

St. Thomas Aquinas on the nature of faith

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Aquinas' s conception of faith is worth examining as a whole. His views on the nature of faith and its relation to knowledge are of importance both in connection with his views on the motives of credibility and as influencing later discussions on this topic.

Two crucial aspects of his thought need to be set out in order to provide the background for his conception of faith.

The first is his Aristotelian conception of the mind' s activity. He held mental activity to be the actualization of a power of the soul. Human knowledge thus results from the actualization of a human power. He distinguishes (*De Veritate* q. 11 a.1) between two ways in which something can pre-exist in potency in natural things. One way is as an active and completed potency, which has the power to realize a perfect act; an example would be healing, where a sick person is restored to health by the natural power within him. The other way is as a passive potency, which does not have sufficient power to act; an example would be the power to burn in something that can only burn if set on fire by another thing. The power to know is a power in the active sense. This power is implanted in us by God as a likeness of uncreated truth; divine truth speaks in us by the impression of its likeness.

This conception of knowledge is radically different from the Christian Platonist understanding of knowledge as resulting from divine illumination that is found in Augustine and most of the other Fathers. For them, the Logos himself, rather than a power created by God in the human mind, was thought of as the source of the divine illumination that gives rise to knowledge. As we have seen, the fact that these Fathers thought of all knowledge as resulting from an illumination of the mind by the Logos meant that they did not see any difficulty in classifying faith as knowledge, since faith is also an illumination produced by the Logos, and that they did not consider

arriving at knowledge through faith as fundamentally different from other ways of acquiring knowledge. The adoption of an Aristotelian conception of knowledge means that the question of what makes faith rational arises much more clearly and sharply than it did for the Platonist Fathers.

The second aspect of Aquinas' s thought that needs to be considered is his understanding of grace. Medieval theologians had arrived at a more precise conception of grace than that found in their patristic predecessors. This conception was developed in the course of trying to describe what distinguishes grace from nature. All agreed that grace was a free and undeserved gift of God. But since our creation is a free and undeserved gift of God, what is there to distinguish grace from the other gifts of God, and give it a definite character that would prevent it from simply being God' s act of creation in general? Augustine had already gone part of the way towards answering this question, by saying that grace confers a gift that surpasses the powers of even unfallen human nature. Medieval theologians brought a further precision to his answer by defining grace as a free undeserved gift of some good that surpasses not only human nature but all (actual or possible) created nature. Such gifts were later termed 'supernatural' . (Gifts that surpass human nature but not all created nature are merely 'preternatural' .) This understanding of the supernatural character of grace provided an explanation of the claims in the New Testament and patristic tradition that sanctification conferred a certain participation in the divine nature. Aquinas held this view of grace as a conferring of supernatural gifts.

The different kinds of grace fall into one of two categories, that of *gratia gratis data* and *gratia gratum faciens*. *Gratia gratum faciens* is grace that is given for the sanctification of the person who receives it; *gratia gratis data* is grace that does not as such sanctify the person who receives it, but is rather given for the sanctification of others besides him (an example would be the gift of prophecy).¹ Aquinas' s classification of the various aspects of sanctifying grace is shaped by the Aristotelian character of his anthropology. The most fundamental aspect of sanctifying grace is a change in the nature of the soul, that is brought about by God. From

¹ Aquinas does not always give these meanings to the terms *gratia gratis data* and *gratia gratum faciens*, but I use them with these meanings because of the usefulness of doing so, and because these are the meanings that the terms took on in later theology.

this change in the nature of the soul spring the infused virtues. These include both the infused theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, and the infused moral virtues. In addition to the infused virtues, there are the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are not active powers that enable people to act on their own, but rather capabilities that give the power to be moved to act by the Holy Spirit. (Compare a guitar that has strings to one that does not. If a guitar has strings, it can produce a musical note when they are plucked; if it does not have them, it cannot produce such a note. But even if it has them, it cannot produce a note on its own. It can only do so if someone plucks it. The gifts of the Holy Spirit in St. Thomas' s view are analogous to the strings on a guitar: the notes are analogous to good actions produced by the exercise of the gifts; and the plucking is analogous to the action of the Holy Spirit on the person.) All these graces are properties that cannot belong to the nature of any created being, and cannot be caused by any created being.

