

A Comparative Analysis of the Actus Fidei in Neo-Scholastic and Transcendental Thomism: An Investigation of the Theologies of Johann Brunsmann, SVD and Pierre Rousselot, SJ

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ABSTRACT

One of the most fascinating areas of fundamental theology is the actus fidei—the act of faith. It is here that grace, freedom, and reason come together in a very unique way. The Neo-Scholastics essentially approached this issue by breaking the process down into two steps: the act of credibility (reason) followed by the act of credentia (grace). The early twentieth century priest and theologian, Pierre Rousselot, SJ, radically departs from this approach in what would contribute to the beginning of Transcendental Thomism—an intellectual movement that would drastically change the character of Catholic theology. A century after Rousselot, many contemporary students of Catholic theology are never introduced to the logical rigor and precise analysis of Neo-Scholastic thought. Consequently, we offer a comparative analysis of the two approaches to the act of faith to manifest the strengths and weaknesses of the two systems.

Keywords: Act of Faith, Thomism, Neo-Scholasticism, Transcendentalism, Vatican II

INTRODUCTION

The Second Vatican Council

At the close of the academic year of 1949–1950, Henri-Marie de Lubac, SJ (1896–1991) received word from the Jesuit Superior General in Rome that he was suspended from his professorship at the *Université Catholique de Lyon* and was ordered to leave the province due to accusations of “pernicious errors on essential points of dogma.”¹ Furthermore, letters were sent to all Jesuit provincials to remove three of his books, *Surnaturel*, *Corpus Mysticum*, and *Connaissance de Dieu*, from circulation in their libraries. In 1954, Yves Congar, OP (1904–1995) was prohibited from teaching and writing by the Master General of the Dominican Order.² The next year, the writings of John Courtney Murray, SJ (1904–1967) were censured by the Superior General of the Jesuit Order due to

concerns about the orthodoxy of his views.³ However, by November 18, 1965, these same men had become *periti* of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and concelebrated the closing Mass with Pope Paul VI (1897–1978). A far-reaching transformation in the Catholic Church had occurred.

The Second Vatican Council was very much a council of conflict and compromise.⁴ Previously, Pope Pius XII (1876–1958) followed the practice of his predecessors and maintained Church order by a very strict system of ecclesiastical discipline. Pope John XXIII (1881–1963) and Pope Paul VI did not maintain this approach.

Many clerics and religious took advantage of their new, gentle leadership style and instituted radical reforms in their dioceses, religious

¹ Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 67-68.

² John Anthony Berry, “Yves Congar: Ecumenism and the Changing Face of Roman Catholicism,” in *Ecumenical Encounters*, Beihefte zur Ökumenischen Rundschau (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015), 158-169.

³ Joseph A. Komonchak, “The Silencing of John Courtney Murray,” *Cristianesimo nella storia*, ed. A. Melloni et al. (Bologna: Società Editrice il Mulino, 1997), 657-702.

⁴ For a fascinating analysis of key theological issues, see Thomas G. Guarino, *The Disputed Teachings of Vatican II: Continuity and Reversal in Catholic Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdsman Publishing Company, 2018).

institutes, and universities, using the call for ecclesial renewal from the Council as a justification for a revolution. A sharp reaction began almost immediately.

Archbishop Marcel François Marie Joseph Lefebvre, CSSp (1905–1991) created the Society of Saint Pius X in 1970 and ordained priests without approval from a diocesan bishop in 1976.⁵ In 1988, he gravely escalated the situation by consecrating four bishops without a Papal mandate. These consecrations constituted a schismatic act and therefore Lefebvre incurred the penalty of *excommunicatio latae sententiae* along with those who were consecrated.⁶ To understand the changes in the Catholic Church, one need not accept the disturbing claims by Archbishop Lefebvre and other conspiracy theorists that the Freemasons had hijacked an Ecumenical Council. The radical changes that took place in the Church in the mid-twentieth century can at least partially be understood as the result of a paradigmatic shift in the *philosophical* and *theological* foundations of Catholicism. In this paper, we analyze aspects of this transformation, specifically as it affected the theology of the act of faith.⁷

Twentieth Century Thomism

The philosophical and theological insights of the thirteenth century Dominican priest, Saint Thomas Aquinas, revolutionized Catholic thought in the Middle Ages and have had an enduring impact to this day. A persistent question over the last seven centuries has been to precisely define what ought to be the long-term legacy of Aquinas. In response to negative trends in modern philosophy and the resulting

loss of Christian faith in Europe, Pope Leo XIII promulgated the encyclical *Æterni Patris* in 1879. Leo gave pride of place to the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and the Neo-Scholastic method, as well as a return to the study of the Fathers of the Church. Leo writes,

Now, We think that, apart from the supernatural help of God, nothing is better calculated to heal those minds and to bring them into favor with the Catholic faith than the solid doctrine of the Fathers and the Scholastics, who so clearly and forcibly demonstrate the firm foundations of the faith, its divine origin, its certain truth, the arguments that sustain it, the benefits it has conferred on the human race, and its perfect accord with reason, in a manner to satisfy completely minds open to persuasion, however unwilling and repugnant.⁸

Furthermore, the Holy Father stated that “among the Scholastic Doctors, the chief and master of all towers Thomas Aquinas, who, as Cajetan observes, because ‘he most venerated the ancient doctors of the Church, in a certain way seems to have inherited the intellect of all’.”⁹

Æterni Patris assured that Neo-Scholasticism, or more colloquially “Thomism of the Strict-Observance,” became the norm at Catholic faculties throughout the world. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP (1877–1964) is widely regarded as the archetypal Neo-Scholastic theologian. In the early twentieth century, another intellectual movement emerged that challenged the Neo-Scholastics: the *Nouvelle théologie*,¹⁰ a subset of which included the Transcendental Thomists (our focus in this paper).¹¹ The Transcendentalists, such as Joseph

⁵ “Apologia pro Marcel Lefebvre,” *Society of Saint Pius X*, http://www.spxasia.com/Documents/Archbishop-Lefebvre/Apologia/Vol_one/Chapter_11.htm.

⁶ Congregation for Bishops, “Decree Remitting the Excommunication ‘Latae Sententiae’ of the Bishops of the Society of St Pius X,” 21 January 2009, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cbishops/documents/rc_con_cbishops_doc_20090121_rmissione-scomunica_en.html.

⁷ For some historical and theological background on the debates around the *actus fidei*, the reader is referred to Roger Aubert’s magisterial study, *Le Problème de l’acte de foi*, 2nd ed. (Louvain: E. Warny, 1950) and the highly respected work by Avery Cardinal Dulles, SJ, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁸ Leo XIII, *Æterni Patris*, par. 27, 4 August 1879, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris_en.html.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁰ Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie- New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 4.

¹¹ The *Nouvelle théologie* movement eventually became divided into two camps over the interpretation and implementation of the Council. Rahner, Congar, Schillebeeckx, Küng, and Chenu founded the more “progressive” theological journal, *Concilium*, in 1965, emphasizing the hermeneutic of discontinuity or rupture. On the other hand, de Lubac, Balthasar, Ratzinger, and others founding the theological journal, *Communio*, in 1972,

Maréchal, SJ (1878–1944), Karl Rahner, SJ (1904–1984), and in a different way, Bernard Lonergan, SJ (1904–84), attempted to show the compatibility of Thomistic thought with the principles and method of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) as well as other modern philosophers. Rahner, in particular, sought to present the Christian faith in a new way to secular, German academicians.¹²

All of the Transcendentalists believed that the Neo-Scholastic method and the manuals through which it was taught were not suitable for modern man and attempted to develop an alternative system.¹³ At the Second Vatican Council, elements of their thought were incorporated into conciliar documents through the influence of *periti* such as Rahner. By the close of the 1960s, Transcendentalists had well established themselves on Catholic theological faculties throughout the world.¹⁴

emphasizing a hermeneutic of reform (with continuity). See Benedict XVI, “Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia Offering Them His Christmas Greetings,” 22 December 2005, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia.html.

