, is the object of faith, is because formally speaking faith assents to something only because it has been revealed by God. Hence, the divine truth is the object on which the assent of faith is based. The other things of faith come under its assent because they are related to God in some way.⁵

² This should be no surprise, as the authors of the text in question were Johann Baptist Franzelin and Joseph Kleutgen, both prominent in the revival of Scholastic and particularly Thomist thought in the nineteenth century. Kleutgen in particular is notable for his influence on Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, which put in place the neo-Thomist revival of the twentieth century. For details see chapter 10 of Gerald McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1977), and Aubert, "La Constitution *Dei Filius*," 46–47, 61–62.

³ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] II-II, q. 4, a. 1: "Faith is a habit of mind by which eternal life begins in us, making the intellect assent to what is not apparent." See also; *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 2: "Hence, in order that man be ordered to the good of eternal life, there must be a certain beginning of it in him to whom it is promised. Eternal life consists in the full knowledge of God, as is clear from John 17:3. Hence, there must be some beginning of this supernatural knowledge in us; and this is through faith, which by the infusion of light holds what exceeds natural knowledge." Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.

⁴ See: Aquinas, ST II-IIa, q. 1, a. 1, *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 8.

⁵ See ST II-II, q. 1, a. 1: Concerning faith, if we consider its formal object, that is nothing other than the first truth; for the faith about which we are speaking assents to

As the object of faith, this first truth is not an object of vision, for we do not have a direct and immediate intuition of God. Rather, faith's object is unseen (Heb 11:1). As something assented to but unseen, the intellect is not compelled by the certainty of what is seen, as in normal epistemic circumstances. Hence, there is required an act of the will by which the assent is willed rather than drawn by the natural light of the intellect itself.⁶ The act of faith then is a willed assent to those things about God which are not seen by the natural light of human reason. This assent is accompanied by certainty given that it is the first truth which moves the will to command the intellect to assent.⁷ The certitude of faith then does not lie in the intellect's being compelled by the evidence, but in the will's attachment to God as the good itself.⁸

On the basis of the foregoing, there are three different modes by which the object of faith can be considered: (1) believing God (*credere Deo*); (2) belief in God (*credere Deum*); and (3) believing in God (*credere in Deum*). These three components are coordinated with the intellectual and volitional components of the act of faith. On the side of the intellect there is the object (God) considered both formally and materially. Formally considered this involves (1) believing God when he reveals something for us to believe; materially considered this involves (2) belief in God or belief that God exists. On the side of the will, the intellect is willed to assent to the object of faith, and this because it refers that object to an end which is desired; this volitional component involves (3) believing in God as such a desirable end.⁹ The object of faith then relates to both the intellect and the will. As related to the intellect it falls under the nature of the true, regarding the existence of God and the trustworthiness of what God has

nothing unless it is revealed by God. Thus, faith depends on the divine truth as a kind of medium. . . . Other things do not fall under the assent of faith unless they have some order to God, for example, that man is aided toward enjoying God through certain effects of divinity. And even here the object of faith is in a way the first truth insofar as nothing falls under faith unless in relation to God."

⁶ See *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 4: "In another way the intellect assents to something not because it is sufficiently moved by its proper object, but through a certain choice voluntarily leaning on one side more than the other. And if this follows with doubt and fear of the other side, it will be opinion; if however it follows with certitude and without any fear, it will be faith."

⁷ See *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 1.

⁸ *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 2.

⁹ See *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2.

revealed; as related to the will it falls under the nature of the good, regarding an end that is desired.¹⁰

With the foregoing in mind, there is some justification for the following scriptural definition of faith: the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things unseen (Heb 11:1).¹¹ The object of faith is unseen and believed in as an end under the aspect of the good. If the object of faith believed in as an end is unseen, then it is not possessed, but hoped for, in which case faith provides the substance of such things. For, the hope for God, who is not yet seen, is contained primordially in faith, which hope is thereby substantiated. Furthermore, insofar as faith disposes the intellect to believe the truths about God that have been revealed, faith is the evidence of things unseen.¹²

On this account, faith is not blind, nor is it wholly independent of reason; rather, reason can prepare or dispose the individual for faith. This can occur in three ways: (1) by establishing the preambles of faith, such as the existence and nature of God; (2) by providing creaturely similitudes by which to understand the truths of the faith, such as the psychological model for the Trinity; and (3) by showing that doctrines contrary to the faith are either false or not necessary, such as the eternity of the world.¹³ In all these cases, faith builds upon reason and does not eradicate it.