The main sources for Aquinas' s conception of faith are his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* (henceforth *Sent.*), the *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (henceforth *D. V.*), and the *Summa theologiae*, although useful material can be found in many other works.² There are some differences between his earlier and later works, but no substantial changes. Instead of earlier and later positions on what it is that leads us to have faith, we can discern two rather different accounts of faith that exist side by side in both his earlier and later works, and that are not entirely reconcilable one with another.³

The first account considers faith from the standpoint of what it is that is believed, the propositions that Aquinas calls the material object of faith. It describes faith in revealed propositions as an act of the intellect, commanded by the will, that lies between knowledge (*scientia*) and opinion (*opinio*).⁴ This follows Hugh of St. Victor in holding faith to be between knowledge and opinion, but rejects Hugh' s contention that faith is substantially in the will as opposed to in

² For a discussion of Aquinas' s views on faith that considers virtually all the relevant passages in his works, see the excellent monograph by Benoît Duroux O.P., *La psychologie de la foi chez St. Thomas d' Aquin* (Tournai: Desclée, 1963).

³ The first position is more explicitly set out in his earlier works, the *Commentary on the Sentences* and the *De Veritate*, than it is in the *Summa theologiae*, where the second position is more prominent. There is however nothing in the *Summa* that is incompatible with the earlier position, so we cannot talk about a change of mind concerning it. As far as I can discover, this contention that Aquinas gave two different accounts of faith has not been asserted by previous scholars.

⁴ See e.g. *D. V.* q. 14 a. 2, *In Heb.* c. 11, l. 1.

the intellect (cf. *D. V.* 14, 4). Some account of what is meant by ‘knowledge’ and ‘opinion’ needs to be given here; the concepts that St. Thomas has in mind here are not well translated by the English words used for them.

There is no one term used by Aquinas that expresses the meaning of the English word ‘knowledge’. The modern philosophical conception of knowledge – or rather of propositional knowledge – would include two different words used by St. Thomas, that describe two different cognitive acts. The first sort of act, *intellectus*, is the grasp of self-evident principles whose truth is known as soon as the meaning of the terms that make them up is known. The second sort of act, *scientia*, is the knowledge of propositions that are known to be true through being deduced from principles that are known through *intellectus*. In both *intellectus* and *scientia*, there is no choice about whether to believe; the object – the proposition – grasped in these acts compels the mind to assent, leaving no possibility of doubt concerning it, and puts an end to questioning. *Scientia*, unlike *intellectus*, involves discursive thought, but the role of discursive thought is to bring about *scientia* through deduction. Once *scientia* is arrived at, the discursive thought that brought it into being comes to an end (cf. *D. V.* q.14, a.1).

Opinio does not mean what is meant by the English word ‘opinion’. *Opinio*, according to Aquinas (*D. V.* q.14, a.1), happens when the intellect accepts one of two contradictory universal propositions, but is not fully determined to it, and still has some fear of the other’s being true. Its counterpart for propositions about particulars is *suspicio*.⁵ The fear involved in opinion may be weak enough to admit of a kind of certitude. In discussing the degree of evidence needed by a court, St. Thomas states that when it comes to singular contingent things we cannot achieve the certainty of a demonstration, and should be content with ‘probable certitude’, *probabilis certitudo*.⁶ The probable evidence that grounds opinion is

⁵ *In VII Ethicorum*, l. 3; ‘...virtutes intellectuales sunt habitus, quibus anima dicit verum...Ab horum autem numero excludit suspicionem, quae per aliquas coniecturas habetur de aliquibus particularibus factis; et opinionem quae per aliquas coniecturas habetur de aliquibus universalis. Quamvis enim per ista duo quandoque verum dicatur tamen contingit quod eis quandoque dicitur falsum, quod est malum intellectus, sicut verum est bonum intellectus. Est autem contra rationem virtutis, ut sit principium mali actus. Et sic patet quod suspicio et opinio non possunt dici intellectuales virtutes.’ Aquinas (1949), pp. 314-5.

⁶ *2a2ae*, 70, 2; ‘Respondeo dicendum quod secundum Philosophum in I Eth., ‘certitudo non est similiter quaerenda in omnia materia’. In actibus enim humanis, super quibus constituuntur iudicia et exiguntur testimonia, non potest

however not sufficient to compel belief, and opinion does not bring to an end discursive thought on the proposition believed.