¹² George Weigel, “The Century after Rahner,” *Arlington Catholic Herald*, 10 February 2000, <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?id=2604&CFID=138859769&CFTOKEN=96452113>.

¹³ Louis Roy, *Transcendent Experiences: Phenomenology and Critique* (London: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

¹⁴ The Australian theologian, Tracey Rowland, notes that the intellectual tradition of Saint Thomas is “arguably one of the most significant of all such traditions for the study of Catholic theology.” Rowland, *Catholic Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2017), 54. She also observes that “the term ‘Neo-Thomism’ is the most nebulous of labels.” *Ibid.* This label can include Neo-Scholasticism, Transcendental Thomism, Existential Thomism, Lublin Thomism, Whig Thomism, New Natural Law Thomism, River Forest Thomism, Analytical Thomism, Augustinian Thomism, Fribourg Thomism, Toulouse Thomism, and other forms. Rowland introduces a helpful categorization by defining three “streams” that are dominant in contemporary Catholic theology.

“Stream One” is the Neo-Scholastic Thomism specifically encouraged by Pope Leo XIII and was embodied in the work of Réginald Marie Garrigou-Lagrange, OP. “Stream Two” includes the transcendentalists who seek in varying ways to

The Transcendentalist project attempted to redefine the foundations of Catholic doctrine on topics ranging from the Holy Trinity, to soteriology, to the act of faith itself. The act of faith, or more precisely, the exercise of divine faith, is a fundamental concept in the Christian religion which is often misunderstood in our current age. Therefore, it is helpful to look to the Neo-Scholastic synthesis on this topic which is the fruit of much reflection on the part of the Church and compare it with the new Transcendentalist system. After explicating the philosophical presuppositions of the two systems, the works of two prototypical theologians on the *actus fidei* will be analyzed: the Neo-Scholastic, Johann Brunsmann, SVD (1870–1936), and the proto-Transcendentalist, Pierre Rousselot, SJ (1878–1915).

PHILOSOPHICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS OF NEO-SCHOLASTIC THOMISM

Aristotle

The Neo-Scholastic system makes great use of the philosophical insights on the fourth century BC Greek philosopher, Aristotle. Aristotle attempted to resolve problems that he perceived in the system of his mentor, Plato. In particular, he was very critical of Plato’s “world of ideal forms.” In Aristotle’s view, the world is indeed intelligible and there is some consistency in all change. Man *knows* by the senses, not by remembering forms from another reality. In fact, sense knowledge allows man to know the *truth* of things. Things act according to *natures* and the *essence* of a thing is composed of *matter* and *form*. Aristotle’s forms are different than Plato’s in that they are dynamic, existing only in relation to matter (and matter is always related to form). Indeed, Aristotelian form expresses itself in matter.¹⁵

For Aristotle, matter is *relative* non-being and change is not annihilation and reincarnation. Rather, he reasoned that there must be a

incorporate Kantian epistemology into Thomistic thought. “Stream Three,” Existential Thomism, is concerned with the study of Thomistic principles in their historical context and focuses on the interpretation of *esse*. Marie-Dominique Chenu, OP, a student of Garrigou-Lagrange, helped establish the historical-contextualist reading of Thomas Aquinas based on preliminary work by Étienne Gilson in the 1940s.

¹⁵ Julián Marías, *History of Philosophy* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1967), 70.

principle of continuity in change. Therefore, Aristotle defined two types of change: *accidental* and *substantial*. Accidental change has the principle of continuity of substance. Substantial change has the principle of continuity of matter. But what causes change? In the Aristotelian system, a cause is a reason, a “Why?” Aristotle defined four causes:

- Material — Why *this* rather than *that*?
- Formal — Why are you such that you are?
- Efficient — Why are you moving or not?
- Final — For whose sake? i.e., Purpose

Fundamentally, Aristotle sought to explain motion. He posited a Prime Mover, i.e., god. Aristotle concluded that an object moves for two reasons:

- An object is moved by itself.
- An object is moved by another, but there can be no infinite regress in efficient causality. Therefore, there must be an unmoved mover.

Aristotelian form has no principle of change, unlike matter. The unmoved mover has no matter; it is all *act* with no *potency*. If there were potency, then it could be moved, and would not be the unmoved mover. Aristotle proposed that the unmoved mover causes the world through final causes, i.e., it draws the world to itself.¹⁶

Aristotelian knowledge is the knowledge of the forms. Form never exists separately from matter. Therefore, all knowledge comes to man through the senses. As a consequence, man must be capable of genuine learning, i.e., a process of abstracting the form from the matter. A robust theory of cognition emerges from this philosophical system:

- The five senses perceive the sensible single in the outside world.
- The *sensus comune* unifies the senses and presents this to the mind as an immaterial *phantasma* (i.e., a mental impression of the sensible single. This is neither the sensible single itself [e.g., John Smith himself] nor the universal of the sensible singular [e.g., man in general].)
- The (active) *intellectus agens* illuminates the *phantasma* which universalizes it, abstracting

the form and impressing it, the *species impressa*, upon the *intellectus passivus*.

- The *intellectus passivus* then produces a concept, or *species expressa*.¹⁷

The intellect’s return to the sensible single in the world is necessary for a judgment of truth because *veritas est adæquatio rei et intellectus*.¹⁸

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas synthesized the philosophical insights of Aristotle with the Catholic theological tradition that had been previously expressed in Platonic/Augustinian formulations. A starting point for Thomas was the name given by God to Himself when Moses encountered the Lord in the burning bush: יהוה, “I Am Who Am.”¹⁹ Aquinas described God as *ipsum esse subsistens*.²⁰ He brilliantly extended the Aristotelian system when he acknowledged that there is another order of reality besides essence, or forms. He recognized both the *existential* order and the *essential* order of reality. In the order of existence, one distinguishes between the act of being (*esse*), and potency of being (essence). In the order of essence, one distinguishes between the form (act), and matter (potency).

THE ACT OF FAITH IN BRUNSMANN

Johann Brunsmann, SVD

Johann Brunsmann was born in Austria on May 12, 1870. This was the same year in which the First Vatican Council was suspended due to the conquest of the Papal States by Lieutenant General Count Raffaele Cadorna on the orders of the King of Piemonte, Vittorio Emanuele II.²¹ Brunsmann professed vows with the *Societas Verbi Divini* and was ordained a priest in 1897.²² In 1924 he published the classic Neo-

¹⁶ Ibid, 72-78.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2017), bk. 3.

¹⁸ See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q 16, A 2 and Aquinas, *Quæstiones Disputatæ de Veritate*, I, 1.

¹⁹ Exodus 3:14 (RSV).

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1, Q 4, A 2.

²¹ “Raffaele Cadorna,” *Treccani.it L’Enciclopedia Italiana*, <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/raffaele-cadorna/>.

²² “Index Defunctorum Societatis Verbi Divini 1875-2010,” *Divine Word Missionaries*, <http://www.svdcuria.org/public/infonews/misc/obit/rip1875-.pdf>.

Scholastic manual, *Lehrbuch der Apologetik*. In 1928 it was translated into English by the German-American theologian, Arthur Preuss, with the title *A Handbook of Fundamental Theology*.²³ The book was divided into four volumes:

- A General Introduction to Fundamental theology. Natural Religion.
- Revealed Religion.
- The Church of Christ: Establishment, Nature, Properties, and Notes.
- The Teaching Office of the Church, Infallibility, Inspiration, Faith.