¹⁰ See *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 1: "The act of faith then is to believe, which is an act of the intellect determined to one [object] from the command of the will. Thus the act of faith has an order to the object of the will, which is the good and an end, and to the object of the intellect, which is the true."

¹¹ See also *De Filius* [DF] III, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2, *Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman Tanner (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 804–811, at 807–8. All English translations of DF III are taken from Tanner.

¹² See *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 1.

¹³ See: Aquinas, *In I Boethium de Trinitate*, q. 2, corp. 3 ("In *sacra doctrina*, we can make a threefold use of philosophy. First, for demonstrating the preambles of faith, which are the things necessary to know in faith, such as those things concerning God that can be demonstrated by natural reason, e.g. that God exists, that God is one, etc., or what can be proved about God and creatures and which faith presupposes. Secondly, for clarifying by creaturely likenesses those things which are of faith, as Augustine in the *De Trinitate* uses multiple likenesses drawn from the teachings of the philosophers to manifest the Trinity. Thirdly, for resisting those things that are said contrary to faith, whether by showing such things to be false, or showing that they are not necessary"); *ST* I, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1: ("That God exists and other such things about God that can be known by natural reason, as said in Romans 1, are not articles of faith, but preambles to the articles. Thus, faith presupposes natural knowledge, just as grace presupposes nature and the perfection the perfectible"); II-II, q. 2, a. 10, ad 2 ("Demonstrative reasons adduced for those things of faith are preambles to the articles [of faith]").

Given what we have seen, there is clearly a co-ordination of intellect and will in the act of faith such that, if intellect and will are in disharmony, it will be impossible to make the assent of faith. Let us consider an example offered by John Jenkins to help us think our way into this matter. Our will can be misinformed by various vices, and given this malformation we are not inclined to believe the truth when we hear it. Consider a smoker so addicted to his vice that, despite the overwhelming scientific evidence showing the negative health outcomes of smoking, he refuses to believe or indeed suspends the assent of the intellect to that or any truth that undermines his smoking. Accordingly, the smoker is disinclined to believe a set of truths precisely because his will is bent upon a particular vice which such truths oppose.¹⁴ As a result, the smoker neither believes the truths about smoking nor has his will formed in such a way that, even if he did believe such truths, his character would change so that he would stop smoking.

Similarly in divine matters, an individual can be such that he is not inclined to believe the truth when it is revealed. This may be because he may be ignorant of truths about God naturally knowable by human reason, so that when such truths are revealed they are dismissed. Or it may be because, although he recognizes truths as coming from God, he is in such a state in life that he would have to change dramatically were he to accept the truths. In either case, God is not recognized as the truth or the good itself.

Consider by contrast someone not so disinclined to believe. The will of such an individual does not restrict the intellect's assent to faith, but in fact encourages it to assent to one's true good. Given the subject's dispositions, he is moved to assent to the truths that God has revealed about himself. There are all sorts of dispositions that a subject may have in being so inclined to assent, such as being in possession of a solid proof of God and his attributes. Given the consistency of the latter with what God has revealed along with the subject's recognition of God as his true good, the individual assents more readily to the truths of faith.¹⁵ But things need not be so technical. What matters for the will in moving the intellect to assent to faith is that God is seen as the true good in which man's heart can rest. In other words, the individual falls in love with God as the ultimate good in whom his perfection consists, and like a lover with his beloved, he is disposed to accept as true what his beloved reveals to him.

¹⁴ John Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 208–9.

¹⁵ *In III sent.*, d. 24, q. 1, a. 3, qc. 3: "Reason that is led by faith is not made to see what is believed, and therefore the difficulty of the work [of faith] is not diminished, so far as it is in itself; but it makes the will more prompt to believe."

Demonstrative proof of the philosophical tenets of classical theism can help irrigate the soil of faith and direct the will to God as the ultimate good; but so too can an appreciation of the goodness of God in the feeling of his mercy in forgiveness of sin, in the blessing of a happy life, spouse, offspring, in the presence of God in prayer and particularly the sacraments. This account of faith defended by Aquinas is unthinkable within the philosophical outlooks that were prevalent at the time of the First Vatican Council.