Faith lies between *scientia* and *opinio* because it has the assent (*assensus*) that belongs to *scientia*, but it has the lack of evident truth in its object that belongs to *opinio*. By ‘assent’ is meant a firmness of belief in the truth of a proposition that rules out any fear of its not being true. Such assent is brought about either by the proposition that is the object of belief, or by the will. The object of belief brings about assent through being evident, either through *intellectus* or *scientia*. The propositions that are the object of faith are not evident. (Some revealed propositions, like the existence of God, can be known by *scientia* and thus become evident, but the person who comes to know them in this way ceases to have faith in them; see e.g. *2a2ae* 1, 4). Since they are not evident, faith does not bring about an end to discursive thought concerning their truth, as *scientia* does. What causes the assent of faith is the choice of the will, a choice that is motivated by the fact that we are promised eternal life as the reward for believing.⁷ The desire for eternal life that motivates this choice need not be charity (which is the love of God, considered as he is in himself rather than as the creator of the universe, above all created things); if this desire had to be charity, it would be impossible to have faith and to sin, because sin banishes charity. Charity is a love, and love is an enjoyment of what is already possessed, but a desire is a movement of the appetite seeking a promised good, that need not actually be possessed (*D. V.* 14, 2 ad 10). A desire for eternal life is compatible with a rejection of it through sin, which is what makes it possible for people to have formless faith, and for people to be converted and choose to believe before they have charity. However, in formed faith, the faith that merits and justifies, the motive for the choice to believe is charity. That is why charity is said to be the form of faith. Voluntary acts get their nature from their end, which is the object of the will, the state of affairs the will seeks to realize in acting; this end is like the form of natural things (‘form’ here is the essential nature of a thing). The object of the will in a perfected act of faith is the divine good which is loved with charity (*2a2ae* 4, 3). In justifying faith, which brings salvation, this love is what moves the will to

habere certitudo demonstrativa, eo quod sunt circa contingentia et variabilia. Et ideo sufficit probabilis certitudo, quae ut in pluribus veritatem attingat, et sic in paucioribus a veritate deficiat.’ Aquinas (1943), vol. 3, p. 1789a-b.

⁷ *D. V.* 14, 1; ‘Et sic etiam movemur ad credendum dictis Dei in quantum nobis repromittitur, si credideremus, praemium aeternae vitae.’ Aquinas (1972), p. 437.

believe.⁸ The action of believing God, then, will also be an action of loving God, and it will be on account of the latter feature of the action that the believer will choose to do it. The natural order of the action that leads to faith is that first we have an understanding of God, which pertains to the knowledge that precedes faith; then we wish to reach him; then we wish to love him.⁹

Faith is not a moral or intellectual virtue, but a theological virtue (*D. V.* 14, 3). It is a theological virtue because it has God as its immediate object and because it merits eternal life. It cannot be a moral virtue because it has the intellect, not the will, as its subject, and because it does not, as moral virtues do, have as its object a good that is achievable through natural human powers. The intellect is the subject of faith because it is the intellect that actually does the act of believing, although it does so at the command of the will. Aquinas' s most extensive discussion of why faith is not an intellectual virtue occurs in his early work, the *Commentary on the Sentences*. He considers the following arguments for faith' s being an intellectual virtue (*3 Sent.* d.23, q.11. a.3, q1a. 3);

1. An intellectual virtue has the intellect as its subject. But faith has the intellect as its subject; so it is an intellectual virtue. [Presumably this argument assumes the premise that faith is a virtue.]
2. The articles of faith that faith is concerned with are like the principles of other sciences. But grasp of principles is an intellectual virtue; so faith is an intellectual virtue.
3. An intellectual virtue, as Aristotle says, is a virtue through which one always makes true judgements. But faith cannot embrace falsehood; so faith is an intellectual virtue.

His reason for denying that faith is an intellectual virtue is that it belongs to the nature of a virtue that it reach its final goal not only with respect to its action, but also with respect to its mode of action. The good and final goal of the intellect is truth. It does not suffice for faith to be an intellectual virtue that we know the truth

⁸ This is concisely put in *3 Sent.* d.23 q.2 sol.2 ad 4; 'amando credere est actus fide per caritate motae ad actum suum.' Aquinas (1933), vol. 3, p. 728.

