

***Dei Filius* IV: On Faith and Reason**

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In this essay, we will examine the presentation of faith and reason in the fourth chapter of the First Vatican Council's dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius*.¹ Our examination focuses primarily on the *intelligibility* of the constitution's exposition of faith and reason in its fourth chapter. Secondly it looks for the *implications* that this intelligible teaching bears for Catholic thought in our own contemporary moment.

To achieve this twofold finality, we will divide our essay into four parts. The first will identify what makes this chapter *textually unique* in relation to the three chapters that precede it. In light of chapter 4's textual distinctiveness, we will then attempt, in the second part, to unpack what we suggest is the *speculative foundation* of the constitution's presentation of faith and reason. Thirdly, we will examine how this speculative foundation serves the document's *integrated account of faith and reason*. Fourthly, we will conclude with a summary of the chapter's integrated account of faith and reason with an eye towards its *theocentric orientation*.

The late Avery Cardinal Dulles once observed that "without actually mentioning Thomas Aquinas, Vatican I endorsed his [Aquinas's] position" on faith and reason.² Our analysis of *Dei Filius* IV will largely proceed

¹ We base our analysis of the constitution's word frequency, etc., upon the Latin text of *Dei Filius* as found in *Constitutio dogmatica de fide catholica*, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2, *Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, S.J. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 804–11. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of the Latin text are mine.

² Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., "Faith and Reason: From Vatican I to John Paul II," in *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*, ed. David Ruel Foster

along Thomistic lines. Although we recognize that one need not be a Thomist in order to profit from a study of *Dei Filius*, we do believe that Aquinas's teaching about faith and reason helps to illumine its central themes.

What Makes *Dei Filius* IV ("On Faith and Reason") Unique?

We begin our study of faith and reason in *Dei Filius* with a question: What makes chapter 4 unique when considered in relation to the whole of *Dei Filius*?

In order to answer this question, we note that *Dei Filius* comprises six main parts: a prologue, four chapters, and a series of canons (divided into discrete groups associated with particular chapters).³ According to their respective titles, the first chapter is about God, the creator of all things (*De Deo rerum omnium creatore*). The second chapter is about revelation (*De revelatione*). The third chapter is about faith particularly (*De fide*). And the fourth chapter is about faith and reason together (*De fide et ratione*).

Dei Filius, unsurprisingly, refers to "God" (the subject of chapter 1) in each of its five other parts. It references "revelation" (the subject of chapter 2) in chapters 2–4 and in the canons associated with chapters 2–4. "Revelation" is thus absent only in the prologue and in the first chapter. The subject of chapter 3 (i.e., "faith") appears in the prologue, in chapters 2–4, and in the canons associated with chapters 3–4. Finally, the constitution references "reason" in the prologue, in chapters 2–4, and in each group of canons.

This terminological recurrence reflects the constitution's integrity. Each individual chapter coheres with the other parts that precede and (or) follow it. This cohesion, however, can occlude the precise formal distinction between chapters 3 and 4. Both of these final two chapters treat of faith. The third chapter considers faith while the fourth chapter considers faith in relation to reason. Consequently, we might be tempted to identify *reason* as the specific difference between chapter 3 and chapter

and Joseph W. Koterski, S.J. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 193–208, at 193–94. Dulles continues: "A decade later, in 1879, Pope Leo XIII published his encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, proposing St. Thomas as the thinker whose synthesis of faith and reason should be accepted as a solid foundation from which to grapple with more recent questions in philosophy and science" (194).

³ There is also a ninety-seven-word (Latin) conclusion that follows the canons. Given the conclusion's hortative (rather than expository) nature and the subject of this essay, we will devote only passing attention to the conclusion.

4. This suggestion has merit. Reason does receive unique consideration in the fourth chapter. Nonetheless, as we have already noted, chapter 3 also mentions “reason” (as does every other part of *Dei Filius* except chapter 1).⁴ From these considerations, chapters 2–4 each appear to treat of “faith and reason” in some way and to some degree.⁵

Again, we ask our question: What makes *Dei Filius* IV unique when compared to the constitution as a whole? And thus far a clear answer to our question does not immediately appear. Given that the conciliar fathers deemed the subject “faith and reason” worthy of a separate chapter, however, we reasonably assume that chapter 4 does contribute something proper and distinctive to its subject.⁶ This proper and distinctive contribution is the object of our inquiry.

We propose that the key to our question’s answer lies in the opening lines of chapter 4: “The perpetual consensus of the Catholic Church also held and holds that there exists a twofold order of cognition [duplex ordo cognitionis], distinct not only in principle but also in object.”⁷ This twofold

⁴ “Reason” (*ratio*) appears twenty-one times in *Dei Filius* (excluding section titles). It appears three times in the prologue to *Dei Filius* (including “rationalism”). It appears twice in the second chapter (*De revelatione*). It appears three times in the third chapter (*De fide*). It appears ten times in the fourth chapter (*De fide et ratione*). It appears three times in the canons (once in the canons associated with chapter 2, twice in the canons associated with chapter 3, and once in the canons associated with chapter 4).

