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HOW FAITH SAFEGUARDS REASON

I

1. *If anyone shall deny one true God, Creator and Lord of things visible and invisible; let him be anathema.*
2. *If anyone shall not be ashamed to affirm that, except matter, nothing exists; let him be anathema.*
3. *If anyone shall say that the substance and essence of God and of all things is one and the same; let him be anathema. (Vatican Council—on Catholic Faith, Can. I—III).*

II

1. *If anyone shall say that the one true God our Creator and Lord cannot be known by the natural light of Reason, through created things; let him be anathema.*
2. *If anyone shall say that it is impossible or inexpedient that men should be taught by divine revelation concerning God and the worship to be paid to Him; let him be anathema.*
3. *If anyone shall say that man cannot be raised by divine power to a higher than natural knowledge and perfection, but can and ought by a continuous progress to arrive at length of himself at the possession of all that is true and good; let him be anathema.*
4. *If anyone shall not receive as sacred and canonical the books of Holy Scripture entire with all their parts, as the Holy Synod of Trent has enumerated them, or shall deny that they have been divinely inspired; let him be anathema.*

III

1. *If anyone shall say that human reason is so independent that Faith cannot be enjoined upon it by God; let him be anathema.*

IV

1. *If anyone shall say that in divine Revelation there are no mysteries, truly and properly so-called, but that all the doctrines of faith can be understood and demonstrated from natural principles by properly cultivated reason; let him be anathema.*

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If only to profess the continuity of an old Catholic's faith, the present writer may be allowed to quote some words of his which God privileged him to say some three and thirty years ago. These words were wrung from me by the bewildering fact that even amongst the ranks of Catholic apologists the momentous Decrees of the Vatican Council were largely ignored. When, as a beginning of Catholic intellectual action, I sought to re-publish in English the Decrees of the Vatican Council, two happenings were significant; first, the Catholic Truth Society, to whom I naturally offered the official English translation, thought that, even as a penny pamphlet, its sale would not justify its publication. No doubt they knew, better than I knew, the intellectual desires of their book-buyers.

Secondly, a very distinguished theologian severely reprimanded me in print for having called the 'Decrees of the Vatican Council' the best book and most valuable religious relic left to the twentieth century by the nineteenth.

From the *Introduction* which I wrote, a little timidly, to the Decrees, I quote the following:

'Perhaps no General Council has been more naturally fitted than the Vatican Council to produce a masterpiece of religious thought and literature. No assembly of men since the time of Christ has ever been so representative of Christian and National thought. It is literally true to say that the Whitsun tongues of fire fell not on so many nations as were gathered together in Rome, July 18th, 1870. Hardly one civilised or barbaric nation was unrepresented in the Hierarchy. For the first time in the history of the Church

every continent of the world sent its representative to bear witness to the truth.

'When we contrast the 537 Bishops that voted in the last Session with the 318 that voted at Nicea for the divinity of the Son of God, and with the 274 that voted at Ephesus for the humanity of Jesus Christ, we begin to see the religious importance of the Vatican Council.

'We have to remember, moreover, that there were but five Western Bishops at Nicea, and probably less at Ephesus, so that (numerically speaking) Nicea and Ephesus were representative merely of the East, and not wholly representative even of that, whereas the Old World and the New World were fully represented at the Vatican . . .'

'Nicea lasted only sixty-eight days; Ephesus seventy; the Vatican 222 days.'

'It is no exaggeration, then, to say that, as compared with the two earlier Councils, the Vatican was made up of twice as many Bishops, representing ten times as many nations, and spending thrice as much time over Decrees . . .'

'Eighty-six Committee Meetings were held. Of these forty-six dealt with the Constitution on Faith and forty on the Constitution of the Church. These Committee Meetings lasted on an average four hours; and they were attended by the whole body of voters. The private work accompanying their formal activity may be left to the imagination.'

*'Yet the net result of the almost endless discussion is a document no larger than a page or two of a daily newspaper.'*¹

Amongst the most precious gifts of this document are the Decrees on Faith and Reason, from which we have quoted above.

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We are now far enough advanced into the twentieth century to see quite undeniably that the chief event of the

¹ *The Decrees of the Vatican Council*—Introduction, pp. v-vii.

nineteenth was the Vatican Council. Many other events labelled 'discoveries' or 'inventions' made such a stir or din that the decisions of the five hundred shepherds from every quarter of the world seemed little more than the feeble, futile bleatings of five hundred sheep.