⁹ *3 Sent.* d.23 q.2 a.5 ad 5; 'Unde iste est naturalis ordo actuum, quod prius apprehenditur Deus - quod pertinet ad cognitionem praecedentem fidem - deinde aliquis vult ad eum pervenire, deinde amare vult, et sic deinceps...' Aquinas (1933), vol. 3, p. 740.

through it; the act of faith through which we arrive at truth would also have to perfect the intellect with respect to its mode of action. The goodness of the mode of action of the intellect is not achieved through its operation being commanded by a good will, as happens in faith. Rather, St. Thomas - following Aristotle - holds that it consists in the intellect's grasping its object as true, either by grasping it as true in itself - self-evidently true - or by analyzing it into something that it grasps as true in itself. Faith causes the intellect to reach its final goal through making it assent to first truth, but it does not cause it to reach its goal through the mode of action that is proper to the intellect; it does not cause the articles of faith to be seen as true in themselves (which is why believing the articles of faith is not like grasping the principles of a science). Thus, it is not an intellectual virtue. (*3 Sent.* d.23, q.1, a.3, sol. 3.)

Aquinas seems to have felt the difficulty in saying that although faith is in the intellect, and is not an intellectual virtue, it is nonetheless a virtue. He responds to this difficulty by saying that when two powers are ordered to one another, the perfection of the lower power lies in its being subject to the higher one. Thus, for example, the virtue of the concupiscible appetite lies in its being subject to reason. Faith can be said to be a virtue in the intellect, because it subjects the intellect to the will when the will commands it to achieve the good of eternal life through believing, and the good of the intellect lies in its being subject to the will adhering to God.¹⁰ One might ask; why is it that in this case the will is the higher power, and the intellect is the lower? The answer, in Aquinas's scheme of things, is that the purpose of human virtues is to enable humans to reach their ultimate good. Indeed, what makes a *habitus* in the soul a virtue is its being directed towards a human good. (A *habitus* is a dispositional power and propensity to act; the term has no adequate English equivalent.) One virtue is higher than another when its action is more directly related to the achievement of the ultimate human good, which is salvation. The theological virtues, which have the ultimate good of salvation as their object, are thus

¹⁰ *D. V.* 14, 3 ad 8; '...in quibuslibet duobus ordinatis ad invicem perfectio inferioris est ut subdatur superiori, sicut concupiscibilis quod subdatur rationi; unde habitus virtutis non dicitur expedire concupiscibilem ad actum ut faciat eam libere effluere in concupiscibilia, sed quia facit eam perfecte subiectam rationi. Similiter etiam bonum ipsius intellectus est ut subdatur voluntati adhaerenti Deo: unde fides dicitur intellectum expedire in quantum sub tali voluntate ipsum captivat.' Aquinas (1972), p. 447.

higher than the moral and intellectual virtues, which have as objects things different from this end, in so far as they are lead to this end.¹¹ Since the action of the will in directing the intellect to believe is motivated by the desire for salvation, the will's disposition to act in this way is a higher power than the intellect, and the intellect is acting well in obeying it. Thus he asserts;

...since it belongs to virtue to cause good activity, its operation can be said to be good either formally, insomuch as it proceeds from a potency that is moved towards a good because it is good, or materially, insomuch as it is congruent with and connatural to that potency. The act of faith is good in both these ways: because it is both suited to the intellect, insofar as as it is concerned with that which is true; and proceeds from the command of the will, which is moved to the good as its object. However, on the side of the intellect, although it has goodness with respect to the object of reasoning, the act of faith lacks perfection, because, as was said above, he who lacks the vision of the truth to which he adheres fails in the mode of perfection of intellectual activity....It is apparent that faith is a virtue; not an intellectual one, but a virtue in the sense commonly used, that is, something that produces an act that is good and that proceeds from a good will.¹²

One might object that there is a circularity in Aquinas' s description of the motive of the choice to believe. This motive is supposed to be the desire for eternal life. But does not the intention of gaining eternal life by choosing to have faith itself presuppose

¹¹ *D. V.* 14, 3 ad 9; '...fides neque est virtus intellectualis neque moralis sed est virtus theologicus; virtutes autem theologicae, quamvis convenient subiecto cum intellectualibus vel moralibus, differunt tamen obiecto: obiectum enim virtutum theologicarum est ipse finis ultimus, obiectum vero aliarum ea quae sunt ad finem.' Aquinas (1972), p. 447-8.