⁵ “Faith” (*fides*) appears fifty-two times in *Dei Filius* (excluding section titles). It appears four times in the prologue to *Dei Filius* (including reference to “the faithful” [*fidelium*]). It appears twice in the second chapter (*De revelatione*). It appears fourteen times in the third chapter (*De fide*). It appears nineteen times in the fourth chapter (*De fide et ratione*). It appears eleven times in the canons (ten times in the canons associated with chapter 3, and once in the canons associated with chapter 4). It also appears twice in the conclusion following the canons (in the phrases *omnes Christi fideles* and *fidei lumen*).

⁶ The respective lengths of the integral parts of *Dei Filius* also highlight the final chapter’s significant role in the constitution. Chapter 4 is the longest part of *Dei Filius* (slightly longer than even the lengthy prologue). Chapter 4 comprises 634 words. The prologue comprises 631 words. Chapter 3 comprises 588 words. The canons comprise 542 words. Chapter 2 comprises 383 words. Chapter 1 comprises 172 words. The conclusion comprises 97 words.

⁷ “Hoc quoque perpetuus Ecclesiae catholicae consensus tenuit et tenet, duplicem esse ordinem cognitionis, non solum principio, sed obiecto etiam distinctum.” *DF* IV continues here: “In principle, because we know in one by natural reason, in the other by divine faith; in object, because—beyond those things to which natural reason can attain—there are proposed to us for belief mysteries hidden in God which, unless [they are] divinely revealed, are not able to be known.” in object, because—beyond those things to which natural reason is able to attain—there are proposed to us for belief

order of cognition comprises both *principles* and *objects*. It comprises principles “because we know in one [principle] by natural reason, in another [principle] by divine faith.” This order of cognition also comprises objects, “because beyond those things to which natural reason can reach, there are proposed to us for belief mysteries hidden in God, which unless they are divinely revealed, are not able to be known.” In sum, *Dei Filius* IV explains that the *knowledge of natural reason* and the *knowledge of divine faith* proceed from two distinct kinds of *principles* to two distinct kinds of *objects*. Hence, there exists a *twofold order of cognition*.

Several textual details support our emphasis on these opening lines in *Dei Filius* IV. First, none of the other sections of the constitution invoke “principle” or “object.” Chapter 4 alone utilizes these two key terms. This observation seems to be significant in light of the fact that the constitution utilizes both “faith” and “reason” throughout its other parts and chapters. Principles and objects, then, are elements peculiar to chapter 4, and they would seem to contribute to the distinct presentation of faith and reason in chapter 4. Moreover, chapter 4 references “principle” and “object” three times each. “Principle” and “object” are not only unique to this chapter, but they are also prominent in the chapter. We suggest that this distinction between principles and objects serves as (1) the heart of chapter 4’s argumentation, and (2) the element that renders the chapter unique in *Dei Filius*.

From the preceding textual analysis, we will now examine the speculative integrity of *Dei Filius* IV. In other words, we now turn our attention to the way that principles and objects coalesce in the “twofold order of cognition” highlighted in the chapter’s opening lines.

Principles, Objects, and the “Twofold Order of Cognition”

Dei Filius IV begins with the “perpetual consensus” of the Church: *there exists a twofold order of cognition*. And this duplex order encompasses real distinctions on the level of principles and on the level of objects. Consequently, in this section, we will investigate: (1) the nature of *principle*, (2) the nature of *object*, and (3) how these result in this *twofold order of cognition*.

We recall the most basic definition of a “principle”: *that from which*

mysteries hidden in God which, unless [they are] divinely revealed, are not able to be known.”

*something proceeds in any way.*⁸ We also recall that a principle “is not an absolute thing; it is strictly a relative concept of a reality entirely unintelligible except in terms of what proceeds from it, the *principiatum*.”⁹ Indeed, Aquinas explains that “principle implies a certain order in any procession.”¹⁰ Principle, therefore, implies *relation*.

In the order of logic, an example of a principle is the principle of identity or the law of non-contradiction—from these first truths the human mind can reason (i.e., “proceed”) to valid conclusions that are true. Of course, beyond the logical order, there are also principles of being (matter and form, potency and act, etc.). We also recall that there is a distinction—sometimes logical, sometimes real—between principles and *causes*. A cause is that from which something proceeds *with the qualification of dependence in being*. Therefore, all causes are principles (e.g., matter and form), but not all principles are causes (e.g., the real distinction between being and non-being).