One of the central concerns of the modern philosophical project has been that of the self. The genesis of this concern can be traced back to the influence of late medieval nominalism and the closing off of the world from the realm of ideas. Yet, the single most significant contributor in turning philosophical attention inward on the self was René Descartes.

As is well known, Descartes sought to cut through the dry and pejoratively titled “scholastic” debates in philosophy in order to place it on a firm foundation akin to that enjoyed by mathematics.¹⁶ In this respect he sought out some indubitable foundation on which to build knowledge. And as even many non-philosophers are aware, that foundation was the *cogito*.¹⁷ The subject of the *cogito* knows that he exists, for were he not to exist, he could not be such a subject. That being the case, the primary truth of which I can be aware is my own individual being; and this independent of any truths I can affirm about the world, objects, or even my body. I am a *res cogitans*, a thinking thing, and whatever else I am, I am primarily that.¹⁸

What presents itself now with some urgency is how to get from the

¹⁶ See discourses I and II in René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. F. E. Sutcliffe (London: Penguin, 1968). Note in particular what he says in discourse II: “As far as all the opinions I had accepted hitherto were concerned, I could not do better than undertake once and for all to be rid of them in order to replace them afterwards either by better ones, or even by the same, once I had adjusted them by the plumb-line of reason” (p. 37). Note what he says about the Scholastics in discourse VI: “I have never noticed that, by the method of disputation practised in the schools, any truth has been discovered of which one was ignorant before” (p. 84); “[The Scholastics] are like the ivy which does not seek to climb higher than the trees which support it. . . . Their fashion of philosophising is most convenient for those who have only mediocre minds; for the obscurity of the distinctions and principles which they use enables them to speak about all things as boldly as if they really knew them. . . . They seem to me like a blind man who, in order to fight a person who can see, without disadvantage, brings him into the depths of a very dark cellar” (p. 85).

¹⁷ See meditation II in René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. John Cottingham in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 16–17.

¹⁸ Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 18 (meditation II).

mind to the world. Our knowledge of the world has been put in serious doubt, so a no-less-serious engagement with that doubt must be made. Effectively, the bridge that we use to cross the chasm opened between mind and world must be strong enough to quell the doubt that opened the chasm in the first place. Whilst his successors may not have been as keen to follow him in his conclusions, those who came after Descartes certainly adopted his initial starting point, to the effect that our grasp on the world is in jeopardy, and we need to construct a bridge of such reliability that the skeptical problem cannot even arise.¹⁹

What this outlook engendered was the conviction that, for knowledge to be worthy of the name, it must be apodictically certain, for only such knowledge could put to rest the skeptical problems that emerge once the self is disengaged from the world. Consequently, post-Cartesian thinkers began to build up epistemological theories about how mind and world interact, with the primary concern being to establish such a rigid link between the two that to deny the deliverances of our epistemic faculties would be to refuse to think.

This movement came to its pinnacle in the thought of Immanuel Kant, who in the *Critique of Pure Reason* sought to establish those conditions without which it would be impossible to know. On Kant's view, the only way that speculative reason can establish anything with apodictic certainty is if the content of knowledge is suffused by the formal structures of the a priori subject. Thus, the content of our experience is formally structured by space and time, and the space-time manifold is in turn thought through by the categories of the understanding. All such thought is a thought for a subject and so brought under the unifying conditions of the subject.²⁰ Failure to think about the world in this way is not simply to think falsely, but is a failure to think. Accordingly, one can have apodictic knowledge of the world only if what is signified by the term "world" is what comes into conformity with the a priori structures of the mind.

¹⁹ See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 159: "Descartes' disengaged subject, like his procedural notion of rationality, is not just an idiosyncratic conception. For all the challenges and disagreements to his dualism in modern thought, with the central idea of disengagement he was articulating one of the most important developments of the modern era."

²⁰ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (Hampshire: Palgrave, 1929), "Transcendental Aesthetic" (for the a priori forms of intuition) and "Transcendental Analytic," bk. 1, ch. 1 (for the metaphysical deduction of the a priori categories of understanding), and ch. 2 (for the transcendental deduction of the categories, and thereby the necessity of their application in thought).