¹² *3 Sent.* d.23 q.2 a.4; '...cum virtutis sit reddere opus bonum, operatio potest dici bona vel formaliter, in quantum procedit ex potentia quae movetur in bonum secundum rationem boni; vel materialiter, secundum quod est congrua et connaturalis potentiae. Et utroque modo actus fidei est bonus; quia et congruit intellectui in quantum est verorum; et iterum procedit a voluntate imperante, quae movetur in bonum quasi in objectum. Ex parte autem intellectus, quamvis habeat bonitatem ratione objecti, non tamen habet perfectionem, quia deficit modus, ut dictum est, eo quod non habet conspicuam veritatem cui adhaeret....Unde patet quod fides est virtus, non quidem intellectualis, sed eo modo quo communiter loquimur de virtute quae producit actum bonum ex bonitate voluntatis procedentem.' Aquinas (1933), vol. 3, p. 736 (the translation is mine).

beliefs that have to be accepted through faith? The claim that one must believe the Christian revelation in order to be saved is itself a part of that revelation, and not knowable independently of it. St. Thomas does not consider this objection, but an answer to it is suggested by the answer he gives to a similar difficulty. In *D. V.* 14, 9, where he discusses the question of whether something accepted by faith can also be known, he considers the objection that one of the things that must be believed through faith is that God exists. But we cannot believe this because it is a teaching received from God, since no-one can believe that something is received from God unless he first believes that there is a God from whom it is received. Thus the judgement by which God is believed to exist precedes the judgement by which anything is thought to be received from God, and cannot be caused by it. His answer is that someone can begin to believe what previously he did not believe, but very weakly supposed to be true. Thus it is possible that someone before believing God could suppose (i.e. believe it to be somewhat probable) that there is a God and that God would be pleased by one's believing him, and on this basis believe God, and hence believe that there is a God, since God's existence is presupposed by the articles of faith that we believe when believing God. (*D. V.* 14, 9 ad 9.)¹³

This picture of the resemblances and differences between faith, knowledge and opinion enables St. Thomas to give an admirably clear account of the nature of the certainty of faith. Certainty, he says, can mean two things; it can mean firmness of adherence to a proposition, or the evidentness of a proposition.¹⁴ In the first sense,

¹³ *D. V.* 14, 9 ad 9; ‘...aliquis potest incipere credere illud quod prius non credebat sed debilius extimabat; unde possibile est quod aliquis antequam credat Deum, extimaverit Deum esse et hoc esse ei placitum quod credatur eum esse. Et sic aliquis potest credere Deum esse eo quod sit placitum Deo, quamvis etiam hoc non sit articulus, sed antecedens articulum quia demonstrative probatur.’ Aquinas (1972), p. 464.

¹⁴ *3 Sent.* d.23 q.2 a.2 sol.3; ‘In intellectu enim principiorum causatur determinatio ex hoc quod aliquid per lumen intellectus sufficienter inspici per ipsum potest. In scientia vero conclusionum causatur determinatio ex hoc quod conclusio secundum actum rationis in principia per se visa resolvitur. In fide vero ex hoc quod voluntas intellectui imperat. Sed quia voluntas hoc modo non determinat intellectum ut faciat inspici quae creduntur, sicut inspiciuntur principia per se nota vel quae in ipsa resolvuntur, sed hoc modo ut intellectus firmiter uni adhaerat; ideo certitudo quae est in scientia et intellectu, est ex ipsa evidentia eorum quae certa esse dicuntur; certitudo autem fidei est ex firma adhaesione ad id quod creditur... (Ad lum); Certitudo enim scientiae consistit in duobus, scilicet in evidentia, et firmitate adhaesionis. Certitudo vero fidei consistit in uno tantum, scilicet in firmitate adhaesionis... Quamvis certitudo

the certainty of faith is greater than that of knowledge (of *intellectus* or *scientia*). In the second sense, faith is not certain at all. This means that the question of the theoretical reasonableness of the certainty of faith does not arise, because that is not the sort of reasonableness that such certainty requires or can have. It is practical reasonableness that can and should be demanded from the firmness with which the will commands the reason to assent to faith.