The constitution, however, employs “principle” in a more specific sense. *Dei Filius* is speaking about the dynamics of actual human *knowledge*. The

⁸ Jorge J. E. Gracia offers the following summary of “principle” and its dynamics: “The term *principium* normally translated as ‘principle’ in English had a rather broad meaning for scholastics. It meant not only principle but also origin, beginning, source, foundation and element. It was generally defined as ‘that from which something proceeds.’ When used technically, scholastics distinguished three separate types of principles: logical, physical, and metaphysical. Logical principles, such as the principle of noncontradiction, the rule of inference, and even the premises of particular demonstrations, were considered the starting points of knowledge. Physical principles, such as a father of a child, are the same as causes, and therefore external to the things of which they are principles. Finally, metaphysical principles fall between these two. Like logical principles, they are not separable from the things of which they are principles, but, unlike them and like physical principles, they are really distinct from it. As such they are neither physical entities nor mental concepts, but rather real constituents of things. The most universally accepted of these were substance and accident, essence and existence, and the matter and form which composed individual material substances. Strictly speaking and for most authors, then, the notion of principle is broader than that of cause. Not all principles are causes, but all causes are principles” (“Numerical Continuity in Material Substances: The Principle of Identity in Thomistic Metaphysics,” *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 10, no. 2 [1979]: 73–92, at 78).

⁹ James A. Weisheipl, O.P., “The Spector of *Motor Coniunctus* in Medieval Physics,” in James A. Weisheipl, O.P., *Nature and Motion in the Middle Ages*, ed. William E. Carroll (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1985), 99–120, at 103.

¹⁰ *In I phys.*, lec. 1, no. 5: “Principium vero importat quendam ordinem alicuius processus.” Aquinas continues here: “Hence something can be a principle which is not a cause, as that from which motion begins is a principle of motion, but [is] not a cause, and a point is a principle of a line, but not a cause” (translation mine).

text says that we know in one principle by natural reason (*naturali ratione*) and in the other principle by divine faith (*fide divina*). Natural reason and divine faith are *really distinct principles* by which human knowledge (*cognitio*) proceeds (i.e., comes to be).

This point resonates deeply with the philosophical convictions of St. Thomas Aquinas. In the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas explains that “there is in every human a certain *principle of knowledge*, namely the *light of the agent intellect*, through which certain universal principles of all the sciences are naturally known immediately at the first instant [cognoscuntur statim a principio].”¹¹ The title “agent intellect” (sometimes “active intellect” for reasons that will be clear in a moment) delineates the active, “illuminative” role that the human intellect exercises in its acquisition of conceptual knowledge. For the sake of brevity, we will not trace each of the epistemological tributaries that feed into the reservoir of human knowledge. For our purposes it will suffice to note (1) that Aquinas refers to the light of the agent intellect as a principle of human knowledge, and (2) that it is from this principle that natural intellection occurs and human reasoning proceeds.

Likewise, faith is also a principle of human knowledge—albeit really distinct from and greatly superior to the knowledge of human reason. Aquinas explains that the proper act of divine faith is supernatural *belief*—“to think with assent” to the divine truth that is God because it is God who reveals it.¹² The act of faith reveals its nature and subject: faith is a supernatural *habitus*—a theological virtue—that resides in the human intellect.¹³ As a *habitus*, the theological virtue of faith is a stable,

¹¹ *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 117, a. 1: “Knowledge is acquired in man, both from an interior principle, as is clear in one who acquires knowledge through his own discovery; and from an exterior principle, as is clear in one who learns. There is in every human a certain *principle of knowledge*, namely the *light of the agent intellect*, through which certain universal principles of all the sciences are naturally known immediately at the first instant. Now when someone applies such universal principles to some particular things, the memory and experience of which he acquires through sensing; through his own discovery he acquires knowledge of things of which he was ignorant, proceeding from the known to the unknown” (emphasis added; all translation from ST is my own). This reference to the “light” of the active intellect, of course reminds us of DF II: “The same Holy Mother Church holds and teaches that God, the principle and end of all things, is able to be known with certainty from created things by *the natural light of human reason*: ‘from the creation of the world, his invisible qualities have been clearly perceived through the things that have been made’” (emphasis added).

¹² See ST II-II, q. 2, a. 1.

¹³ See ST II-II, q. 4, a. 3.

supernaturally perfective disposition in the cognitive power of the soul. Consequently, faith is an intrinsic principle (*principium intrinsecum*) of human action that orders the human person's knowing power to the supernatural act of belief.¹⁴

In sum: *Dei Filius* explains that two principles inform the human power of knowing: *reason* and *faith*. Both natural reason and theological faith are principles of human knowledge. Moreover, they are really distinct from each other. Although they are both operative in the dynamics of human knowing, reason is a natural principle of knowledge while faith is a divine principle of knowledge. Thus, with the aid of Aquinas, we can recognize the duplexity of human knowledge on the level of *principles*.

As we have seen, however, the constitution does not limit the "twofold order of knowledge" to the level of principle. The *duplex ordo cognitionis* extends from principles to *objects*. And this comes as no surprise to a Thomist. Put simply, a principle of action that lacks an object is impossible. Conversely, an object without reference to a principle is simply unintelligible. Principles and objects—in their very natures—are *mutually referential*.¹⁵

The nature of *objectivity* frequently eludes our comprehension. We commonly attempt to express the nature of objectivity through some kind of opposition to subjectivity. This common tendency is not without reason. There is a distinction between the nature of a subject and the nature of an object. Moreover, their respective natures are distinct such that a subject insofar as it is a subject is not an object, and an object insofar as it is an object is not a subject. Nonetheless, the distinction between subjects and objects is just that: a distinction. There is no metaphysical or logical tension between subjectivity and objectivity. Indeed, Aquinas explains that objects and subjects give rise to each other.