On this Kantian account, historical knowledge of contingent facts is impossible. This is because, in order to be known, such contingent facts must come under the a priori structuring of the mind, and thereby lose their contingency. Whatever can be known of contingent facts can be only what is universal and necessary. Accordingly, the historical facts that disclose to us various matters pertaining to faith, such as Christ's resurrection as a promise of our own, cannot be known. Hence, the speculative intellect can offer no credibility for faith. Indeed, for Kant, faith cannot pertain to knowledge; for, as he famously claims, he denies knowledge in order to make room for faith.²¹ Consequently, the speculative intellect cannot have a role to play in faith.

Nevertheless, Kant does recognize that there can be a rational affirmation to faith—it is not mere opinion—and this comes by way of practical reason. Kant believes that, if we are morally bound as rational agents to pursue a certain end, then that end must at least be possible, otherwise we cannot be rationally bound to pursue it. But according to Kant we are morally bound to will the highest good (and all that pertains to it), in which case the highest good (and all that pertains to it) must be attainable. But this would not be so were the highest good (and all that pertains to it) not to exist.²² We can thus be convicted by moral faith according to Kant insofar as the object of practical reason commands our assent.

Notice here that, for Kant, the certitude of the act of faith is not that of the will's adhesion to God as the true good. Rather, the certitude is an intellectual certitude, such that the practical intellect is compelled to believe lest it forfeit the possibility of practical reason as such. Hence, unless one assents to God as the highest good, one cannot reason practically. Faith is thereby a necessary condition for practical reason. This faith is quite different from that of Aquinas. For him, the faithful assent to the truths revealed in historical facts not because it would be impossible to think without thereby assenting, but because of the authority of the One who reveals them. Such an outlook is impossible in a post-Kantian philosophical climate. Accordingly, Catholic thinkers typically went in one of two directions when dealing with the post-Kantian challenge to faith.

On the one hand, there were those who looked inward for an interior

²¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B-xxx. In this regard it should be noted that at the end of the *Critique*, A822/B850, Kant takes faith or belief (*Glaube*), in contrast to knowledge, to be subjectively sufficient but objectively insufficient.

²² See Allen Wood, "Rational Theology, Moral Faith, and Religion," in *Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 401–3, for more details on this argumentation.

illumination of faith, whereby faith is impressed upon the soul by the inner light of God. This is reminiscent of the Augustinian move from outer experience to internal illumination. This was the position of certain traditionalists who espoused a kind of fideism whereby the truths of the faith proclaimed by the Church excite one's interior sense of faith and stimulate assent. There can be no rational demonstration then of the preambles of faith, for such does not excite the interior divine sense; only the truth of the faith proclaimed by the Catholic Church can do so.²³

On the other hand, there were some who sought to think through the Kantian challenge to faith on more rationalistic grounds and to come out the other end with an affirmation of faith by reason that is apodictically certain. George Hermes maintained that Kant's critical idealism did indeed undermine the traditional Scholastic theology of Aquinas and others, but that one could salvage the act of faith by means of Kantian philosophy. This act of faith was not that of speculative reason, whose pretensions for metaphysical speculation Kant had undermined; rather, it was a moral faith grounded in practical reason. As we have seen above, for Kant, practical reason can be reasonable only when the demands of such reason are possible to be met. Hermes held that practical reason will command our assent to something, even when speculative reason does not render it absolutely necessary. Speculative reason may force us to accept something as true on pain of relinquishing thought altogether; in such cases assent is necessary, not voluntary. Practical reason by contrast can oblige us to accept something as true not because one cannot withhold assent, but because one is morally obliged to assent for the purposes of the categorical imperative. With these distinctions in place, Hermes held that historical truths pertain to practical reason, to which we are obliged to assent, in which case we are convicted of a moral, but not a speculative faith.²⁴

In a similar fashion, Anton Günther believed that we can proceed in a geometric fashion in deducing truth after truth, and this applies not only to philosophical truths but also to theological ones, wherein we can deploy Hegelian concepts pertaining to the dialectic of self-positing spirit and thereby deduce independently of revelation, the Trinity, the Incarnation, and man's redemption. For both Hermes and Günther, the truths of faith

²³ For details see ch. 2 of McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism*; note in particular the position of Louis Bautain on (46–56). For details of Bautain's fideism and the development of his position to something more acceptable to Rome, see Aubert, *Le problème*, 112–22.