Definition and Division of Faith

In volume IV, Brunsmann begins his investigation of the act of faith by looking to Sacred Scripture. He points out that the Old Testament understanding of faith is very different than that of the New Testament. Often, faith-filled people of the Old Covenant, including Gentiles, were referred to as “God-fearing.” In the Septuagint, the word πιστις (*fides* in Latin), occurs twenty times. It usually signifies reliability, fidelity, security, or truth. Only once does it represent faith in the sense of belief. Πιστευνει (*credere* in Latin) is found thirty times and usually signifies: “to acknowledge the existence of God” or “to submit to the Divine laws.” Only in Genesis 15:6 is it used to mean “to believe.”²⁴

The situation in the New Testament is quite different. According to Brunsmann, faith “forms the foundation and pivot of religious conduct”²⁵ and always recognizes the sovereignty of God. The word πιστις occurs twenty-four times in the Synoptic Gospels. It is never found as a noun in John’s Gospel. The Synoptics often speak of πιστις as a confidence which has a firm belief as its basis. We see many times that “Christ praises the power of faith, when He attributes to faith corporeal cures or the forgiveness of sins, or when He rebukes the disciples for their lack of faith.”²⁶ Πιστευνει is found forty-five times in the Synoptics and 100 times in John’s Gospel.

The Synoptic Gospels usually use the verb to mean “to trust,” while John typically uses it to mean “to believe.” In the *Corpus Paulinum*, faith is the distinguishing mark of the Christian and typically signifies a firm assent to the truths revealed by God. Πιστις occurs 190 times and πιστευνει 100. The verb is often utilized to express “assent” in the religious sense. St. Paul also makes use of the word πιστος (*fidelis* in Latin) to mean faithful, loyal, reliable, truthful, trustworthy, or believing.²⁷

Modern philosophers have taken a very different approach to faith than the one offered by the Biblical witness. For example, John Locke (1632–1704) writes that faith is “an assent to undemonstrated propositions, based on subjective motives.”²⁸ David Hume (1711–1776) posits that faith is “a vivid imagination of the consciousness of existence on emotional grounds.”²⁹ Immanuel Kant describes faith as a “subjectively sufficient, but objectively insufficient assent, known to be such by the conscious mind.”³⁰ Finally, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) “relegates faith entirely to the sphere of emotion.”³¹ According to Brunsmann, “to the Modernist, faith is not an act of the intellect, but of the emotion, essentially a feeling and experience of the absolute, arising from the depths of the sub-consciousness.”³² The influence of Modernism is evident in the classical Protestant definition of faith—an expectant confidence of the already secured forgiveness of sins, in view of the merits of Christ, and therefore personal salvation.³³

The Church traditionally defined *faith* in a general sense as “a firm intellectual assent to the truth, given on the authority of another.”³⁴ While faith is a way of knowing, it is helpful to distinguish it from traditional *knowledge* for

²³ Johann Brunsmann, *A Handbook of Fundamental Theology* trans. Arthur Preuss, vol. 4 (St. Louis, MO: Herder, 1932).

²⁴ Brunsmann, 193.

²⁵ Ibid, 194.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, 195-197.

²⁸ Cited in Brunsmann, 197. Brunsmann draws these modern definitions of faith from Rudolf Eisler, “Glaube,” *Wörterbuch der philosophischen Begriffe*, vol. 1, 4th ed. (Berlin: Verlegt bei Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn, 1927).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid, 198.

³² Ibid, 198-199.

³³ Ibid, 199.

³⁴ Ibid.

“knowledge is always the product of internal evidence, whereas faith must content itself with authority.”³⁵ Thomas Aquinas writes, “Faith stands midway [between opinion and knowledge]: it exceeds opinion in that it has a firm assent; it falls below knowledge in that it does not have vision.”³⁶ The relationship of the will and the intellect is an important one in the act of faith. According to Brunsmann, “the will cooperates in the act of faith; but it does not furnish the ultimate motive of assent; it merely commands assent because the intellect recognizes the authority.”³⁷

Brunsmann distinguishes between *fides humana*, *fides divina*, and *fides ecclesiastica*. *Fides humana* is based on the authority of man while *fides divina* rests on the authority of God Himself. *Fides ecclesiastica* is established upon the infallible authority of the Church. It covers the truths that pertain to *fides et mores* but are not formally revealed by God. Chapter III of *Dei Filius* provides an excellent definition of *fides divina*:

This faith, which is the beginning of human salvation, the Catholic Church professes to be a supernatural virtue, by means of which, with the grace of God inspiring and assisting us, we believe to be true what He has revealed, not because we perceive its intrinsic truth by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God himself, who makes the revelation and can neither deceive nor be deceived.³⁸

The First Vatican Council referred to faith as a virtue or *habitus*. According to Brunsmann, “The act of faith grows out of the habit, which rests as a permanent ontological perfection in the faculties of the soul and has for its sole aim to facilitate the act.”³⁹ In the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas defines *fides divina* as “an act of the intellect assenting to divine truth at the command of the will, which is moved by the

grace of God.”⁴⁰ This concise definition encapsulates well the three components of the act of faith: intellect, will, and grace.

Another important distinction arises from the fact that one may speak of divine faith as either objective (*fides quæ*) or subjective (*fides qua*). *Fides quæ* is the object of the act and indicates the *depositum* of truths, while *fides qua* is the act of faith itself. The *fides qua* may be further divided into eight categories: *fides simpliciter divina*, *fides divina catholica*, *fides formata seu viva*, *fides informata seu mortua*, *fides explicita*, *fides implicita*, *fides actualis*, and *fides habitualis*. Simple divine faith (*fides simpliciter divina*) “has for its object revealed truths that have been made known to its bearer not through the Church, but directly by God Himself.”⁴¹ Catholic faith (*fides divina catholica*) is concerned with the truths proposed by the Church. The authority of God is the formal object of both acts so the difference between them is purely accidental.

Informed or living faith (*fides formata seu viva*) is the type which is motivated by the love of God. Faith that lacks this love is called “dead faith” (*fides informata seu mortua*). Explicit faith (*fides explicita*) is concerned with truths that one perceives in themselves while implicit faith (*fides implicita*) is an “assent to truth that we do not perceive in itself, but only as contained in another.”⁴² The final distinction is between actual faith (*fides actualis*) and habitual faith (*fides habitualis*). Actual faith (*fides actualis*) is the act of faith itself. Habitual faith (*fides habitualis*) is “the theological virtue by which the intellect is disposed to assent to the truths revealed by God.”⁴³

The Object of Faith

Neo-Scholastic formulations present the object of faith as twofold: formal, i.e., that which gives to it its relation to an act, and material, i.e., that to which an act can be directed. The *obiectum formale quo* “is that by means of which the material object, i.e. revealed truth, is attained by the intellect, or that which causes the intellect to

³⁵ Ibid, 200.

³⁶ “*Fides autem medio modo se habet, excedit enim opinionem in hoc, quod habet firmam adhaesionem; deficit vero a scientia in eo, quod non habet visionem.*” *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q 67, A 3.

³⁷ Brunsmann, 201.

³⁸ Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius*, can. 3: DS 1789.

³⁹ Brunsmann, 202.

⁴⁰ “*Ipsum credere est actus intellectus assentientis veritati divinæ ex imperio voluntatis a Deo motæ per gratiam.*” *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Q 2, A 9.

⁴¹ Brunsmann, 204.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

give its assent to a truth.”⁴⁴ God alone can be the formal object of faith for He is the *Supremus Dominus*. In fact, *Dei Filius* states that the motive of faith is the authority of God Himself who reveals (*auctoritas ipsius Dei revelantis*) for God can neither be deceived nor deceive (*nec falli nec fallere potest*).⁴⁵

Similarly, on the material object of faith, the First Vatican Council stated that “all those things are to be believed with divine and Catholic faith which are contained in the written or orally transmitted Word of God (*in verbo Dei scripto vel traditio*), and are proposed by the Church to be believed as divinely revealed truths.”⁴⁶ Divine faith is intimately connected with Catholic faith. By a sure commandment of Jesus Christ, the truths of revelation are to be proposed by the Catholic Church. Nonetheless, a very pertinent question remains: “When is a truth contained in the sources of revelation to be regarded as revealed?”⁴⁷ The Scholastic tradition tells us that a truth may be found in the founts of revelation either *formally* or *virtually*. A formally revealed truth may be expressed either *directly* or *indirectly*, e.g., in the form of two premises from which it follows as a logical conclusion. A truth that is virtually revealed is “not fully expressed therein, but only in one of the premises from which it may be deduced.”⁴⁸

Within the formally revealed category, a truth may be either explicit or implicit. A formally revealed truth may be implicit under a variety of conditions:

- If the defined truth or object (*definitum*) is explicitly revealed, its definition is implicitly revealed.
- If a physical whole (*totum physicum*) is explicitly revealed, its essential constituents and integral parts are implicitly revealed, for without them the whole as such could not exist.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 207.