The nature of objectivity is very dear to Aquinas. Indeed, "among the words that St. Thomas uses constantly in constructing his doctrinal synthesis, none is used more frequently or more variously than *object*. . . . Remove

¹⁴ See *ST* I-II, q. 49, prol.: "After actions and passions, the principles of human actions must be considered: and firstly of intrinsic principles, secondly of extrinsic principles. The intrinsic principle is power and habit. But because powers have been spoken of in the first part [of the *Summa theologiae*], habits now remain to be considered."

¹⁵ L. M. Régis, O.P., writes: "The subject is included in the definition of the object, and the object is included in the definition of the subject. They neither exist nor are intelligible except simultaneously. To suppress one of the terms, soul or *res*, is to suppress the object" (*Epistemology*, trans. Imelda Choquette Byrne [New York: Macmillan, 1959], 178).

the word *object* and its substitutes from St. Thomas' writings, and you suppress one-third of his works."¹⁶

Three principles give rise to objectivity: (1) A *thing* (i.e., a *res*), (2) a knowing being (e.g., a rational being), and (3) the relation between the thing and the knowing being.¹⁷ In the most general sense, something is an "object" (of the soul) if that something has some relation (*aliquam habitudinem*) to the soul.¹⁸ Objectivity comprises the active and passive relational elements between a thing and the soul. Only when there is some actual relation between a thing and the soul does objectivity emerge.¹⁹ And with the rise of an object also arises a *subject*. Objectivity and subjectivity exist only when there is some relation between a soul and a thing. Moreover, although the soul and the thing can subsist independent of each other, objectivity and subjectivity cannot. Objects and subjects are correlated parts of *habitus*. And as we have already said, a subject or an object is not intelligible as such without the other. They always—as such—come as a pair.

To give an example: Imagine that there is a rock outside. Imagine also that only the rock is outside (nothing else). This rock—this thing—in its current isolated situation is not an object. It is simply a thing (i.e., a *res*). Now, in our imaginary scenario, we walk outside and look at the rock. That rock is now rendered *an object*. Our very act of looking at the rock has introduced *objectivity* to the rock. It is now an "object" of our vision. Notice that the rock in its being (i.e., as an existing thing, as a *res*) has not changed. It was a thing before we looked at it (i.e., a rock), and it is still the same thing in itself (i.e., the same rock) after we have begun to look at it. It was not an object of our sight before we began to look at it, however.

Let us break down this imaginary scenario into its objective and subjective parts. At the beginning of our scenario, the rock was only a thing and not an object (of our sight). At the end of the story, the rock was *both* a thing *and* an object (of our sight). It is a thing in itself; but in relation to us it is an object. Consequently, our act of seeing has rendered us a subject—we are a *seeing subject* in relation to the *seen rock* (the object of our sight). Without the rock as a thing, we could have no objectivity nor

¹⁶ Régis, *Epistemology*, 176 (emphasis original).

¹⁷ We use "knowing" here in a broad sense that includes both sense apprehension and intellectual apprehension.

¹⁸ "Dicitur autem aliquid esse obiectum animae, secundum quod habet aliquam habitudinem ad animam" (*De veritate*, q. 22, a. 10).

¹⁹ See Régis, *Epistemology*, 177: "The object is not taken as an absolute, nor the soul taken as another absolute, but a *habitus* between things and the soul and vice versa."

any concomitant subjectivity. Why? “It is impossible to see without seeing something.”²⁰ The seen rock (i.e., the object) specifies our act of sight. If someone were to ask us “what are you doing?” in this scenario, the full and complete answer is not “we are looking,” but rather “we are looking at a rock.” The rock is the object of our act of sight. And our reflective awareness that *we* are looking at the rock gives rise to subjectivity—we know that we are the *subject* looking at a rock (i.e., an object of our sight).²¹

“Object” signifies “the reality, thing or person, that engages an act.”²² Objects specify action. Actions specify principles of action (i.e., potencies and the *habitus* of potencies—like the theological virtue of faith). Therefore, objects specify principles of actions. This is why *Dei Filius* includes both principles and objects in the twofold order of knowledge. It would be impossible to divide the order of knowledge only on the level of principle. If the principles of knowledge (i.e., natural reason and divine faith) are real principles—ordered to real acts of knowledge—then they require real objects of knowledge. Just as it is impossible to see without seeing something (an object of sight), so it is impossible to know without knowing something (an object of knowledge). And this is true of both the natural

²⁰ Régis, *Epistemology*, 255.