²⁴ For details, see McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism*, 59–67, and Aubert, *Le problème*, 103–12.

must impress themselves upon us with such certainty that to deny them would not only be unreasonable, but would be a failure to reason.²⁵

One can see between the positions of the inward-looking fideists and the outward-looking rationalists a preponderance for extremes that the position of Aquinas held in a delicate balance. On the one hand, the fideist view tends towards envisaging acceptance of the truths of faith as a wholly internal occurrence guided by an intuitive sense of God's revelation as found within the Catholic Church. There is thus a convicting trust in that revelation with no external impression of reason, no establishing of the preambles of faith, to guide the believer. By contrast, the rationalist view tends toward the need for the truths of faith to impose themselves extrinsically upon the believer, so that the believer is compelled to accept them on pain of being irrational; the free response essential to the willed assent of faith is thereby denied. In both cases, something essential to the Thomistic position, whether that be the intellect's acceptance of the truth or the will's assent to the good, is denied. The Church sought to navigate between the two extremes in the nineteenth century, and we see the final destination of that navigation and the culmination of these attempts in the chapter on faith in *De Filius*.

Dei Filius chapter 3 is relatively short. It begins with the affirmation that we are drawn to give faith to God because he is the primary truth. The affirmation of faith is the beginning of salvation, for faith is a supernatural virtue (a habit of the mind) by which we are moved to believe in something because it is God, the first truth, who has revealed it.²⁶ This faith does not go against reason, but it is brought into accord with reason by external divine acts which are accessible to reason, such as miracles and prophecies. These external acts function as signs of God's revelation and serve to confirm what God has revealed. The assent of faith requires the illumination of the Holy Spirit; and true obedience is given to God when a man yields to the gift of faith. Insofar as faith is an assent, it assents to things that are to be believed, and these are what have been revealed in Scripture and the teachings of the Church.²⁷

²⁵ See ch. 4 in McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism*.

²⁶ This is in accord with the definition of faith given at the Council of Trent, session 6, ch. 6: "They are disposed to justice when excited and assisted by divine grace, conceiving faith through hearing, they are moved freely toward God, believing those things to be true that have been divinely revealed and promised [Disponuntur autem ad ipsam justitiam dum excitati divina gratia et adjuti, fidem ex auditu concipientes, libere moventur in Deum, credentes vera esse quae divinitus revelata et promissa sunt]" (DH, no. 1526).

²⁷ *DF* III, at pp. 807–8.

Given the foregoing, it is impossible to be pleasing to God without faith. This is because one who is without faith in some way does not believe the things that God has revealed (and thereby doubts God as the first truth) or he does not yield to the Holy Spirit—and thereby resists the grace that the Spirit offers; in both cases, such a man is resistant to God. Accordingly, without faith, a man cannot achieve justification or eternal life.

The Council goes on in *Dei Filius* III to proclaim that the Son founded the Catholic Church to ensure perseverance in faith, and that there are various signs of credibility of the Church, including her propagation, holiness, goodness, unity, and stability. For the purposes of this paper, we need not consider these.

Added to this account of faith are several canons that target both the rationalist and fideist positions that undermine the traditional Thomist position. Canons 2 and 5 target the rationalist view that faith can be arrived at through some form of natural reasoning, and not through a willed assent to God the first truth.²⁸ Canons 3 and 4 target the fideist position that faith relies on an internal occurrence and cannot be moved by external signs, not even miracles.²⁹

These canons are consistent with the account of faith articulated in the chapter and in turn with the traditional Thomistic account. What they, along with the chapter, emphasize is that there is both an intellectual and a volitional component to faith, so that the act of faith involves a balancing between external realities that reveal some truth to the intellect, on the one hand, and the internal reality of having one's will be drawn to God as the true good, on the other, and thereby believing the truths that have been revealed. Both the rationalists and the fideists overemphasize either of these dichotomies, such that what Thomas was able to articulate and

²⁸ *DF* III, can. 2 ("If anyone says that divine faith is not to be distinguished from natural knowledge about God and moral matters, and consequently that for divine faith it is not required that revealed truth should be believed because of the authority of God who reveals it: let him be anathema" [p. 810]); can. 5 ("If anyone says that the assent to Christian faith is not free, but is necessarily produced by arguments of human reason; or that the grace of God is necessary only for living faith which works by charity: let him be anathema" [p. 810]).