⁴⁵ Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius*, can. 2: DS 1811.

⁴⁶ “*Fides divina et catholica ea omnia credenda sunt, quae in verbo Dei scripto vel traditione continentur et ab ecclesia...tamquam divinitus revelata credenda proponuntur.*” Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius*, chap. 3, para. 8: DS 1792.

⁴⁷ Brunsmann, 216.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 216-217.

- If a general proposition is expressly revealed in an absolute sense, the revelation includes all particular propositions falling under it.
- If both premises of a syllogism are expressly revealed, the logical conclusion that follows therefrom is implicitly revealed.
- If all the elements that enter into a collective truth are expressly revealed, then that collective truth itself is implicitly revealed.⁴⁹

Returning to the topic of truths revealed virtually, Brunsmann states that “a truth is contained virtually in the sources of revelation if it can be deduced from a revealed truth by means of a naturally perceived premise.”⁵⁰ He gives the following example:

Christ is a man (formally revealed)
Men need air to live (natural premise)
Christ needs air to live (*conclusio theologica*)

On the topic of the material object of faith, it is necessary for Catholics to maintain that there can be no *objective* development of revealed truths after the death of John the Apostle. However, there will always be *subjective* development in the life of the Church.

All formally revealed truths, whether they are explicit or implicit, belong to the material object of divine faith. Nonetheless, a *conclusio theologica*, such as the one stated above, cannot be the material object of divine faith. Rather, it is a theological conclusion which is proposed for belief as an article of faith by the Church’s infallible teaching office and should be received with ecclesiastical faith. There may also arise the case where the Church declares that a theological conclusion must be received with divine faith. In the words of Brunsmann, “This is a sure proof that it is not only virtually, but also formally, revealed by God, even though the theologians may not have agreed on the matter previously.”⁵¹

The aforementioned subjective development of doctrine occurs for the following reasons:

- Some truths are but obscurely contained in the sources of revelation;
- These truths were not clearly and distinctly proclaimed by the Church during the early centuries of her existence;

⁴⁹ Ibid, 217-218.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 219.

⁵¹ Ibid, 223.

- Some of them in [the] course of time were expressly defined as articles of faith, e.g., the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.⁵²

It is helpful to compare the subjective development of doctrine to the organic growth of an organism. According to Brunsmann, with the passing of time, “it manifests its true nature with ever increasing distinctness.”⁵³

The Act of Faith

The act of faith is an assent that is both supernatural and free and is produced in the soul by three distinct causes: the intellect, the will, and supernatural divine grace. According to Brunsmann, the intellect is the proper subject (*subiectum*) of the act of faith as well as its proximate cause. This fact is affirmed by *Dei Filius* which states that faith is the “supernatural virtue by which we hold revealed doctrines to be true.”⁵⁴ On the other hand, “the will, which has for its formal object not truth, but goodness, is externally connected with the act of faith, in as much as it issues the command to illicit that act after the intellect has proposed the assent of faith as a desirable good to the will.”⁵⁵ To use the traditional Scholastic language, “the material element [of the act of faith] is the adhesion of the intellect; the formal element is the determination of the will.”⁵⁶ One may say that the act of faith is free precisely because of the role of the will. Brunsmann states that “the freedom of faith manifests itself in the fact that the assent of the intellect, even after the reasonableness of faith and the duty to believe have been clearly perceived, *still* depends upon the free decision of the will.”⁵⁷

Nonetheless, the role of supernatural divine grace is absolutely essential:

Supernatural divine grace is necessary to put the act of faith into real relation with man’s supernatural end and to conduct him, so far as

the life of faith is concerned, to eternal salvation. Now since the free act of faith proceeds partly from the intellect and partly from the will, in making an act of faith these two faculties of the soul must both be supernaturally elevated and strengthened by grace.⁵⁸ (emphasis added)

The aforementioned proposition is a dogma of the Church as defined in *Dei Filius*, chapter III. But where is the salutary act of faith found? As evidenced by Sacred Scripture, it is an act of the intellect: “We have *believed*, and have come to *know*, that you are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:69 RSV) The Catholic Church has always affirmed that the salutary act of faith is an act of the intellect in contrast to the opinion of the Reformers who reduced the act of faith to an “expression of confidence in being justified through the merits of Christ.”⁵⁹ In conclusion, the salutary act of faith is posited at the

- *instigation* of the will, and
- *Performed* with the cooperation of divine grace.

For the demands of human reason to be met, the intellect and will must be sufficiently prepared to make the act of faith. Men and women of the twenty-first century do not enjoy the privilege of being a part of the Apostolic Age, receiving Divine teachings from the Lord Himself along the Sea of Galilee. Catholic Christians today receive the truths of the faith mediately, i.e., through the Magisterium of the Church. As a result, for one to assent to the teachings of the Church on the authority of God, one must be convinced of:

- The authority of the Church,
- The fact that there has been a revelation, and
- That revealed truths are proposed for our belief by the Church.⁶⁰

The First Vatican Council described the role of the Church in this way:

In order that the obedience of faith might be in harmony with reason, God willed that to the Interior help of the Holy Spirit there should be joined exterior proofs of His revelation, to wit,

⁵² Ibid, 229.

⁵³ Ibid, 230.

⁵⁴ “...*qua revelata vera esse credimus.*” Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius*, chap. 3, para. 1: DS 1789.

⁵⁵ Brunsmann, 234.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 236.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 238-239.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 241.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 247.

divine facts, and especially miracles and prophecies, which, as they manifestly display the omnipotence and infinite knowledge of God, are most certain proofs of His divine revelation adapted to the intelligence of all men...Nay, more the Church itself, by reason of its marvelous extension, its eminent holiness, and its inexhaustible fruitfulness in every good thing, its Catholic unity and its invincible stability, it is a great and perpetual motive of credibility, and an irrefutable witness of its own divine mission.⁶¹

At this point, it is appropriate to address the question of certitude in the context of the preparation for the act of faith. “Certitude is a state of mind in which we firmly adhere to truth on account of motives which exclude all fear of error. It is the quiet intellectual possession of the truth and, with regard to its objective foundation, may be of three species—*metaphysical, physical, or moral.*”⁶² Each of the three species may be further subdivided into *absolute* or *relative* certitude. Absolute certitude is “that which has such a complete and perfect objective foundation that it satisfies men of every degree of culture.”⁶³ On the other hand, relative certitude is “that which has an objective foundation that satisfies only such intellects as lack the understanding and consequently also the need of a more perfect objective grounding for their subjective stock of truths.”⁶⁴ The will acts in perfect conformity with reason in these scenarios because it commands the assent of the intellect to a revealed doctrine on the authority of God. This is why it is possible for children

and poorly educated adults to have genuine faith. Furthermore, according to Brunsmann, “what is here said of children and uneducated adults may be applied to many of those who are ordinarily regarded as educated, because, though well versed in secular lore, they lack the most elementary notions of religion.”⁶⁵

There are two distinct judgments of credibility related to the preparation for the act of faith: *iudicium credibilitatis* (judgment of credibility based on the authority of God) and *iudicium credenditatis* (practical judgment of man bound by the duty to assent). Theologians sometimes combine these two judgments under the term *iudicium credibilitatis*. Another aspect of the preparation for the act of faith is moral preparation. This may be done either directly or indirectly: “Indirectly, it removes the obstacles that bar the way to faith; directly, it cooperates in the act of faith.”⁶⁶ There are many obstacles such as prejudice, selfishness, pride, avarice, greed, immoderate craving for material possessions, voluptuousness, the pursuit of pleasure, sensual excess, fear of material losses, and a dislike of the Catholic religion. Proper motives can help an un-baptized person overcome such obstacles. These include a sincere desire for the truth, a grateful love of God coupled with a sincere wish to comply with the duties He imposes, and the realization of the errors of one’s own religion or well-founded doubts in its truth.