²¹ We can also identify two more precise kinds of objective relation between the soul and a thing. These relations are really distinct. The real distinction between them is based upon the *inverse directions* of their respective relations. If something is ordered to exist in the soul, the relation between them is one of *knowable objectivity* (and the thing is an *intelligible object* of the soul). In contrast, if the soul is ordered to a thing as it exists in itself, the relation between them is one of *appetible objectivity* (and the thing is an *appetible object* of the soul). The former (knowable) objectivity assumes the spiritual existence of the soul. The latter (appetible) objectivity lies in the concrete existence of the thing. This, of course, accounts for the real distinction in the soul between the intellect and the will. Aquinas explains in *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 10: “Hence, where we find different aspects of relatedness to the soul, there we find an essential difference in the object of the soul, and this indicates a distinct genus of the soul’s powers. Now a thing is found to have a twofold relationship to the soul: one by which the thing itself is in the soul in the soul’s manner and not in its own, the other by which the soul is referred to the thing in its own existence. Thus something is an object of the soul in two ways. (1) It is so inasmuch as it is capable of being in the soul, not according to its own act of being, but according to the manner of the soul—spiritually. This is the essential constituent of the knowable insofar as it is knowable. (2) Something is the object of the soul according as the soul is inclined and oriented to it after the manner of the thing itself as it is in itself. This is the essential constituent of the appetible insofar as it is appetible” (translation mine).

²² T. C. O’Brien, “Appendix I—Objects and Virtues,” in Thomas Aquinas, *Faith*, ed. and trans. T. C. O’Brien, vol. 31 (II-II, qq. 1–7) of *Summa Theologiae* (London: Blackfriars, 1974), 178–85, at 178.

knowledge of human reason and the supernatural knowledge of divine faith. "As perceived or present in the [knowing or loving] soul, objects reveal the existence of powers or *habitus*, and as analyzed by reflection, they reveal the nature of these powers, for they not only signify but cause the activity of our powers or *habitus*."²³

The "Twofold Order" of Faith and Reason

The "light" of human reason and that of divine faith are really distinct principles of knowledge. And as distinct principles of knowledge, they are ordered to two distinct objects. The constitution explains that the principle of human knowledge extends to objects within the "reach" (*pertingere potest*) of human reason. It cites the first chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans for an inspired example of these objects. The Apostle to the Gentiles identifies two such objects: (1) "the things that are made" (i.e., created reality), and (2) God himself known "through the things that are made."²⁴

The constitution explains then that both created reality and God are objects of the natural principle of human knowledge. The natural principle of human knowledge can reach created things and the uncreated God himself. This may strike us as odd given the strict division in the twofold order of knowledge that the text maintains. We will return to this point in a moment, but for now we note with St. Paul that God's objectivity vis-à-vis human reason is a *refracted* objectivity. In other words, God is not a direct object of human cognition. Rather, God is an object of human knowledge *through* the things that he has created.

Dei Filius expresses the objects of faith in reference to the objects of reason. Unsurprisingly, the objects of faith lie beyond the scope of natural knowledge: "Beyond those things to which natural reason is able to reach, mysteries hidden in God are proposed to us for belief which, had they not been divinely revealed, are not able to be known."²⁵ Although natural reason can know many things, there are divine mysteries hidden in God that exceed its grasp. These divine mysteries are the proper and exclusive object of faith. The document returns to the Apostle Paul's explanation in

²³ Régis, *Epistemology*, 181 (emphasis original).

²⁴ "Quocirca Apostolus, qui a gentibus Deum per ea, quae facta sunt, cognitum esse testatur" (DF IV).

²⁵ "Obiecto autem, quia praeter ea, ad quae naturalis ratio pertingere potest, credenda nobis proponuntur mysteria in Deo abscondita, quae nisi revelata divinitus, innotescere non possunt" (DF IV).

the First Epistle to the Corinthians about the hidden wisdom of God that the Father has made known through Jesus Christ and revealed by the Holy Spirit.²⁶ The text's reference to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit points to the preeminent mystery hidden in God himself: the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Faith alone enables the human person to come to knowledge of this divine truth.

In sum, *Dei Filius* has outlined (in admittedly cursory fashion) the speculative mechanics that underlie what it teaches about the relation between faith and reason. There is a twofold order of knowledge. And this twofold order resides not only in the principles of knowledge (i.e., natural reason and divine faith) but also in the objects of knowledge (e.g., things naturally knowable and things knowable only through divine revelation).

After laying this foundation of fundamental distinction, the chapter then explains how faith illumines and elevates reason. "Indeed, reason illumined by faith, when it zealously, piously, and soberly seeks, attains with the help of God some understanding—and that a most fruitful—of the mysteries."²⁷ This statement clarifies that, even though faith exceeds reason both in principle and in object, nonetheless, faith illumines reason such that reason can attain—by God's help—a most fruitful (*fructuosissimam*) understanding of the mysteries that lie beyond reason's native reach.