However, the reason he gives for this firmness of assent detracts somewhat from the coherence of his position. He says that the assent of faith is firmer than that of *intellectus* or *scientia* because first truth, which is the cause of the assent of faith, is a stronger cause than the light of reason which causes the assent of *intellectus* and *scientia*. Elsewhere (in his commentary on Boethius' s *De Trinitate*) he explains this contention by saying that the light of faith is more capable of inducing assent than demonstration (which produces *scientia*) because although demonstration cannot reach false conclusions, men are often deceived concerning it through taking something to be a demonstration when it is not. The light of faith is more capable than *intellectus* of inducing assent because the light by which we assent to first principles can be impeded by bodily infirmity. The light of faith, on the other hand, which is like the seal of first truth in our mind, cannot fail, just as God can neither be deceived nor lie.¹⁵ But this explanation of the firmness of assent of faith – the impossibility of God' s lying or being deceived, and the consequent impossibility of the light of faith that he implants ever causing assent to a falsehood – describes something that would prevent the light of faith from ever arriving at a falsehood. Aquinas does not explain why the impossibility of faith' s ever being mistaken should move the will to firmness of assent. This impossibility is suited to move the reason to assent, because it gives grounds for

fidei de qua loquimur, quantum ad illud unum sit vehementior quam certitudo fidei quantum ad illa duo.' Aquinas (1933), vol. 3, pp. 728-9.

3 *Sent.* d.23 q.2 a.3 sol.1 ad 2; 'scientia et intellectus habent certitudinem per id quod ad cognitionem pertinet, scilicet evidentiam ejus cui assentitur. Fides autem habet certitudinem ab eo quod est extra genus cognitionis, in genere affectionis existens...' Aquinas (1933), vol. 3, p. 732.

D.V. 14, 1 ad 7; '...certitudo duo potest importare, scilicet firmitatem adhaesionis, et quantum ad hoc fides est certior etiam omni intellectu et scientia quia prima veritatis quae causat fidei assensum est fortior causa quam lumen rationis quae causat assensum intellectus vel scientiae; importat etiam evidentiam ejus cui assentitur, et sic fides non habet certitudinem sed scientia et intellectus...' Aquinas (1972), p. 438.

¹⁵ Aquinas (1992), q.3 a.1 ad 4, p. 109.

believing the articles of faith to be true and excluding all doubt. But it is not suited to move the will, which, as St. Thomas goes on to say right after offering this explanation, is what causes the assent of faith rather than the reason. What moves the will is a good to be sought. The only good that would arise directly from the impossibility of faith's being in error would be the good of always arriving at the truth in believing; and if this were the good sought in faith, the motive of belief would be primarily an intellectual one,¹⁶ which Aquinas denies. (The impossibility of faith's being in error would be an advantage from the point of view of the will when considered together with the information that faith claims to impart, which is about how to achieve perfect and eternal happiness, since it would remove any doubt about how we can achieve this happiness. But this advantage does not attach to the infallibility of faith considered in itself.) This motive does not harmonize with his claim that it is a good thing for the intellect to be subject in the act of faith to the will adhering to God. There is no subjection in the intellect's believing when its motive for belief is the impossibility of being in error. Nor does it harmonize with his assertion that the will chooses to believe in order to attain salvation. My being saved is a different motive for action than the impossibility of God's deceiving me. It would be more in keeping with Aquinas's first account of faith if he were to say that what causes the firmness of assent of faith is the surpassing goodness of the good that is sought in assenting, viz., eternal life.

This incoherence is due to the intrusion of the second account of faith that is to be found in Aquinas. The first account, as we have seen, looks at faith from the standpoint of *what* is believed, the propositions that are its material object; the second account looks at faith from the standpoint of *who* it is that is believed in faith, which is its formal object. Aquinas holds that the person believed in faith is God. Where God speaks is in Holy Scripture and the doctrine of the Church, or, more precisely, in Holy Scripture rightly understood according to the teaching of the Church.¹⁷ This means that a

¹⁶ He holds that truth is the good of the intellect, not of any appetitive virtue (*2a2ae* 1, 3 ad 1); 'verum est bonum intellectus, non autem est bonum appetitivae virtus...' Aquinas (1953a), vol. 3, p. 1403b.

¹⁷ Aquinas slides between describing *sacra scriptura*, Holy Scripture, and *sacra doctrina*, sacred teaching, as containing the divine message that is to be believed with faith. This imprecision expresses his realisation of the unity of the Scriptural message and Church teaching, but it does not yield a worked out theory of the nature of that unity.

heretic who rejects some of the teachings of the Church is not believing God even when he believes other Church teachings, and does not have the *habitus* of faith.¹⁸ In believing, the faithful believe God rather than the men through whom he speaks.¹⁹ Faith cannot consist in believing the testimony of men as such, because this testimony is fallible; it can only be belief in the testimony of God who can neither deceive nor be deceived.²⁰ No-one is so unbelieving as to think that God would not tell the truth. Unbelief does not consist in thinking that God is lying when he speaks, but in not believing him when he is speaking through men.