Analysis of the Act of Faith

Having explained the definitions, divisions, and preparations for the act of faith, it is now appropriate to conclude with some analysis. There are four different causes of the act of faith:

- The *material cause* of the act of faith is the adhesion of the intellect considered in itself in so far as it is still determinable and has not yet acquired a specific character.
- The *formal cause* is the authority of God, which lends to the assent of the mind its specific character of divine faith.
- The *efficient cause* is threefold:(1) the intellect, which in accepting revealed truth, posits the act of assent; (2) free will, which

⁶¹ “*Ut nihilominus fidei nostrae obsequium rationi consentaneum esset, voluit Deus cum internis Spiritus Sancti auxiliis externa jungi revelationis suae argumenta, facta scilicet divina, atque imprimis miracula et prophetias, quae cum Dei omnipotentiam et infinitam scientiam luculenter commonstrent, divinae revelationis signa sunt certissima et omnium intelligentiae accommodata...Quin etiam Ecclesia per se ipsa, ob suam nempe admirabilem propagationem, eximiam sanctitatem et inexhaustam in omnibus bonis fecunditatem, ob Catholicam unitatem, invictamque stabilitatem, magnum quoddam et perpetuum est motivum credibilitatis et divinae suae legationis testimonium irrefragabile.*” Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius*, chap. 3, para. 2, 7: DS 1790, 1794.

⁶² Brunsmann, 251.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 252-253.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 258.

commands this assent; and (3) divine grace, which furnishes the stimulus.

- The *final cause* of the act of faith refers to the will, from which the command to assent emanates, and consists in the direct and beatific vision of that to which faith merely assents on external authority.⁶⁷

These four causes are accepted by all Neo-Scholastic theologians but historically there was disagreement on the question of how the mind assents to the motive of faith, i.e., the authority of God revealing supernatural truths. There were traditionally four distinct theories:

- In giving the adhesion of divine faith, the mind assents to the formal object of that faith.
- The formal object of divine faith is perceived by immediate intuition.
- The formal object of divine faith is not perceived and believed in the act of faith itself, but in the operation of the intellect which precedes that act as its necessary preparation.
- The formal object of divine faith received the adhesion of the intellect as object *in se* at the instigation of the free will, which is illumined by an evident knowledge of the formal object, obtained from a consideration of the motives of credibility and of its supreme claim to our assent as a subjective condition, without which the intellect could not yield the assent of faith.⁶⁸

The first theory, attributed to Francisco Suárez, SJ (1548–1617), is untenable because the formal object of faith must be perceived, at least logically, before the material object. The second theory, attributed to John de Lugo, SJ (1583–1660), is untenable according to Brunsmann because “it is not true that God, by means of the doctrinal preaching of the Church, enforced by miracles, is immediately perceived and speaks at least mediately to the faithful.”⁶⁹ Finally, the third theory, advocated by Miguel de Elizalde, SJ (1616–1698), cannot be accepted for at least three reasons:

⁶⁷ Brunsmann, 265-280.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 265-280.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 273

- It assumes that the assent of faith does not extend to its formal object.
- Equally untenable is the further assumption that the assent of faith is absolutely certain because of the formal object.
- The contents of revelation can be assented to *only* on the authority of God, although this authority itself is affirmed on the strength of created motives.⁷⁰

The fourth theory, advocated by Anton Straub, SJ (1852–1931) seems to be very well founded, according to Brunsmann. He argues that it provides the most logical explanation of the act of faith and also reinforces its divine character. Based on this theory, Brunsmann concludes with the following analysis of the act of faith:

- The act of faith, by which the intellect assents to revealed truth, has for its motive or formal object, the authority of God, which is assented to in the same act.
- The assent give to the motive of faith does not, however, rest upon some other motive, but upon the authority of God as the sole formal object of faith.
- ...the preceding proofs of credibility are only the objective condition, and not the motive or cause, of the assent given. Moreover, the authority of God is not accepted for its own sake as a motive, but *in se* as object, because the assent of faith is given at the instigation of the will.
- But the act of faith must not, for this reason, be objectively ascribed to the will which dictates it, because as we have seen, the will, like the intellect, constitutes its subjective cause.
- It would be equally wrong to seek the motive of faith in the objective good that moves the will, because faith is an act of the intellect and, therefore, can have no other formal object but truth.
- Thus, the authority of God, to which the intellect assents at the instigation of the will, remains the sole, proximate, and ultimate motive of divine faith.⁷¹

Having thoroughly examined Brunsmann’s Neo-Scholastic analysis of the act of faith, we

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 278-279.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 285-286.

now explore the foundations of Transcendental Thomism and finally the Transcendentalist approach to the act of faith.

PHILOSOPHICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS OF TRANSCENDENTAL THOMISM

The modern philosopher, René Descartes (1596–1650), identified what he perceived to be metaphysical and epistemological problems in the Neo-Scholastic philosophical system. Inspired by Francis Bacon’s success in empirical science, he tried to develop a new way of doing philosophy. Descartes looked for an undeniable starting point for metaphysics from which he could deduce metaphysical principles with certainty. He eventually formulated the *Cogito ergo sum* as the clear and distinct idea on which to develop other ideas. In Descartes’ system, the *Cogito* is based on the fact that man cannot doubt that he himself is thinking.⁷² This is obviously a significant turn from the objective to the subjective.

A side-effect of Descartes’ new system was that the Scholastic unity that came from the concept of substantial form was lost. A dualism emerged: matter and spirit or brain and mind. After Descartes, the British Empiricists and the Continental Rationalists became the two dominant schools in European philosophy. The Empiricists such as John Locke, George Berkeley (1685–1753), and David Hume rejected Descartes’ starting point and asserted that all knowledge is sense knowledge; there are no universals. It was very difficult to develop a robust theory of causality for the Empiricists and they end up in the radical skepticism of Hume, effectively killing classical philosophical inquiry.⁷³ The great Continental Rationalists were Nicolas Leibniz (1646–1716), Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), and Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715). They believed in innate ideas and tried to apply mathematical reasoning to deduce practical principles from these ideas.⁷⁴

Immanuel Kant began his quest to defend human reason and the fruits of Isaac Newton’s work. He wrote the *Critique of Pure Reason* which is a defense of human reason. According to Kant, reality is *phenomenon* and *neumenon*. The *neumenon* is not knowable through reason.

⁷² Julián Marías, 210-223.

⁷³ Ibid, 247-260

⁷⁴ Ibid, 224-246.

One can only know the phenomenon because the mind comprehends sense impressions that are categorized according to the innate categories of the mind. According to Kant, we may speak of universality and objectivity. However, this is not because the mind accesses objective reality. Rather, we do so because everyone thinks in the same way. For Kant, objectivity is inter-subjective. “Pure reason” is not meant to bring man beyond sense perceptions. One can talk about universal laws not because one may actually know what is out there but because one may know how the mind works. Kant essentially radicalized the turn to the subjective that began with Descartes.⁷⁵

Kant also wanted to defend the existence of God and applied the categorical imperative⁷⁶ to this end. Unfortunately, his system ultimately suggests that objective reality is unknown and unknowable: the human mind is the arbiter of reality, e.g., subjectivism and relativism. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854), and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) criticized Kant and said that if the *neumenon* is unknown and unknowable, how do you know that it exists? The Kantian categories turn out to very limited and ultimately inadequate. These German idealists proposed a dialect of human thought, i.e., man knows through the categories but also can step outside the categories and notice them. Hegel suggested that man cannot explain this but his system described on the macroscopic level the relationship of God with the world. According to Hegel, God is alienated from Himself and resolves this alienation within history.⁷⁷

Hegel’s enigmatic ideas conformed to the spirit of the times and were well received in philosophical circles, eventually spawning the Romanticism movement. One of Hegel’s students, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872), posited that God was just a projection of man. Subsequently, Karl Marx (1818–1883) took Hegel’s idea of history and Feuerbach’s critical

⁷⁵ Ibid, 284-296.

