



## **Faith and Reason**

Thomas Aquinas

### **QUESTION 1. FAITH**

#### **Article 2.**

#### **Whether the object of faith is something complex, by way of a proposition?**

Objection 1. It would seem that the object of faith is not something complex by way of a proposition. For the object of faith is the First Truth, as stated above (Article 1). Now the First Truth is something simple. Therefore the object of faith is not something complex.

Objection 2. Further, the exposition of faith is contained in the symbol. Now the symbol does not contain propositions, but things: for it is not stated therein that God is almighty, but: "I believe in God . . . almighty." Therefore the object of faith is not a proposition but a thing.

Objection 3. Further, faith is succeeded by vision, according to 1 Corinthians 13:12: "We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face. Now I know in part; but then I shall know even as I am known." But the object of the heavenly vision is something simple, for it is the Divine Essence. Therefore the faith of the wayfarer is also.

On the contrary, Faith is a mean between science and opinion. Now the mean is in the same genus as the extremes. Since, then, science and opinion are about propositions, it seems that faith is likewise about propositions; so that its object is something complex.

I answer that, The thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower. Now the mode proper to the human intellect is to know the truth by synthesis and analysis, as stated in I, 85, 5. Hence things that are simple in themselves, are known by the intellect with a certain amount of complexity, just as on the other hand, the Divine intellect knows, without any complexity, things that are complex in themselves.

Accordingly the object of faith may be considered in two ways. First, as regards the thing itself which is believed, and thus the object of faith is something simple, namely the thing itself about which we have faith. Secondly, on the part of the believer, and in this respect the object of faith is something complex by way of a proposition.

Hence in the past both opinions have been held with a certain amount of truth.

Reply to Objection 1. This argument considers the object of faith on the part of the thing believed.

Reply to Objection 2. The symbol mentions the things about which faith is, in so far as the act of the believer is terminated in them, as is evident from the manner of speaking about them. Now the act of the believer does not terminate in a proposition, but in a thing. For as in science we do not form propositions, except in order to have knowledge about things through their means, so is it in faith.

Reply to Objection 3. The object of the heavenly vision will be the First Truth seen in itself, according to 1 John 3:2: "We know that when He shall appear, we shall be like

to Him: because we shall see Him as He is”: hence that vision will not be by way of a proposition but by way of a simple understanding. On the other hand, by faith, we do not apprehend the First Truth as it is in itself. Hence the comparison fails.

#### **Article 4.**

#### **Whether the object of faith can be something seen?**

Objection 1. It would seem that the object of faith is something seen. For Our Lord said to Thomas (John 20:29): “Because thou hast seen Me, Thomas, thou hast believed.” Therefore vision and faith regard the same object.

Objection 2. Further, the Apostle, while speaking of the knowledge of faith, says (1 Corinthians 13:12): “We see now through a glass in a dark manner.” Therefore what is believed is seen.

Objection 3. Further, faith is a spiritual light. Now something is seen under every light. Therefore faith is of things seen.

Objection 4. Further, “Every sense is a kind of sight,” as Augustine states (De Verb. Domini, Serm. xxxiii). But faith is of things heard, according to Romans 10:17: “Faith . . . cometh by hearing.” Therefore faith is of things seen.

On the contrary, The Apostle says (Hebrews 11:1) that “faith is the evidence of things that appear not.”

I answer that, Faith implies assent of the intellect to that which is believed. Now the intellect assents to a thing in two ways. First, through being moved to assent by its very object, which is known either by itself (as in the case of first principles, which are held by the habit of understanding), or through something else already known (as in the case of conclusions which are held by the habit of science). Secondly the intellect assents to something, not through being sufficiently moved to this assent by its proper object, but through an act of choice, whereby it turns voluntarily to one side rather than to the other: and if this be accompanied by doubt or fear of the opposite side, there will be opinion, while, if there be certainty and no fear of the other side, there will be faith.

Now those things are said to be seen which, of themselves, move the intellect or the senses to knowledge of them. Wherefore it is evident that neither faith nor opinion can be of things seen either by the senses or by the intellect.

Reply to Objection 1. Thomas “saw one thing, and believed another” [St. Gregory: Hom. xxvi in Evang.]: he saw the Man, and believing Him to be God, he made profession of his faith, saying: “My Lord and my God.”

Reply to Objection 2. Those things which come under faith can be considered in two ways. First, in particular; and thus they cannot be seen and believed at the same time, as shown above. Secondly, in general, that is, under the common aspect of credibility; and in this way they are seen by the believer. For he would not believe unless, on the evidence of signs, or of something similar, he saw that they ought to be believed.