Age has given to remembrance the days when our youth was not a little troubled by such words as 'Liberty' and 'Liberal,' 'Reason' and 'Rationalism.' Something like an intellectual world war with its benumbing war-cries and untiring propaganda of Reason against Faith was costing the Church many a casualty or desertion.

Of course, signs were not wanting that a law governing the movement of untruth was being fulfilled. Under this law the untruth which lay at the heart of the old rationalism was beginning to change from homicidal to suicidal tendencies. Our contemporary unintellectualism—now we hope on the ebb, if not in subsidence—was then an ominous streamlet which seemed too slender and shallow to be of concern.

It is a matter perhaps of more than human alertness that the five hundred Bishops gathered together from all parts of the earth, and even from the remoter parts untroubled by Rationalism, saw and met the attack which misguided Reason was making on itself.

Observers of the dramatic moments in history will one day take two of the almost platitudinous Canons I have quoted, in order to show how the exaggerations of the sixteenth century and after had unsaid themselves so effectively that they had to defend against their attack what once they thought they were defending against the Church's attack. Nothing sums up the sixteenth century attack so well as *Scripture and Private Judgment*. But from the land where Luther claimed to have set the Scripture in its true place of honour, there had come a criticism which would have made the Bible a book of hardly more than archaeological interest. Courses of Scripture Lectures were being given to prove that the Scriptures were

hardly worth lecturing about. How dramatic, then, is the Canon which quietly says, 'If anyone shall not receive as sacred and canonical the books of Holy Scripture entire with all their parts, as the Holy Synod of Trent has enumerated them, or shall deny that they have been divinely inspired; let him be anathema.'

The other fundamental principle, if it can be called principle, of sixteenth century anti-Churchism was Private Judgment. It was a new and ambiguous title. It could have been accepted by Catholic thinkers if it meant that a man's reason is not *the* measure of truth, yet is *the man's* measure of truth. In other words, what a man thinks about a principle (such as the whole is greater than its parts) or about a fact (such as that the sun rises in the East) does not decide that principle or fact, yet what a man thinks about a principle or fact decides his attitude towards the principle or fact.

It was perhaps chiefly when the non-Catholic thinkers began to give a scientific unity to their private judgments about the Scriptures that their denial of the sound Catholic attitude drove some into the denial of the value of Scripture, and some into a denial or an ultimately suicidal exaggeration of reason.

Some Councils, like Ephesus when it proclaimed the Godhead of Jesus by the word *ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΣ*, have had moments of intense drama. But it may be questioned whether in its own sphere the Vatican Council's reassuring words to human reason, 'You are able to reason up to an intelligent First Cause,' have had any more dramatic parallel in Conciliar action. One can almost see the Good Samaritan tending the wounds of the man who fell among robbers. One can almost hear the Good Shepherd re-assuring and soothing the strayed sheep whom He lost and sought and found.

Happily for us the five hundred shepherds gathered in Council used a language and spoke in a voice that the sheep

could recognise. But whereas in every other department of human thought and activity there is a rigid vocabulary, in the high regions of philosophical thought a fixed vocabulary is looked upon by non-Catholics as almost an inroad upon intellectual freedom. In other words a fixed vocabulary is least tolerated where it is most needed.

But the Conciliar Fathers were gleaning from the great thinkers, pagan and Christian, when they very carefully avoided the bewildering ambiguities of the two words 'Reason' and 'Faith.' Even in our modern English there are some twenty different meanings of both. When each of these twenty different meanings of Reason may be found in conjunction with any one of the twenty meanings of Faith, the permutations and combinations tend to tire minds into Agnosticism.

Observe the profound psychology of these five hundred shepherds of God's flock :

'The Catholic Church with one consent has also ever held and does hold that there is a twofold order of knowledge, distinct both in principle and in object :

'In principle because our knowledge in the one is by natural reason; and in the other by divine faith.

'In object because, besides those things to which natural reason can attain, there are proposed to our belief mysteries hidden in God, which, unless divinely revealed, cannot be known.'

In other words, by Reason, as an act, we mean the act of certitude about truths guaranteed to us by our intellect working on the natural data of our senses.

By Faith we mean the act of certitude about truths guaranteed to us by the supernatural help and revelation of God.

A prevalent misconception about Reason and Faith is corrected by the accurate words of the Council. To many modern minds and to some minds whom the inaccurate statements of Catholics have misled, Faith is not an act of

intelligence. A modern non-Catholic thinker has defined Faith as 'Certitude beyond the evidence.' And even Catholics often quite inaccurately define a Mystery or a revealed truth as something we cannot understand, whereas it is something we can understand but cannot *comprehend*, because we cannot understand it to the full.