⁷⁶ “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law.” Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals 3rd ed.* trans. James W. Ellington (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 30.

⁷⁷ Julián Marías, 307-329.

analysis and concluded that *money* is the meaning of the dialectical process of history.⁷⁸ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900) disagreed with the others and asserted that the only meaning in history is *power*.⁷⁹ Finally, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) stated that the only meaning in history is *sexual*. The Nazi philosopher, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), stopped trying to interpret history and Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre (1905–1980) declared that history and existence are meaningless.⁸⁰

In an attempt to adapt and reconcile the Thomistic tradition of the Church with modern philosophy, the Transcendental Thomists developed a new system that conformed to the Cartesian emphasis on the subject and Kantian epistemology. In particular, Karl Rahner systematized Transcendental philosophy in his theology. He wrote three books: *Spirit in the World* (an attempt to take Kantianism and explain how it is compatible with St. Thomas), *Hearers of the Word*, and *Foundations of Christian Faith*. In *Spirit in the World*, he goes through the Aristotelian/Thomistic theory of cognition and attempts to show how at each step Kant was really asserting the same thing. Rahner wanted to show that Kantian thought did not contradict the Catholic faith. To do this, he began his theological investigations with philosophical intuition, rarely using Sacred Scripture or the Fathers. In the following brief analysis of Rahner, we rely on the outstanding research of the Scottish theologian, Patrick Burke (1964–). Burke's scholarship in Rahner's foundational thought is *ne plus ultra*.

Rahner studied under Heidegger and took the Heideggerian starting point: the question. Man cannot question the question because he would be questioning. This reality cannot be questioned. Man questions all of being. The necessity of the question reveals that being may be able to be known because that which is unknowable cannot be questioned. According to Rahner, the relationship between being and knowing cannot be an accidental relationship; being and knowing must exist in an original unity: being *is* knowing and being is presence to

self, i.e., the knower and the known are the same.⁸¹

But if being is presence to self (knowing), how is it that being is questionable? The being that is in no way present to itself is matter. Thomas Aquinas called this prime matter. For Rahner, the concept of being must be variable and the intensity of knowledge is parallel to the intensity of being. Therefore, know ability is not the capacity to be known by rather it is the capacity to be present to self. The object of a knowing being is itself so there is no “bridging the gap” problem; there is no gap. How can man have knowledge of another? If it is true that being is knowing, then knowledge of another is only possible if the knower himself is the being of the other. He must enter into otherness. This is what is Rahner called sensibility. Man is already away from himself in matter. The very ability to question means that man is not lost in the other. He can place himself over the other. This means that he has come back to himself. The Neo-Scholastics called this the judgment (*conversio ad phantasma*).⁸²

This ability to “think” is manifested in the human capacity to form universals. Universals stand on the side of the knower and can be related to many things. Rahner asked how is it possible for man to form universals to show the judgment. His conclusion was that it must be the fruit of a different spontaneous act of the mind. Neo-Scholastic Thomists called this the agent intellect and stressed the existence of the essential, i.e., the concept. The form is liberated from the material substance in this process.

Rahner asserted that this is not true; we are not speaking of a literal liberation. Therefore, the formation of the universal is not a liberation but rather a recognition of the limitation and consequent repeatability of the sensibility intuitive object. But how is this possible? It is only possible if the intellect is already beyond the sensibility intuitive and has already comprehended all possibilities. In human knowing, the sensible object is recognized as

⁷⁸ Ibid, 331-340.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 362-364.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 425-441.

⁸¹ Patrick Burke, *Reinterpreting Rahner* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 3.

⁸² Rahner presents describes his understanding of the dialectal nature of sensibility in *Geist in Welt*. In this section we refer to Karl Rahner, *Geist in Welt*, 2nd ed., ed. Johannes Baptist Metz (Munich: Kösel, 1957). Also see Patrick Burke, *Reinterpreting Rahner*, 8-11.

limited and repeatable only in virtue of the fact that the intellect is already beyond it in its preapprehension of being. The universal is being reduced to a limitation of *esse*. This is a radical reinterpretation of *essentia* and a shift of emphasis from the essential to the existential. Rahner's model of cognition is the *a priori* structure of the mind but is only revealed *a posteriori*. According to Rahner, the essence of human knowledge is a return to oneself. Human self-presence begins in sensibility but the being which is present to itself is immaterial. Human knowing is peculiar because of the coming to self from sensibility. The return is a constant "coming from" matter.⁸³

In Rahner's system, spirit is the primordial element of man. Man's spirit has a potency to be completely present to himself. The intellect must present the means to make man present to himself. This is actualized through sensibility; the intellect must become sensibility. Rahner's sensibility is the *conversio ad phantasma* of the Neo-Scholastic Thomists. The object of Rahnerian metaphysics is absolute being, not God. His horizon of all being (*esse commune*) is distinct from God (*esse absolutum*). Metaphysics is the reflexive illumination of the ground of human knowing. Man is simultaneously in the world but by the fact that he is questioning always beyond it; he is the midpoint between the world and God. Rahner said that sensibility is not a passive faculty, for the Spirit goes out of itself into matter. *Sensibility is the judgment*. The spirit of man desires the horizon of all being. Spirit (mind) seeks the pre-apprehended horizon of all being (what the Neo-Scholastics called abstraction). Human knowing consists in the oscillation between the sensible singular and the horizon of all being. Because of man's pre-apprehension of all being, he sees that the sensible singular is limited. Sensibility is the judgment in which abstraction is a moment.⁸⁴

In conclusion, Rahner asserted that spirit, in virtue of its desire for the pre-apprehended horizon allows sensibility to emanate from itself. This emanation of sensibility is the primordial turning of spirit to matter—what Neo-Scholastics called the judgment. But because the essence of abstraction is the recognition of limitation (which occurs in virtue of the pre-apprehension), then when the spirit

allows sensibility to emanate from itself in the judgment, the abstraction has already occurred. So sensibility is the judgment within which is contained abstraction. Yet, Rahner insisted on the pure nature, the passive intellect, and the moment of abstraction to maintain the validity of concepts, so as not to fall into Modernism.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, some of his followers applied his epistemology and fell into Modernism because they did not maintain the validity of concepts, e.g., Hans Küng.