How is this possible? The council states that reason attains this most fruitful understanding under the illumination of faith both from "those things which it [reason] naturally knows, by analogy, and from the interconnectedness of the mysteries among themselves and with the ultimate human end." These references to analogy and to human finality attract particular interest. Although this essay does not explore analogy—either logical or ontological—analogy's presence in this passage indicates that there is real continuity between the reality of naturally knowable objects and the objectively mysterious reality hidden in God. With regard to human finality, we will return to that in our closing remarks.

Although the document assures reason that the rationality and intelligibility for which human understanding searches are not absent on the supernatural level, the text also explains that reason's naturality will always serve as something of a limit to reason's contemplation of the mysteries. Even if illumined by faith, the created intellect can never know the divine mysteries as it knows the truths proper to its own objective reach ("object"

²⁶ DF IV.

²⁷ DF IV: "Ac ratio quidem, fide illustrata, cum sedulo, pie et sobrie quaerit, aliquam, Deo dante, mysteriorum intelligentiam eamque fructuosissimam assequitur."

is explicitly mentioned here). In this life, the divine mysteries will always remain somewhat elusive to human understanding. And, paradoxically, the very faith that extends reason's objective reach is the same faith that leaves the divine mysteries veiled in the presence of created intelligence this side of eternity. A natural principle remains a natural principle—even when faith presents it with a supernatural object.

Beyond the illumination that faith can extend to reason, the constitution does not fail to acknowledge the aid that reason can give to faith. Indeed, theirs is a mutually beneficial relationship. The document identifies two ways through which reason aids faith and two ways through which faith aids reason.

"Right reason" (*recta ratio*) aids faith (1) by demonstrating the fundamental bases of faith (*recta ratio fidei fundamenta demonstrat*), and (2) (when reason is illumined by faith) by cultivating or perfecting the *science* of divine things (*rerum divinarum scientiam excolat*). These are no mean assistances. Reason's dignity does not suffer unjust diminution in *Dei Filius*. The first of these aids appears to encompass the *praeambula fidei*. As we recall, the preambles of the faith refer to those divinely revealed teachings that on the level of material objectivity lie just within the native natural grasp of human reason. The preambles refer to those truths that the human person can naturally discover—in reference to the natural principle and natural objectivity of human knowledge—but commonly does not.²⁸ The preeminent example, of course, is God's existence. Human reason can

²⁸ See *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 4: "It is necessary for man to accept by faith not only things which are above reason, but also those which can be known by reason: and this for three motives. First, in order that man may arrive more quickly at the knowledge of Divine truth. Because the science to whose province it belongs to prove the existence of God, is the last of all to offer itself to human research, since it presupposes many other sciences: so that it would not be until late in life that man would arrive at the knowledge of God. The second reason is, in order that the knowledge of God may be more general. For many are unable to make progress in the study of science, either through dullness of mind, or through having a number of occupations, and temporal needs, or even through laziness in learning, all of whom would be altogether deprived of the knowledge of God, unless Divine things were brought to their knowledge under the guise of faith. The third reason is for the sake of certitude. For human reason is very deficient in things concerning God. A sign of this is that philosophers in their researches, by natural investigation, into human affairs, have fallen into many errors, and have disagreed among themselves. And consequently, in order that men might have knowledge of God, free of doubt and uncertainty, it was necessary for Divine matters to be delivered to them by way of faith, being told to them, as it were, by God Himself Who cannot lie" (English translation taken from *Fathers of the English Dominican Province* [New York: Benziger, 1911]).

demonstrate the existence of God, objectively speaking. Nonetheless, most human persons (unaided by grace) do not, individually and actually, arrive at a valid demonstration.

Even apart from the *praeambula fidei*, however, we could suggest that the implications latent in objectively natural truths like the law of non-contradiction and the principles of causality serve as—at least remote but essential—fundamentals of the faith. Because God is the creator of all natural reality, there is no natural object that does not lie within the providential structures of reality. All things (each *res*) bear the ordering wisdom of God according to their respective natural or supernatural identities.²⁹ Therefore, all naturally knowable truths, because they fall under the order of divine wisdom, can serve as foundations of the faith in one way or another—and, perhaps, in many ways (e.g., substance, the Eucharist).

We also pause briefly to note the reference to *scientia* in the second way reason aids faith. We recall that Thomas Aquinas framed his presentation of the *sacra doctrina* in the opening question of the *Summa theologiae* around the nature of science. Of course, “science” in this context carries connotations different from that of contemporary parlance. *Scientia* denotes certain causal knowledge proceeding from first principles. One assumes that those theologians and bishops who worked on *Dei Filius* were familiar with the nature of *scientia* in general and the different methods proper to each of the various sciences (e.g., physics, metaphysics, theology).³⁰ For any reader familiar with Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*, with medieval controversies surrounding the nature of theology, and with the importance of objectivity in the division and methods of the sciences, the phrase “science of divine things” (*rerum divinarum scientia[m]*) is pregnant with meaning and implications. For Thomas and the Thomists (and for many others from 1240 onward), the word *scientia* always signaled *objectivity* (just as it did

²⁹ For more on the ordering wisdom of God impressed on all created being, see Cajetan Cuddy, O.P., “Isidore and Augustine in Aquinas’s Teaching on the Essence and Kinds of Law (ST I-II, qq. 90–91),” in *Reading the Church Fathers with St. Thomas Aquinas: Historical and Systematic Perspectives*, ed. Piotr Roszak and Jürgen Vijgen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 187–231.