Reply to Objection 3. The light of faith makes us see what we believe. For just as, by the habits of the other virtues, man sees what is becoming to him in respect of that habit, so, by the habit of faith, the human mind is directed to assent to such things as are becoming to a right faith, and not to assent to others.

Reply to Objection 4. Hearing is of words signifying what is of faith, but not of the things themselves that are believed; hence it does not follow that these things are seen.

Article 5. Whether those things that are of faith can be an object of science [Science is certain knowledge of a demonstrated conclusion through its demonstration]?

Objection 1. It would seem that those things that are of faith can be an object of science.

For where science is lacking there is ignorance, since ignorance is the opposite of science. Now we are not in ignorance of those things we have to believe, since ignorance of such things savors of unbelief, according to 1 Timothy 1:13: "I did it ignorantly in unbelief." Therefore things that are of faith can be an object of science.

Objection 2. Further, science is acquired by reasons. Now sacred writers employ reasons to inculcate things that are of faith. Therefore such things can be an object of science.

Objection 3. Further, things which are demonstrated are an object of science, since a "demonstration is a syllogism that produces science." Now certain matters of faith have been demonstrated by the philosophers, such as the Existence and Unity of God, and so forth. Therefore things that are of faith can be an object of science.

Objection 4. Further, opinion is further from science than faith is, since faith is said to stand between opinion and science. Now opinion and science can, in a way, be about the same object, as stated in Poster. i. Therefore faith and science can be about the same object also.

On the contrary, Gregory says (Hom. xxvi in Evang.) that "when a thing is manifest, it is the object, not of faith, but of perception." Therefore things that are of faith are not the object of perception, whereas what is an object of science is the object of perception. Therefore there can be no faith about things which are an object of science.

I answer that, All science is derived from self-evident and therefore "seen" principles; wherefore all objects of science must needs be, in a fashion, seen.

Now as stated above (Article 4), it is impossible that one and the same thing should be believed and seen by the same person. Hence it is equally impossible for one and the same thing to be an object of science and of belief for the same person. It may happen, however, that a thing which is an object of vision or science for one, is believed by another: since we hope to see some day what we now believe about the Trinity, according to 1 Corinthians 13:12: "We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face": which vision the angels possess already; so that what we believe, they see. On like manner it may happen that what is an object of vision or scientific knowledge for one man, even in the state of a wayfarer, is, for another man, an object of faith, because he does not know it by demonstration.

Nevertheless that which is proposed to be believed equally by all, is equally unknown by all as an object of science: such are the things which are of faith simply. Consequently faith and science are not about the same things.

Reply to Objection 1. Unbelievers are in ignorance of things that are of faith, for neither do they see or know them in themselves, nor do they know them to be credible. The faithful, on the other hand, know them, not as by demonstration, but by the light of faith which makes them see that they ought to believe them, as stated above (4, ad 2,3).

Reply to Objection 2. The reasons employed by holy men to prove things that are of faith, are not demonstrations; they are either persuasive arguments showing that what is proposed to our faith is not impossible, or else they are proofs drawn from the principles of faith, i.e. from the authority of Holy Writ, as Dionysius declares (Div. Nom. ii). Whatever is based on these principles is as well proved in the eyes of the faithful, as a conclusion drawn from self-evident principles is in the eyes of all. Hence again, theology is a science, as we stated at the outset of this work (I, 1, 2).

Reply to Objection 3. Things which can be proved by demonstration are reckoned among the articles of faith, not because they are believed simply by all, but because they are a necessary presupposition to matters of faith, so that those who do not know them by demonstration must know them first of all by faith.

Reply to Objection 4. As the Philosopher says (Poster. i), "science and opinion about

the same object can certainly be in different men,” as we have stated above about science and faith; yet it is possible for one and the same man to have science and faith about the same thing relatively, i.e. in relation to the object, but not in the same respect. For it is possible for the same person, about one and the same object, to know one thing and to think another: and, in like manner, one may know by demonstration the unity of the Godhead, and, by faith, the Trinity. On the other hand, in one and the same man, about the same object, and in the same respect, science is incompatible with either opinion or faith, yet for different reasons. Because science is incompatible with opinion about the same object simply, for the reason that science demands that its object should be deemed impossible to be otherwise, whereas it is essential to opinion, that its object should be deemed possible to be otherwise. Yet that which is the object of faith, on account of the certainty of faith, is also deemed impossible to be otherwise; and the reason why science and faith cannot be about the same object and in the same respect is because the object of science is something seen whereas the object of faith is the unseen, as stated above.

#### **Article 10.**

#### **Whether reasons in support of what we believe lessen the merit of faith?**

Objection 1. It would seem that reasons in support of what we believe lessen the merit of faith. For Gregory says (Hom. xxvi in Evang.) that “there is no merit in believing what is shown by reason.” If, therefore, human reason provides sufficient proof, the merit of faith is altogether taken away. Therefore it seems that any kind of human reasoning in support of matters of faith, diminishes the merit of believing.