It is, therefore, necessary to insist on the truth that, though the intellect's light of Reason is not the superadded light of Faith, yet an act of Faith is an act of the intelligence. Moreover, every act of Faith is an act of Reason: just as every act of intelligence using human fingers to work is not only an act of the intelligence but is an act of the fingers.

Indeed, the act of Faith is for man in his present state, his highest act of Reason. If we are somewhat startled by this seeming paradox, we have but to consider that if there are any powers which can be moved by a higher power it is only when moved by this higher power that these lower powers reach their highest perfection. If there are truths not knowable by Reason but acceptable when made known by one who knows, then Reason will see that its perfection lies in accepting the word of one who knows. This is but saying that, as in the sphere of action man's highest is reached by choosing and following a competent leader, so in the sphere of thought or Reason man's highest is reached by choosing and hearkening to a competent teacher.

This principle, of almost self-evident truth, is to-day nowhere denied except in the sphere of ultimate thought where like a fixed vocabulary it is most needed. Never in the history of human thought was the educable child in such an atmosphere of intellectual authority and human faith. At a tender age the child is forced, not by parents, but, in a sense by the police, into a building where perhaps ninety per cent. of what it has to learn has to be taken on human faith. No wonder that, after ten or twelve years of hot-housing in this atmosphere of human compulsory faith, the poor child when free from this thralldom feels

free to scorn divine authority and divine truth where these are most necessary for human life.

Little or nothing in the child's previous schooling has been an appeal to the child's reason. Its lessons in history have been too often the partisan's appeal to the child's emotions and social passions. Its mathematical studies at their best are but an introduction to logic which itself is but an introduction to that organised reasoning which we call Philosophy. But mathematical studies at their worst are hardly less than an irrational and rooted prejudice that all things are mathematically measurable, and therefore three-dimensional.

The Vatican Fathers builded perhaps better than they knew when they came to the aid of crumbling Reason by their astounding declaration: 'If anyone shall say that the one true God, our Creator and Lord, cannot be certainly known by the natural light of human Reason through created things; let him be anathema.'

Upon this defined doctrine of the infallible Council much light is thrown by the great doctor whose very words so often become the words of the infallible dogmas. In his *Treatise Contra Gentiles* St. Thomas argues for Reason against those who deny that Reason can prove the existence of God. He seems to sympathise with these deniers and unbelievers, because they so often find believers using weak arguments for the existence of God.

But in spite of the scandal caused by the weak arguments of unskilled believers, unbelievers who deny the validity of the true arguments are denying not only the existence of God, but also the possibility of the higher Sciences. These are the words of Aquinas: 'The falsity of that opinion is shown secondly, by the order itself of Sciences; for if no substance above sensible substance can be an object of Science, there will be no Science above Physics as stated in *IV Metaphysics*.'²

² *Contra Gentiles*, I, ch. 12.

A strange confirmation of this profound doctrine of the Pagan Philosopher and his Christian pupil is the fact that in the England of to-day Science means those departments of knowledge which are concerned with the measurable. viz.: the Physical (in the evident acceptance of Physical) Sciences.

We have singled out the matter of God's existence, as the Vatican Fathers singled it out, for the fundamental study of the relations of Reason and Faith. No matter what object of thought the human intellect seeks to penetrate and intellectually unify by the principle of cause and effect, the intellect will ultimately come upon the ultimate Cause, viz. God.

But as only a minority rather than a majority are capable of the accurate and prolonged reasoning that makes the intellect certain of a God—and as that minority of intellectual efficient would need a long time to work out their reasoning, and even then would work it out with some error. Faith as a supernatural light is added by God to help us to believe or to believe more quickly and more accurately in the existence of a First Cause.

Let us examine this more closely by considering Faith first as that body of revealed supernatural doctrine which we call THE FAITH; and secondly as that supernatural psychological light infused by God into the intelligence of man.

First, it is undeniable that the supernatural truths revealed by God complete the natural truths which the intellect can discover in the natural Universe.

Again, as we have seen, to deny the fundamental doctrine of God's existence is really to deny the existence of all, or all the higher, Sciences. Hence that Faith which steadies stumbling Reason in holding God's existence is a strong safeguard of Reason.