³⁰ John W. O’Malley writes: “For the bishops at the council, the teaching of *Dei Filius* reflected much of what they had learned in their seminary days, and therefore it came as no surprise to them. They might disagree with some point or another, but by and large they found themselves on familiar and basically uncontested ground. They accepted without question the document’s implication that faith was an assent to truths expressed in propositions” (*Vatican I: The Council and the Making of the Ultramontane Church* [Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2018], 171).

an objectively known *thing* and a knowing *subject*).³¹ *Scientia* is objectivity formalized on the level of disciplines. “Science” is the precise, consistent, and systematic working out of and within a distinct formal object.

The historic importance of *scientia* in philosophical and theological contexts also renders intelligible the constitution’s observation that “God is the Lord of the sciences,” and the Church’s express support for scientific disciplines, “each in its own ambit,” to make use of their discipline’s respective “proper principles and proper method.” God is the cause of all of reality. Therefore, he is the first principle of all principles of knowledge and objective things. He is Lord of all of the sciences. The legitimate formalization of scientific disciplines poses no systemic threat to the divine mysteries hidden in God.

In this section of the text, we also read of the aids that faith provides reason. Numerically parallel to the inverse aids we just considered, faith helps reason in two ways: (1) Faith liberates and guards reason from errors, and (2) faith instructs reason with a manifold knowledge (*multiplici cognitione instruat*).

These aids that faith provides to reason appear to operate on horizontal and vertical planes. Faith liberating reason from present errors and guarding it against future errors serves to assist human knowledge on the plane of its own proper cognitive act. Any errors from which faith can liberate reason seem to apply to cognitive disorders that emerge between knowing principle and natural objectivity. The errors of rationalism and of semi-rationalism appear particularly germane to this specific aid. Although the errors of rationalism materially comprise supernatural objects, these errors are, formally, errors of reason. The rationalist who erroneously claims supernatural objects as naturally accessible to human reason (or who denies the existence of supernatural objects because of human reason) *errs on the level of human reason*, not on the level of divine faith. The rationalist’s error—in both of its expressions—is ironically a natural error. Human reason can neither reach supernatural objects by its own native principles nor invalidate supernatural objects by its own native principles. Because nature cannot natively reach supernature, it can neither prove supernature nor disprove supernature. Natural reason fails in both counts because of the *duplex ordo cognitionis*. Both the principle and the objects of natural reason are really (formally) distinct from the principle of faith and the

³¹ For an interesting study of the origin of *obiectum*, see Lawrence Dewan, O.P., “*Obiectum*: Notes on the Invention of a Word,” in *Wisdom, Law, and Virtue* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 403–43.

divine mysteries. Faith alone can elevate reason, because faith's sublime supernatural formality (principle and objectivity) comprises natural as well as supernatural being. In other words, reason has no uninvited access to the formality of faith.

Therefore, when faith liberates and guards reason from error, faith is actually reminding reason of its own proper dignity, its own proper principle, and its own proper objectivity. Faith does not expel natural reason from faith's domain because natural reason never had access to faith's proper domain. Rather, faith liberates reason from its own self-delusion and disorder. The themes in *Dei Filius* imply that rationalism is not an epistemological imposter sitting upon an unmerited throne in the kingdom of faith. Rather, rationalism is like an inebriated reason—a deranged fool that is so disoriented that it has fallen from its own dignified chair at the head of the table of natural rationality.

Faith can instruct as well as liberate reason because faith is a principle of a higher order. Moreover, faith's proper objects (i.e., the mysteries hidden in God) are the causes of both reason's principle and reason's proper objects. The manifold knowledge that faith imparts to reason originates in the divine being (the *res*) that stands as faith's proper object. Faith's knowledge is manifold because its proper knowledge is materially and formally divine—its knowledge bears the supernatural formality of God himself as First Truth Speaking about himself and what he has made and done. Faith shares its knowledge with reason, and reason finds this shared knowledge to be *consistent* with reason's own objectivity but also infinitely excelling reason's own objectivity.

Faith, Reason, and God

We now turn in this final, concluding, section to the reality that underlies each part of *Dei Filius*: God. God's being and his causal influence in all of created being and knowing—on both natural and supernatural objectivities—shape the form and matter of *Dei Filius*. Thus, the constitution says that, “even though faith is above reason, there can never exist any true dissension between faith and reason.” And the explanation that the First Vatican Council provides for the impossibility of any contradiction between faith and reason is nothing less than God himself: “The same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has instilled [*indiderit*] the light of reason in the human soul.” This is an argument pointing to causality. The God who is the cause of divine revelation and of the *habitus* of faith is the same God who imparted the natural light of reason to the rational human

soul. Consequently, because “God is not able to negate himself, neither [can] truth contradict truth.” God’s divine unity, then, serves as the principle for the unity of faith and reason.³²

Although we have suggested above that the constitution unpacks the twofold order of knowledge according to the distinction between natural and divine principles and objects (united through their respective cognitive acts), God enjoys ultimate primacy. He is the cause of natural and divine principles and objectivities. Moreover, he is the principle to which all the beings he has created tend. God is the end of all of reality.