Objection 2. Further, whatever lessens the measure of virtue, lessens the amount of merit, since “happiness is the reward of virtue,” as the Philosopher states (Ethic. i, 9). Now human reasoning seems to diminish the measure of the virtue of faith, since it is essential to faith to be about the unseen, as stated above (1, 4,5). Now the more a thing is supported by reasons the less is it unseen. Therefore human reasons in support of matters of faith diminish the merit of faith.

Objection 3. Further, contrary things have contrary causes. Now an inducement in opposition to faith increases the merit of faith whether it consist in persecution inflicted by one who endeavors to force a man to renounce his faith, or in an argument persuading him to do so. Therefore reasons in support of faith diminish the merit of faith.

On the contrary, It is written (1 Peter 3:15): “Being ready always to satisfy every one that asketh you a reason of that faith [Vulgate: ‘Of that hope which is in you.’ St. Thomas’ reading is apparently taken from Bede.] and hope which is in you.” Now the Apostle would not give this advice, if it would imply a diminution in the merit of faith. Therefore reason does not diminish the merit of faith.

I answer that, As stated above (Article 9), the act of faith can be meritorious, in so far as it is subject to the will, not only as to the use, but also as to the assent. Now human reason in support of what we believe, may stand in a twofold relation to the will of the believer. First, as preceding the act of the will; as, for instance, when a man either has not the will, or not a prompt will, to believe, unless he be moved by human reasons: and in this way human reason diminishes the merit of faith. On this sense it has been said above (I-II, 24, 3, ad 1; 77, 6, ad 2) that, in moral virtues, a passion which precedes choice makes the virtuous act less praiseworthy. For just as a man ought to perform acts of moral virtue, on account of the judgment of his reason, and not on account of a passion, so ought he to believe matters of faith, not on account of human reason, but on account of the Divine authority. Secondly, human reasons may be consequent to the will of the believer. For when a man’s will is

ready to believe, he loves the truth he believes, he thinks out and takes to heart whatever reasons he can find in support thereof; and in this way human reason does not exclude the merit of faith but is a sign of greater merit. Thus again, in moral virtues a consequent passion is the sign of a more prompt will, as stated above (I-II, 24, 3, ad 1). We have an indication of this in the words of the Samaritans to the woman, who is a type of human reason: “We now believe, not for thy saying” (John 4:42).

Reply to Objection 1. Gregory is referring to the case of a man who has no will to believe what is of faith, unless he be induced by reasons. But when a man has the will to believe what is of faith on the authority of God alone, although he may have reasons in demonstration of some of them, e.g. of the existence of God, the merit of his faith is not, for that reason, lost or diminished.

Reply to Objection 2. The reasons which are brought forward in support of the authority of faith, are not demonstrations which can bring intellectual vision to the human intellect, wherefore they do not cease to be unseen.

But they remove obstacles to faith, by showing that what faith proposes is not impossible; wherefore such reasons do not diminish the merit or the measure of faith. On the other hand, though demonstrative reasons in support of the preambles of faith [The Leonine Edition reads: ‘in support of matters of faith which are however, preambles to the articles of faith, diminish,’ etc.], but not of the articles of faith, diminish the measure of faith, since they make the thing believed to be seen, yet they do not diminish the measure of charity, which makes the will ready to believe them, even if they were unseen; and so the measure of merit is not diminished.

Reply to Objection 3. Whatever is in opposition to faith, whether it consist in a man’s thoughts, or in outward persecution, increases the merit of faith, in so far as the will is shown to be more prompt and firm in believing. Hence the martyrs had more merit of faith, through not renouncing faith on account of persecution; and even the wise have greater merit of faith, through not renouncing their faith on account of the reasons brought forward by philosophers or heretics in opposition to faith. On the other hand things that are favorable to faith, do not always diminish the promptness of the will to believe, and therefore they do not always diminish the merit of faith.

## **QUESTION 2. THE ACT OF FAITH**

### **Article 1.**

#### **Whether to believe is to think with assent?**

Objection 1. It would seem that to believe is not to think with assent. Because the Latin word “cogitatio” [thought] implies a research, for “cogitare” [to think] seems to be equivalent to “coagitare,” i.e. “to discuss together.” Now Damascene says (De Fide Orth. iv) that faith is “an assent without research.” Therefore thinking has no place in the act of faith.

Objection 2. Further, faith resides in the reason, as we shall show further on (4, 2). Now to think is an act of the cogitative power, which belongs to the sensitive faculty, as stated in I, 78, 4. Therefore thought has nothing to do with faith.