Lastly, in these days when Philosophy, the Queen of Sciences, has been dethroned, History, once a noble courtier, has been put on a throne it could never fill; with

the fall of Philosophy mankind had only History as an approach to mental culture; or may we say, Civilisation. But as the Unity and Trinity of God are the great safeguards of Reason in the supreme sphere of Philosophy, so the Incarnation with its facts of the Birth, Death and Resurrection of Jesus are the safeguards of Reason in the necessary sphere of History.

But the great services rendered to reason by the truths taught to man by God are still more increased by supernatural light infused by God into man's intellect and certain psychological growth has taken place which we can only call a strengthening of the mind.

To develop and perhaps explain this psychological strengthening of the reason by the acceptance and infusion of a few principles may be set down in an order which lack of time has not let me set down in series.

1. The natural is God's gift to man. The supernatural is God's further gift to man.

2. The supernatural is neither the denial of, nor the substitute for, the natural; but the supernatural is the supplement of the natural. Hence, the natural is the preliminary and the accompaniment of the supernatural. In other words, it is not so accurate to say that the supernatural is built *on* the natural as built *with* the natural. Perhaps if by 'on' we signify precedence of time, and by 'with' we signify concomitance and identity in action, it would be still more accurate to say that the supernatural is built both *on* and *with* the natural.

3. From this we conclude that no one who has reached the use of reason can have faith without the use of reason.

Here we may digress, perhaps profitably, by asserting that nothing looks so like sheer faith as sheer reason; and nothing looks so much like sheer reason as sheer faith. For example, when the student has been successful in working through a long, abstruse mathematical problem to a right conclusion his powerlessness to see the whole problem as a whole makes him accept the conclusion on something

akin to faith. If it may not be called faith it certainly cannot be called sight.

4. Some remote and therefore avoidable conclusions of reason lay a burden not only upon the intellect but upon the will. For example, the social implications of Justice are not hard to see as conclusions of reason, but once seen, they are hard to carry into action. Yet when the will has not shirked the hardness, but has honoured reason by carrying them out, the act of the will has strengthened the reason.

5. When the reason begins to discern the possibility and duty of Faith it also begins to discern the demands which Faith may make not only in the name of Faith but in the name of Reason. There will be many a motive suggesting the unreasonableness of Faith. Life, and especially supernatural life, is a ceaseless battle for the best. But whoever has deliberately chosen the second best rather than the best has at least turned his face towards the worst.

6. Perhaps the most important function of Faith towards Reason is that when Faith comes to the unenlightened human mind the man has now a supernatural motive for using his natural power of reason. Easter time suggests a natural contrast between two incidents which may gather up in anecdote all we have had to say.

On the day Our Blessed Lord rose from the dead He allowed His wounded Body to be seen and even His wounds to be touched by His Disciples. His Resurrection as a veritable contemporary event enters into history and only through history enters into theology. In this way the fact that Jesus was dead on Good Friday, was seen alive and 'handled' by some who saw Him at Easter is not a matter of Faith but of Reason.

St. Thomas, the Apostle, refused to accept this matter of reason and of sight on the word of those to whom the sight had been granted. He refused to accept the fact of His Master's resurrection unless he saw and handled his Master's risen body. This was an unreasonable attitude

of mind. Had His Master not graciously condescended to his unreasonableness his refusal to obey his reason might have led to a denial of the Resurrection and therefore to a sin against faith.

This behaviour of one of the Apostles, St. Thomas, is contrasted with the behaviour of the two Apostles, St. Peter and St. John. When the women told the Apostles that the tomb was empty many disbelieved the human witness to a quite easily discernible fact. Their disbelief was not reasonable.

St. Peter and St. John differ; if they did not believe the women they did not disbelieve. But their quite reasonable uncertainty was quickly followed the very reasonable effort they made to turn uncertainty into certainty. They ran to the tomb, they saw that where a few hours ago lay the Body of heir Master in the burial-clothes, there now lay only the clothes. Then recalling His own words and the words of the prophets they reached a faith without sight which knew He had risen from the dead.

It was St. Thomas who might have ended by sinning against Faith because he would not use his reason. It was St. Peter and St. John who used and followed their God-given Reason until it was regarded by God-given Faith.

Faith so potent and so necessary for safeguarding Reason has been so long set aside in the world that Reason is now almost *in extremis*. It is therefore somewhat of a truism to say that the world—even the world that calls itself intellectual—is suffering not so much from a loss of Faith as a loss of Reason. And it is not the misuse but the disuse of Reason which may or may not be one of the unforgivable sins against the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Truth.

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