In Rahner's system, human nature is pure dynamic openness to all being. However, he also defines human nature as a static, conceptualizable reality which has a definable and proportionate end. These two definitions of human nature certainly seem to be in contradiction. Two other fundamental ideas for Rahner are those of "symbol" and "becoming as active self-transcendence." He asserted that all being is in itself plural and because of this, the plural moments within the unity must have an inner agreement. Being, as such, develops into plurality. This plurality which is originally still one is in agreement, because it is derivative within unity. This is in agreement and therefore expressive or symbolic. Being is necessarily symbolic to express itself; being expresses itself to be itself. This expression is what Rahner called the self-realization of the being: the expression causes what it expresses. All material being has parts and therefore all material being is plural in its unity. The novelty of Rahner's theory is that this plurality is not just the stigma of finite being. Instead, using the Trinity as his prime analogate, he argues for being as such. This conclusion follows from the original starting point where the question reveals that being is presence to self by sign, not simply identity.⁸⁶

Being as such symbolizes itself in matter in order to become itself. The body of man is the symbol of his spirit. How can one reconcile this with evolution? In a truly Hegelian way, Rahner stated that at the macroscopic level the spirit symbolizes itself in matter as part of the process of coming to itself only if matter is a moment in the actualization of spirit. However, the Church authoritatively teaches that the human soul is directly created by God. To answer this, Rahner said that man has to have a correct

⁸³ Burke, Reinterpreting Rahner, 11-15

⁸⁴ Ibid, 15-28.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 36-38.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 38-41

understanding of “becoming.” The horizon is therefore, as the term of man’s transcendence, an immanent component of the transcendence itself. The term is immanent in the process because it is transcendent. Rahner argued that matter evolves into spirit and that nevertheless the soul is directly created by God if we say that God, as the term of man’s transcendence, is immanent in the process of becoming, precisely by being transcendent of it.⁸⁷

The Transcendental methodology isn’t traditional, positive theology, e.g., starting with Scripture or Tradition. It begins with Kantian philosophy and then ends up with Catholic doctrine. The structure of human knowing is the structure of being in this system. It seems that God must be the horizon of all being in this Transcendental system. However, Rahner does not make this identification because he wants to hold the distinction between nature and grace. If man is oriented in his *natural* transcendence to God, then there is no natural end of man and the distinction between nature and grace is collapsed. The assertion of this natural transcendence to God may lead some to negate the necessity and unicity of Jesus Christ who offers salvation by the gift of supernatural grace. Rahner did not intend this conclusion but Johann Baptist Metz (1928–), the “grandfather of liberation theology,”⁸⁸ and some of Rahner’s other students followed his thought in that direction. Rahner himself ultimately said that the *desire* for God is supernatural (an effect of grace) but everyone always and everywhere already has it. Grace is a “supernatural existential,” but not *intrinsic* to man, so the grace—nature distinction is maintained.⁸⁹ Having explicated the fundamentals of Rahner’s Transcendental Thomism, we now may carefully analysis Rousselot’s approach to the act of faith.

THE ACT OF FAITH IN ROUSSELOT

Rousselot’s Novelty and the Context of His Work

In 1910, the French theological journal, *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, published an article by the proto-Transcendentalist, Pierre Rousselot, SJ, entitled “Les Yeux de la Foi”

(The Eyes of Faith).⁹⁰ The article radically departed from the method and doctrine of Thomas Aquinas and was regarded as an attack on the Neo-Scholasticism of the early twentieth century. It immediately led Hippolyte Ligeard, a specialist in the history of the treatises on faith and apologetics in the Middle Ages, to write a response that was published in the same journal.⁹¹ Additionally, one of Rousselot’s former professors, Stéphane Harent, SJ, published a criticism in the *Dictionnaire de Theologie Catholique*.⁹²

Hans Boersma points out that Rousselot questioned what he perceived to be the “firmly entrenched rationalist approach”⁹³ of the Neo-Scholastics, perhaps exemplified in the teaching of *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* by Pope Pius X (1855-1914) in 1907. Although still self-identifying as a Thomist, Rousselot argued for a restrained epistemology “in which the intellect aimed beyond discursive knowledge at union with God.”⁹⁴ Essentially, Rousselot posited that man could only acquire true knowledge in an indirect way by stressing the continuity between the natural and supernatural. He believed that exclusively rational judgments of the credibility of Christian faith were useless without the assisting “eyes of faith,” thus implying in the words of Boersma, “a sacramental view of the natural order as pointing to the supernatural end of the beatific vision.”⁹⁵ In Rousselot’s own words, “If our explanation has any merit, it is that of according love an essential role in the act of faith without, however, working any detriment to the most rigorous intellectuality...It

⁹⁰ Pierre Rousselot, “Les Yeux de la foi,” *Recherches de sciences religieuses* 1 (1910): 241-250, 444-475; *The Eyes of Faith*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990).

⁹¹ Hippolyte Liegeard, “La crédibilité de la Révélation d’après saint Thomas,” *Recherches de sciences religieuses* 5, no. 1 (1914): 40-56.

⁹² Stéphane Harent, “Foi,” in *Dictionnaire de Theologie Catholique*, vol. 6, ed. Jean Michel Alfred Vacant and Eugene Mangenot (Paris: Letouzey and Ané, 1920), 55-514.

⁹³ Hans Boersma, “A Sacramental Journey to the Beatific Vision: The Intellectualism of Pierre Rousselot,” *Heythrop Journal*, 49, no. 6 (2008): 1015.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 41-46.

⁸⁸ George Weigel, “The Century after Rahner,” 2010.

⁸⁹ Burke, *Reinterpreting Rahner*, 53-60

is precisely intelligence, corrupted by sin, that is set free by supernatural love.”⁹⁶

Rousselot’s thought would later be taken up as part of the *nouvelle théologie* movement. His work was of particular interest to the French theologian, Henri-Marie de Lubac, SJ. He was also very influential for Karl Rahner. In fact, in his preface to *Geist in Welt*, Rahner stated that “if Pierre Rousselot and Joseph Maréchal are mentioned more than others, this should emphasize that I feel the work particularly indebted to the spirit of their interpretation of Thomas.”⁹⁷ Rousselot, Maréchal, and Rahner are unique in that they all “built their philosophical theologies on the mind’s inherent dynamism toward God,”⁹⁸ rather than the Aristotelian-Thomistic synthesis.

In “The Eyes of Faith,” Rousselot begins with a series of questions addressing the position that must be held with regard to the act of faith, namely, that it is a *reasonable* human act but nonetheless requires Divine *grace*. How does this come about? “For grace is found wherever there is a holy will, but beliefs seem to arise and to become organized either in line with the views of natural reason or under the random influence of phenomenal life.”⁹⁹ Aquinas shed light on this issue when he wrote, “Faith arises mainly by being infused, and from this point of view it is given through Baptism; but as for its specification, that comes from hearing, and thus man is taught faith by the catechism.”¹⁰⁰

The First Vatican Council’s condemnation of the rationalism of Georg Hermes (1775–1831) and the sentimentalism of the Protestants is relevant to this subject. Hermes’ rationalism was condemned in three definitions of *Dei Filius*, as follows:

⁹⁶Rousselot, *The Eyes of Faith*, 60.

⁹⁷ Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World* trans. William Dych (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 9.

⁹⁸ Drew Christiansen, “On the Slope with Teilhard: Lessons on Spirit and Matter,” *America Magazine*, 13 December 2010, http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=12613 accessed 7 March 2012.

⁹⁹ Rousselot, 22.

¹⁰⁰Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis IV*, Q 2, A 2, So. 3, ad 1.

1.5 If anyone denies that the world was made for the glory of God, let him be anathema.¹⁰¹

3.5 If anyone says that the assent of Christian faith is not free, but necessarily results from arguments of human reason; or that the grace of God is only necessary for living faith, which works through charity, let him be anathema¹⁰²;

3.6 If anyone says that the position of the faithful and of those who have not yet reached the only true faith is the same, so that Catholics could have good reason for suspending their assent and calling into question the faith that they have already accepted under the teaching authority of the church, until they have completed a scientific demonstration of the credibility and truth of their faith, let him be anathema¹⁰³;

With regard to the issue of sentimentalism, *Dei Filius* stated in Canon 3.3 that “If anyone says that Divine Revelation cannot be made credible by external signs, and that therefore men and women ought to be moved to faith only by each one’s internal experience or private inspiration, let him be anathema.”¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the challenge for fundamental theology is to “explain the meeting of infused faith (supernatural power of knowing) with dogmatic faith (the ensemble of objects known).”¹⁰⁵

New Approach

According to Rousselot, most theologians reduce the normal act of faith to state that:

- The supernatural act of faith virtually contains and elevates the natural act of faith, or
- It has at least been preceded by a natural authentication of the fact of revelation.¹⁰⁶

However, the problem is not completely resolved, according to Rousselot, because how does one explain the faith of children or poorly catechized adults? In most attempts to resolve this dilemma, and others, Rousselot believed that theologians tended to focus exclusively on

¹⁰¹Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius*, can. 1, 5: DS 1805.