Objection 3. Further, to believe is an act of the intellect, since its object is truth. But assent seems to be an act not of the intellect, but of the will, even as consent is, as stated above (I-II, 15, 1, ad 3). Therefore to believe is not to think with assent.

On the contrary, This is how “to believe” is defined by Augustine (De Praedest. Sanct. ii).

I answer that, “To think” can be taken in three ways. First, in a general way for any kind of actual consideration of the intellect, as Augustine observes (De Trin. xiv, 7): “By understanding I mean now the faculty whereby we understand when thinking.” Secondly, “to think” is more strictly taken for that consideration of the intellect, which is accompanied by some kind of inquiry, and which precedes the intellect’s arrival at the stage of perfection that comes with the certitude of sight. On this sense Augustine says (De Trin. xv, 16) that “the Son of God is not called the Thought, but the Word of God. When our thought realizes what we know and takes form therefrom, it becomes our word. Hence the Word of God must be understood without any thinking on the part of God, for there is nothing there that can take form, or be unformed.” In this way thought is, properly speaking, the movement of the mind while yet deliberating, and not yet perfected by the clear sight of truth. Since, however, such a movement of the mind may be one of deliberation either about universal notions, which belongs to the intellectual faculty, or about particular matters, which belongs to the sensitive part, hence it is that “to think” is taken secondly for an act of the deliberating intellect, and thirdly for an act of the cogitative power.

Accordingly, if “to think” be understood broadly according to the first sense, then “to think with assent,” does not express completely what is meant by “to believe”: since, in this way, a man thinks with assent even when he considers what he knows by science [Science is certain knowledge of a demonstrated conclusion through its demonstration.], or understands. If, on the other hand, “to think” be understood in the second way, then this expresses completely the nature of the act of believing. For among the acts belonging to the intellect, some have a firm assent without any such kind of thinking, as when a man considers the things that he knows by science, or understands, for this consideration is already formed. But some acts of the intellect have unformed thought devoid of a firm assent, whether they incline to neither side, as in one who “doubts”; or incline to one side rather than the other, but on account of some slight motive, as in one who “suspects”; or incline to one side yet with fear of the other, as in one who “opines.” But this act “to believe,” cleaves firmly to one side, in which respect belief has something in common with science and understanding; yet its knowledge does not attain the perfection of clear sight, wherein it agrees with doubt, suspicion and opinion. Hence it is proper to the believer to think with assent: so that the act of believing is distinguished from all the other acts of the intellect, which are about the true or the false.

Reply to Objection 1. Faith has not that research of natural reason which demonstrates what is believed, but a research into those things whereby a man is induced to believe, for instance that such things have been uttered by God and confirmed by miracles.

Reply to Objection 2. “To think” is not taken here for the act of the cogitative power, but for an act of the intellect, as explained above.

Reply to Objection 3. The intellect of the believer is determined to one object, not by the reason, but by the will, wherefore assent is taken here for an act of the intellect as determined to one object by the will.

#### **Article 4.**

#### **Whether it is necessary to believe those things which can be proved by natural reason?**

Objection 1. It would seem unnecessary to believe those things which can be proved by natural reason. For nothing is superfluous in God’s works, much less even than in the works of nature. Now it is superfluous to employ other means, where one already suffices. Therefore it would be superfluous to receive by faith, things that can be known by natural

reason.

Objection 2. Further, those things must be believed, which are the object of faith. Now science and faith are not about the same object, as stated above (1, 4,5). Since therefore all things that can be known by natural reason are an object of science, it seems that there is no need to believe what can be proved by natural reason.

Objection 3. Further, all things knowable scientifically [Science is certain knowledge of a demonstrated conclusion through its demonstration] would seem to come under one head: so that if some of them are proposed to man as objects of faith, in like manner the others should also be believed. But this is not true. Therefore it is not necessary to believe those things which can be proved by natural reason.

On the contrary, It is necessary to believe that God is one and incorporeal: which things philosophers prove by natural reason.

I answer that, 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.

Reply to Objection 1. The researches of natural reason do not suffice mankind for the knowledge of Divine matters, even of those that can be proved by reason: and so it is not superfluous if these others be believed.

Reply to Objection 2. Science and faith cannot be in the same subject and about the same object: but what is an object of science for one, can be an object of faith for another, as stated above (Question 1, Article 5).

Reply to Objection 3. Although all things that can be known by science are of one common scientific aspect, they do not all alike lead man to beatitude: hence they are not all equally proposed to our belief.

#### **Article 10.**

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Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*. II-II, Q. 1, art 1, 4, 5; Q. 2., art. 1,4, 10. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1920.

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