²⁹ *DF* III, can. 3 ("If anyone says that divine revelation cannot be made credible by external signs, and that therefore men and women ought to be moved to faith only by each one's internal experience or private inspiration: let him be anathema" [p. 810]); can. 4 ("If anyone says that all miracles are impossible, and that therefore all reports of them, even those contained in Sacred Scripture, are to be set aside as fables or myths; or that miracles can never be known with certainty, nor can the divine origin of the Christian religion be proved from them: let him be anathema" [p. 810]).

defend in a balanced way they articulate in an unbalanced way, attributing either too much to human reason, or too little. The account of faith then articulated in *Dei Filius* is a move away from modern outlooks that emerged only in response to post-Cartesian philosophical concerns toward a pre-modern account that can be found in the work of Aquinas. In the next section I shall argue that what drives the modern account of faith is not just an epistemic situation found in the writings of Descartes and his successors, but a view of the self that is fundamentally at odds with what Thomas, and arguably Catholics, believe.

The Modern Self

The Cartesian self is the foundation of the modern self. On that account, I lead an inner disengaged life; as a self, I confront a world that is represented to me, whose veracity is judged by me. My worldhood is not that of extended things within the world, but of a private disengaged space against which the world pushes. Experience no longer is the mode by which I enjoy being amongst things and in which the world is disclosed to me, but the experience itself is an object from which I am disengaged and which impresses the world upon me. Thinking then is veridical when the ideas it forms against the tribunal of experience are clear and distinct. Should I think of things without clarity and distinctness and yet affirm them to be true, my will has interfered and, lacking the requisite clarity and distinctness, affirmed what does not stand to me as an object clear and distinct. A willed assent to things wherein the certainty of such an assent is attributable to the will is the path to falsehood.³⁰

The epistemic situation of the loss of the world turns upon a presupposed commitment to a self as disengaged from the world. So the epistemic situation that we find in modern philosophy, wherein the key question is adjudicating on the veracity of our knowledge, is pressing only when a detached and disengaged Cartesian self is presupposed. The differing epistemological trends in modern philosophy all share the

³⁰ Note what Descartes says in meditation IV of the *Meditations*: "So what then is the source of my mistakes? It must be simply this: the scope of my will is wider than that of the intellect; but instead of restricting it within the same limits, I extend its use to matters which I do not understand. Since the will is indifferent in such cases, it easily turns aside from what is true and good, and this is the source of my error and sin" (pp. 40–41).

peculiar Cartesian view of the self as a privatized subject of experience that confronts the world.³¹

Furthermore, the detached self is not attuned to the recognition of what is true. This is because, for Descartes, there is common representational content between a true and a false thought, in which case it is an urgent matter as to how to distinguish between the two. The driving force of this outlook is the neutrality that the detached intellect has with regard to mental content. The self is a receptacle for such content, but is not so constituted that that content must be of a certain kind, and hence what informs that receptacle may be objective features of the world, or it may be the machinations of an evil demon, or a scientist controlling a brain in a vat, or any number of counterfactual scenarios designed to bring forth demon skepticism with some urgency.

Insofar as the Cartesian self receives content but does not seek it out, there is no intentionality to thought. This is because, on the Cartesian account, acts of thought do not systematically differ in accord with that about which they are acts. An act of thought about some false content is the same act of thought about some true content; what differs is not the act, but the content. So the act is not intentionally directed upon something in the world in the case of having a true thought, as opposed to being directed upon some illusory experience in a false thought. That being the case, the Cartesian self is not an engaged self, but as we have been stressing, a disengaged one.

With this detached self, faith must be either something imposed extrinsically, as with the rationalists, or the result of an inner movement and recognition of God, as with the fideists. But in no way can faith be a willed assent to the truths that God has revealed, for neither do these impress themselves extrinsically nor are they the sole result of an inner intuition, and hence the need for a *willed* assent. Not only that, but given the lack of any natural finality of the intellect to rest in the true, God's authority and status as the first truth and one's beloved are not enough for assenting to what God reveals; for, the same act of thought could have as its content what is false just as easily as what is true. Hence there is a need to secure the content of faith either in an extrinsic impression of truth on the intellect or in an interior intuition.