God is the end of natural reason with its natural objectivity. He is also the end of divine faith and its supernatural objectivity. God is the highest thing (*res*) that perfects the objectivities of natural and divine knowledge in the human person. The principle of natural reason proceeds to God according to its proper natural objectivity. The principle of divine faith proceeds to God according to its proper supernatural objectivity. But it is the same God behind both objectivities.

In order to understand this, we recall that a single thing (*res*) can sustain diverse objectivities. For example, a single bird (a *res*) can be an object of sight for the seeing power and an object of sound for the hearing power. The powers of sight and hearing are really distinct—as are their respective objectivities (seeing is not identical with hearing). Nonetheless, a single thing can bear multiple (and even simultaneous) formal objects (i.e., aspects under which a thing is known or loved).

God is both the natural and the supernatural end of the human person. For those unfamiliar with the integration of principles, powers, acts, objects, and ends, this may sound like a contradiction. It is not, however, a contradiction. God as a *being* is one, but he sustains a plurality of different *objectivities* in relation to different principles of created rational action. He is the object of natural reason. He is also the object of divine faith. And he is (in his being) the one true God.

This line of analysis bears significance for God’s centrality—as first cause and ultimate end—in the dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius*. For it implies that God is the end of the human person both naturally and supernaturally—and that God’s natural finality and his supernatural finality vis-à-vis the human person are *really distinct*. As natural end, God is that towards which the natural principle of human knowledge reasons under

³² DFIV: “Verum etsi fides sit supra rationem, nulla tamen umquam inter fidem et rationem vera dissensio esse potest; cum idem Deus, qui mysteria revelat et fidem infundit, animo humano rationis lumen indiderit; Deus autem negare seipsum non possit, nec verum vero umquam contradicere.”

the objectivity of first cause of all of created reality. This is really distinct from God's objectivity as one's supernatural end. As supernatural end, God is that towards which the divine principle of faith is ordered under the objectivity of supernatural beatitude (i.e., known and loved and desired under the aspects of the sacred mysteries he divinely reveals). The twofold order of knowledge that *Dei Filius* articulates presupposes and implies that God is *the twofold end* of rational creatures.³³

Thomas Aquinas's teaching on the nature of principles, potencies, acts, and objects maintains their proper order of specification: potencies are distinguished by acts, acts are distinguished by objects, and objects are distinguished by ends. Therefore, if the principle of natural knowledge extends to natural acts of reason and knowledge that are specified by natural objects, then God, ultimately, is the natural end of the human person. Likewise, if the divine principle of faith so orders the graced human person to the theological act of belief, and this act of belief is specified by the theological objectivity of God as First Truth Speaking, then God, ultimately, is the supernatural end of the human person. God's causal primacy and his objective identities (as natural and supernatural ends) render a contradiction between reason and faith impossible. Because the natural objectivity of reason and the divine objectivity of faith both terminate in the same being (i.e., God), and God cannot negate himself, therefore the objectivities under which reason and faith consider him cannot contradict each other either. *Dei Filius* invokes the importance of God's natural and supernatural finality when it speaks of reason's "most fruitful" knowledge that arises from both what it naturally knows, by analogy, and the ultimate end of the human person.

To summarize our analysis, God as first cause and ultimate end (both naturally and supernaturally) accounts for the dynamism between the natural and the divine in the twofold order of knowledge. And, finally, the twofold order of knowledge ultimately leads natural reason and divine faith, both, to God as their final end under their own proper and respective objectivities. We suggest, at the conclusion of this essay, that the wisdom

³³ Aquinas distinguishes this twofold order (natural and supernatural) of theological finality throughout his writings. For example, see *ST I*, q. 75, a. 7, ad 1: "This argument proceeds from the proximate and natural end. Eternal happiness is the ultimate and supernatural end." See also *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 10, ad 2, and *Quaestiones de anima*, a. 7, ad 10. For a consideration of these texts (among others) and these themes, see Steven A. Long, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 10–51.

of St. Thomas Aquinas helps to unveil many speculative riches in the First Vatican Council's dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius*.

God is the cause of faith and of reason—on the level of principle and of object. God is the end of faith and reason—also on the level of principle and of object. And St. Thomas Aquinas is a most wise intellectual cartographer who sketches a speculative map that indicates why the pathway of reason and the pathway of faith are never contradictory, are always complementary, and objectively order human cognition to God. In an age when objective knowledge about God (both natural and supernatural) continues to fall subject to an ever-greater skepticism, *Dei Filius* IV remains a precious resource for all those who want to know the truth about knowing God.

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