¹⁸ *2a2ae* 5, 3; ‘Formale autem obiectum fidei est veritas prima secundum quod manifestatur in Scripturis Sacris et doctrina Ecclesiae quae procedit ex veritate prima. Unde quicumque non inhaeret, sicut infallibili et divinae regulae, doctrina Ecclesiae, quae procedit ex veritate prima in Scripturis Sacris manifestata, ille non habet habitum fidei, sed ea quae sunt fidei alio modo tenet quam per fidem... (ad 2um:)... omnibus articulis fidei inhaeret fides propter unum medium, scilicet propter veritatem primam propositam nobis in Scripturis secundum doctrinam Ecclesiae intelligentis sane’. Aquinas (1953a), vol. 3, pp. 1438a, b.

¹⁹ In *3 Sent.* d.23 a.2 sol.2 q.2, Aquinas considers this objection to the position that faith is believing God: ‘Praeterea, in actu fidei discernitur fidelis ab infideli. Sed nullus est ita infidelis quin credat quod Deus non loquitur nisi verum. Ergo credere vera esse quae Deus loquitur, non est actus fidei, sed magis vera esse quae nuntius Dei loquitur. Et sic credere homini magis est actus fidei quam credere Deo.’ (Aquinas (1933), vol. 3, p. 723.) The answer given to this objection (ad 3) is ‘...fidelis credit homini non quia homo, sed in quantum Deus in eo loquitur: quod ex certis experimentis colligere potest. Infidelis autem non credit Deo in homine loquenti.’ Aquinas (1933), vol. 3, p. 728.

In *In Ioan.* c.5 l.4 no.5, Aquinas asserts; ‘Innititur autem fides non verbo hominis sed ipsi Deo... Sic nos introducit per verbum hominis ad credendum, non ipsi homini qui loquitur, sed Deo cuius verbo loquitur; 1 Thess. II, 15: ‘Cum accepissetis a nobis verbum auditus Dei, accepistis illud non sicut verbum hominem, sed, sicut vere est, verbum Dei.’ Aquinas (1952), p. 146.

Aquinas even goes so far as to say that teachers in the Church are gods with respect to those they teach, in *3 Sent.* d.25 q.2 a.1 sol.4; ‘...illi quibus incumbit officium docendi fidem, sunt medii inter Deum et homines; unde respectu Dei sunt homines, et respectu hominum sunt dii, in quantum divinae cognitionis participes sunt per scientiam Scripturarum vel per revelationem, ut dicitur Ioan. X, 35: “Illos dixit deos ad quos sermo Dei factus est.” Et ideo oportet quod minores qui ab eis de fide doceri debent, habeant fidem implicitam in fide illorum, non in quantum homines, sed in quantum sunt participatione dii.’ Aquinas (1933), vol. 3, p. 799.

²⁰ *In Heb.* c.6 l.1; ‘Proprium autem fidei est, quod credat homo et assentiat non visis a se, sed testimonio alterius. Hoc autem testimonium vel est hominis tantum: et istud non facit virtutem fidei, quia homo et fallere et falli potest. Vel istud testimonium est ex iudicio divino; et istud verissimum et firmissimum est, quia est ab ipsa veritate, quae nec fallere, nec falli potest.’ Aquinas (1953b), p. 398.

Aquinas expresses the contention that in faith God is the person we believe, and on account of whom we believe, by saying that the formal object of faith is First Truth.²¹ Any cognitive *habitus* has two objects; the material object, that which is known, and the formal object, that by which the material object is known. The formal object is what defines the nature of the *habitus*. We can grasp the difference between these two sorts of object by considering that it is possible to believe propositions that God has asserted (e.g. that one ought not to steal) for a reason other than his having asserted them. In this case the material objects will be the same as in faith, but the formal object will be different. In faith, the material object is the propositions that are said by God, and the formal object is his having said them. Faith assents to something only because it is said by God. God is not only truthful, he is First Truth itself, the uncreated truth that all other truth participates in; faith rests upon this divine truth. Thus Aquinas asserts that ‘if someone believes God to exist on account of certain human reasoning and natural signs, he is not yet said to have the faith of which we speak, but only when he believes for the reason that God says it (*ex hac ratione credit quod est a Deo dictum*).’²²