Whilst I have been stressing the Cartesian subject here and his

³¹ This is the case even for David Hume, who, failing to have an experience of such a self, rejects the existence thereof rather than entertain that the self could be something other than a privatized enduring subject of experience, see Hume (see bk. 1, pt. 4, ch. 6, of *A Treatise of Human Nature* [London: Everyman, 2003]).

detachment from reality, it was this subject that drove the philosophical tendencies of modern thought. All serious post-Cartesian philosophers, especially those with whom we are familiar as the representatives of modern thought, such as Locke, Hume, and Kant, took seriously the Cartesian subject's detachment from reality and sought to explain how to regain reality having presupposed its loss to the subject in the first place. So, whilst not all modern philosophers were Cartesians, they were certainly *post*-Cartesian's insofar as they philosophized in a world in which the Cartesian self and the problems it engendered came to dominate the philosophical scene. This was the case not only for thinkers like Locke, Hume, and Kant, but also for the Catholic thinkers who sought to offer respectability to faith in a post-Cartesian world. Thus, as we have seen, both the fideists and the rationalists sought to root faith either in the internal movements of a detached self or on the inescapable impressions of the truths of faith upon the self. In both cases, it is the self's detachment that renders internal movement or external impression plausible in giving an account of faith.

By contrast, a pre-modern thinker like Aquinas was not in general challenged by the urgency of the mind–world relation as it appears in Descartes and post-Cartesian thinkers. This is because he had his own philosophical anthropology on the basis of which the modern mind–world problem could not emerge.

For Thomas, a person is not a privatized self, a mind, intimately and primarily aware of the internal and only secondarily and at a distance aware of the external world. Rather, the person is a rational substance whose form of life is the rational life.³² That being the case, the person is primarily within the world and aware of the goings on in the world; only secondarily and reflectively is the person aware of what goes on in his thinking.³³ Thought, on this account, is a power in which the rational animal can engage, and it is a power not primarily turned on itself, but turned on

³² See Aquinas, *In II de anima*, lecs. 1–2; *ST I*, q. 75 (note in particular Aquinas's denial in a. 4 that man is to be identified with his soul).

³³ See: *ST I*, q. 89, a. 2 (“For as long as the soul is united to the body, it understands by turning to the phantasms. Thus, it cannot understand itself unless it is made intelligent in act through species abstracted from phantasms, and thus through the same act it understands itself”); *Summa contra gentiles* II, ch. 49 (“As the intellect understands a thing so too it understands its own understanding”); *In II de anima*, lec. 6, no. 4 (“It is to be noted that the possible intellect is in potency in the order of intelligibles; it is actuated through abstraction of form from the phantasm. Nothing then is known unless it is in act; hence the possible intellect knows itself through intelligible species”).

things, on substances. Hence, the being of the person is being in the world, and so the person does not look out from an internal space at the world.

Experience then is not an object for the subject, but the way in which objects are disclosed to the subject. Access to the world is not a matter of stepping back from experience within a disengaged mental space and taking a good hard look. Rather, the rational animal has a particular mode of access to the world in which, were his powers of intellect and will not utilized in accessing it, the world would not be accessed. Hence, contribution from our rational faculties is a necessary enabling condition for our knowledge of things. But if this is the case, then the conceptual content that emerges in our engagement with things does not occlude or make subjective the things to which we have access. Rather, conceptual content is how we have access to the world. It is the individual man with all his rational powers that has knowledge of things.

Accordingly, thinking is not involved in a polarity of some truth impinging itself extrinsically or the subject becoming convinced internally of some private experience. Rather, insofar as the subject is a unified whole existing in the world, his intellect is attuned to truth, and so can rest in the truth once revealed. A willed assent does not reflect the contributions of a confused subject who wishes something to be true for which he has no good reason to think it true. Rather, a willed assent involves both the intellect and will working in cooperation so that the truth assented to is known to be reasonable and revealed by good authority and draws our will to it as the good. Such willed assent crucial to the act of faith can occur only when the self is an engaged self in the world dealing with objects in an intelligent manner, not disengaged within a space of reasons that can only be either breached from without or moved from within. Why is this the case?