¹⁰²Ibid, can. 3, para. 5: DS 1814.

¹⁰³ Ibid, can. 3, para. 6: DS 1815.

¹⁰⁴Ibid, can. 3, para. 3: DS 1812.

¹⁰⁵ Rousselot, 23.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 24.

“*id quod repraesentatur* (that which is represented), and never mentioned the *lumen, id quod inclinatur ad assensum* (light, that which moves us to assent).”¹⁰⁷ He proposed what is perhaps a simpler example, dealing with empirical, scientific knowledge to make his point. Two scientists may have the same evidence set before them and therefore hold the same mental representation in their minds. What distinguishes the scientist who makes the breakthrough discovery is the power of his intellectual activity. Similarly, the difference between the Christian and the *non-credente* lies not necessarily in their mental representation of the *fides quæ* but in the presence or absence of the *lumen fidei* (light of faith). While the *determinatio fidei est ex auditu* (determination of faith is from hearing), the *lumen fidei* “accounts for our perceiving the connection, making the synthesis, [and] giving the assent.”¹⁰⁸

Rousselot sought an explanation of the act of faith that is highly integrated and does not admit a judgment of credibility before assenting to a proposition. Therefore, he insisted that the “perception of credibility and belief in truth are identically the same act.”¹⁰⁹ Two scriptural verses were offered to support this argument: Thomas the Apostle’s exclamation, “My Lord and My God,” in John 20:28 and the Centurion’s affirmation that “truly this man was the Son of God,” in Mark 15:39. To further understand his reasoning, it is helpful to distinguish between the formal object of natural intelligence, i.e., natural being, and the formal object of the knowledge of faith, i.e., supernatural being. According to Rousselot, with the help of God’s grace, man may come to know things beyond his natural end and in fact contemplate the vision of God. From the point of view of everyday experience, Rousselot mentions the experience of visiting Rome:

Many in our time have *seen Rome*, i.e., a marvelously human, surpassingly reasonable, and civilizing institution, and have *believed in the Church*, i.e., the mother of the children of God, the spouse of Christ, and teacher of salvation. The two kinds of knowledge are very different, and the former often occurs with the

latter. And yet, Rome is the Church, and the Church is Rome.”¹¹⁰

Consistent with his focus on the mind’s inherent dynamism toward God, Rousselot asserts that the two formal objects, the natural and the supernatural, are “neither *opposed* nor *disparate*” and that “the supernatural being we are speaking of is natural being, but elevated.”¹¹¹ He continues, “In the final analysis the essence of natural being consists in its essential aptitude to serve as a means for created spirits to ascend to God, their final end; the essence of supernatural being, in its aptitude to lead them to God, object of the beatific vision. The two ‘formal objects’ are no more opposed or disparate than the two ends are.”¹¹²

In the second part of his article, after having already suggested how the act of faith can be both *reasonable* and *supernatural*, Rousselot begins an analysis to show how it can lead to *certitude* while preserving human *freedom*: “Either you see with certitude that God has spoken, or you do not see it with certitude. In the first case, how can the assent be free? And in the second, how can its certitude be legitimate?”¹¹³ Voluntarists tend to resolve the problem by saying, “Believe blindly first, and afterward you will see.” While the voluntarist approach may seem to save freedom, it clearly does violence to intelligence. Many theologians say, “See clearly first, and afterward you will believe.”¹¹⁴ That is, learn the fact of Revelation and the Divine origin of the Catholic Church, concluding that this is *believable*. Afterward, with God’s help, you will say, “I *believe*.”

However, Rousselot does not think that this approach appropriately guards freedom.¹¹⁵ He wants to show that the following two statements are *simultaneously* true:

- It is because man wills that he sees the truth.
- It is because man sees the truth that he wills.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 26.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 28.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 31

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 33-34.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 34

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid, 45.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 46.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 47.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 48.

He takes essentially a *via amoris* approach:

A love, a passion, an appetite, may thoroughly impart its own coloration to the whole world of perceived objects, so much so that it powerfully influences, nay, even transforms, our judgments about “things in themselves.” A man in the grip of passion sees things with new eyes, sees in them a new formal object... In this spontaneous emergence of a totally willed evidence, fullness of certitude would go hand in hand with fullness of freedom.¹¹⁷

Rousselot asserts that “the act constitutes an indivisible unity” and “in no way jumbles up the ‘formal aspects’ of knowledge and volition.”¹¹⁸ The relationship between the properties of freedom and certitude are described as a “circumincession” in which “a reciprocal causality runs between the homage one chooses to render to God and the perception of supernatural truth. Love arouses the faculty of knowing and by the same stroke knowledge justifies that love.”¹¹⁹

Rousselot preemptively addresses the Neo-Scholastic objection that in the pursuit of speculative truth, sentimental influences must be excluded. He defines reason as “nothing other than a pure love of Being” and then posits that “God has made our spirit naturally *sympathetic to being as such*.”¹²⁰ Next, Rousselot proceeds to rebuke any effort to corrupt this natural way of knowing, no doubt provoking the ire of his Neo-Scholastic peers. Later, he takes his position even further by asserting that “the rectitude of our intelligence, when it knows with certainty, comes entirely from the fact that God has inspired it with a natural inclination to the First Truth, that is, to Himself.”¹²¹ He acknowledges that if speculative reason took as its norm *any* inclination whatsoever, fanaticism would result. Therefore, to protect his approach, he declares that:

Man has a right to trust affective tendencies absolutely, as much as or more than his intelligence; he may garb himself in this willed love as in a new nature and make absolute judgments in accord with it only if he knows

with certainty that this new love comes from God.¹²²

Continuing to depart from the Neo-Scholastic method, he claims that “rational evidence itself no longer has the right to direct our absolute judgments, any more than the will does to be religious.” In summary, Rousselot describes his new doctrine in this way:

In the act of faith love needs knowledge as knowledge needs love. Love, the free homage to the supreme Good, gives us new eyes. Being, become more visible, delights the beholder. The act is reasonable since the perceived clue summons the natural order as witness to the new truth. The act is free, since man, if he chooses, can refuse to love his supernatural Good.¹²³

CONCLUSION

While clearly a founding member of the Transcendentalist school, the theological method and conclusions of Pierre Rousselot are not as much a departure from the Catholic theological tradition as some of the later Transcendental figures, such as Rahner and his students. It is evident nonetheless that his approach to the act of faith presents significant novelty. Rousselot’s emphasis on the role of love in the act of faith is especially appealing to contemporary man. It also eliminates the complicated schemata of the Neo-Scholastics that explain the relationship of intellect, free will, and supernatural grace. His highly synthetic approach is attractive because it suggests that man acquires a “*habitus*” of love toward God that enables an act of faith which is both free and certain.

On the other hand, the Neo-Scholastic tradition, as expressed in the popular manual of Brunsmann, cannot be considered to be surpassed by “*Les Yeux de la Foi*.” The composite schemata of the Neo-Scholastics *precisely* define the material object of faith and the degree of assent that is required by the faithful. It is not surprising therefore that when Roman Catholic clergy were educated using the Neo-Scholastic manuals there was significantly less theological dissent throughout the world. These manuals clearly showed with compelling arguments the supernatural character of the Church and the fact that the Lord willed for His

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 49.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 50.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 52.

¹²¹ Ibid, 54.

¹²² Ibid, 55.

¹²³ Ibid, 56

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Church to infallibly teach on faith and morals as they are contained *in verbo Dei scripto vel traditio*. While acknowledging the merit of Rousselot's *via amoris* and its contribution to

theology, Catholic universities and seminaries would do well to share with their students the rich tradition of the Neo-Scholastics so that they may profit from their clarity and precision.

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