For a disengaged self, thoughts differ not *qua* acts, but *qua* contents. Hence, an act of faith is no different *qua* act from one of knowledge. That being the case, what differentiates faith from knowledge is the content involved. By contrast, on Aquinas's account, acts of thought differ not in terms of their contents, but *qua* act. This is precisely because there is an engaged intentionality to thought. Thinking on this account does not involve occupying a detached space and looking out; rather, thinking involves conforming one's thought to that about which it is a thought. In the case of knowledge, this is rather straightforward and involves affirming that the world is thus and so because it is indeed thus and so. In the case of faith, what is being thought about is God, the first truth and final end. Hence, both the intellect and the will are engaged to affirm what is revealed. The difference of faith from knowledge is that the former affirms

something to be thus and so not *because* it is thus and so (whether extrinsically compelled or internally convinced), but *because* God has revealed it as thus and so and he is our beloved; this amounts to a different act of thought than in the knowledge case. Post-Cartesian views of the self cannot honor this outlook, because thinking for a post-Cartesian self is the same act as that of believing; only its content differs. The pressing question then is how to adjudicate the veracity of such thoughts, and in the case of faith how to account for the certainty thereof. Given that a willed assent is ruled out, such certainty can come only from rational compulsion (Hermes, Günther, et al.) or inner intuition (fideism). Hence, once one abandons the Thomistic self and embraces the Cartesian self, one is led down the path of a faith that is irreconcilable with what was defined in *Dei Filius*.

Conclusion

In the foregoing we have considered the nature of faith as articulated by Aquinas and defended by the First Vatican Council. We have noted that what drove the post-Cartesian accounts of faith was a view of the self that was detached, and so had to be moved by either extrinsic impressions or internal conviction. Neither were faithful to the traditional Catholic account of faith, and both were denied at the Council wherein the traditional account was upheld. It is not a mere historical circumstance that the anthropologies adopted by Aquinas and the post-Cartesian thinkers coincide with their differing accounts of faith. Rather, as we have seen, the act of faith takes on the character of a willed assent when the self, the one who is faithful, is considered as a rational substance engaged in the world; by contrast, the act of faith loses the character of a willed assent when the self is disengaged.

All of this carries with it a salutary lesson for our reading of the Council today. In contemporary popular discourse, the Cartesian self is often taken to be the most self-evident of views, with many taking their personal identity to be that of some kind of mental identity independent from bodily considerations. Indeed, in a technologically driven age where human engagement with the world and each other is minimized to the extreme, the self can seem not only disengaged, but entirely isolated, such that it is nothing more than a private subject. This is especially the case in the age of digital technology wherein a subject's private world can be represented within the digital sphere: rather than having the outside enter the inside of the mind, as Descartes and those who came after him thought, we are now in a situation where the inside is being represented outside through the

various digital platforms. Hence, thinking now is even more detached than was the initial Cartesian self: the latter was still answerable to the clarity and distinctness of objectivity. And within the digital realm, the private self seeks to transform the world in his own image. At our point in history, it does not matter what thought looks like; as long as there is thought, it can be represented in some digital media. It would not be overstating things to say that the Cartesian self predominates in popular thinking.

If the Cartesian self predominates, then the concomitant constraint on how to envisage faith must go with it: faith is either (1) extrinsically imposed or (2) the result of an internal movement. Hence, faith is either absolutely certain in light of extrinsic conditions or mere personal opinion. By and large, it is the second option that is preferred today, whereby faith is seen as a sincerely held yet private belief. In more contentious situations, faith is seen by many popular new atheists as belief without thinking, nothing more—a remnant of human thought whilst humanity was still in an age of intellectual immaturity.

Yet, for the Catholic, we are bodily beings in the world, not detached intellects. We are engaged selves and all that goes with that. Accordingly, faith is a willed assent to what God has revealed because God has revealed it. We cannot retreat to the domain of private sincerely held beliefs; for we are affirming something as true and as coming from he who is the good for all humans. But in doing so, we cannot overemphasize the intellectual component of faith; for we assent *because* it is God who has revealed these things. We must carry the middle ground in which faith can be shown to be reasonable yet requires the free assent of the faithful. The task of evangelization and transformation of a culture toward faith has many aspects to it, but if we want to encourage people to take seriously the Catholic account of faith, then one thing we need to do is highlight the inconsistency of that with a post-Cartesian self. Stripping away the Cartesian underpinnings of popular contemporary misgivings about faith will aid in the transformation of our culture and in turn dispose those within that culture for the willed assent to God and his truth.