We could put this view by saying that God’s having said certain things is the reason why we believe them in faith, but it is important not be misled by such a way of expressing Aquinas’s position. We might be willing to say that the reason we believed a statement in the past was because God said it, even when we now realize that as a matter of fact he did not say it. What we would mean by this is that we thought that God said it, and hence believed the statement in question. This is not what Aquinas means when he says that First Truth is the formal object of faith. Rather, he means that God’s *actually having said something* is the reason for our believing it. This is clear from his saying that nothing falls under any *habitus* except in virtue of the formal object of that *habitus*, and since the formal object of faith is First Truth, which excludes all falsehood, it follows that nothing false can fall under faith. This line of reasoning presupposes that it is God’s actually saying something that is the formal object of faith, since it is such actual speech that is incompatible with falsehood. This means that when we believe something on account of God’s having said it, and God actually has said it, we are believing for a *different reason* than we would have if we believed

²¹ See *3 Sent.* d.24 a.1 q1a.1 and sol.1: *D. V.* 14,8; *2a2ae* 1,1.

²² *In Rom.* cap. 4 lect. 1, in Aquinas (1953b), my translation.

something because we thought God said it, but God had not in fact said it. The rationale for saying that these reasons are different will be given at the end of chapter 6.

First Truth's being the formal object of faith means that faith is an instance of belief in testimony. We believe God concerning things we do not see, as one would believe a good man concerning things which one does not see but which he does see.²³ Aquinas gives an account of the nature of belief in human testimony. The need for such testimony comes from the fact that some things, like singular and contingent states of affairs, can be known to one man but not to another. Because in human society it is necessary that men be able to use the goods of other men as if they were their own, when it comes to pass that their own goods are not sufficient, it is therefore necessary to hold to what others know as if we knew it ourselves. Hence it follows that faith, by which one man believes what another asserts, is necessary in the social intercourse of men, and is the foundation of justice, as Cicero says in his *Offices*.²⁴ That is why lying cannot be without sin, since every lie derogates from the faith so necessary to human society (*Super Boet. de Tr.* 3, 1.) There are two reasons for refusing to believe someone; because he is or is imputed to be ignorant, or because he is or is imputed to be a liar.²⁵ Belief in someone's testimony is voluntary. No-one believes unless he chooses to do so.²⁶

Aquinas holds belief in testimony to be an essential part of learning from a teacher. His description of what a teacher attempts to do in teaching does not seem to leave a role for belief in testimony; he says that a teacher communicates knowledge to his student by communicating to the student the principles that he, the teacher, knows, and the deductions that he has made from those principles. Such communication, when understood, gives the student *intellectus* of the principles and *scientia* of the conclusions, and thus confers on the student a knowledge that is independent of the teacher's assertions. (*D. V.* 14, 1.) But although the knowledge that is the goal of teaching does not involve any reliance on belief in the teacher's word, such

²³ *3 Sent.* d.23 q.2 a.2 sol.2; '...Ratio enim quare voluntas inclinatur ad assentiendum his quae non videt, est quia Deus ea dicit: sicut homo in his quae non videt, credit testimonio alicujus boni viri qui videt quae ipse non videt.' Aquinas (1933), vol. 3, p. 727.

²⁴ Cicero, *De officiis* I c.7 n.23.

²⁵ *In div. nom.*, c.1, 1.1, Aquinas (1950), p. 8.

²⁶ *3 Sent.* d.23 q.2 a.1 ad 7; 'nullus credit nisi volens'. Aquinas (1933), vol. 3, p. 721.

belief is an essential part of the acquisition of such knowledge. Aquinas argues for this necessity as follows;

In the beginning man is imperfect in knowledge; to him who is to obtain the perfection of *scientia*, a teacher is needed, who can lead him to this perfection. Such a teacher cannot do this, unless he himself has the perfection of *scientia*, insomuch as he grasps the reasons of those things which fall under a science. But the teacher does not at the beginning of his instruction at once hand on the reasons for the more subtle things concerning which he intends to teach; because then the student would have to have at the very beginning a perfect *scientia* of what he is to be taught. Rather, he teaches the student things whose reasons the student cannot grasp when he is beginning to learn, but that the student will know afterwards when he is perfect in science. Hence it is said that it is necessary for the learner to believe (*oportet addiscentem credere*); the learner cannot attain the perfection of *scientia* otherwise than through accepting as true that which is first taught to him, the reasons for which he cannot then understand. The ultimate perfection to which man is ordered, however, is the knowledge of God; which no-one can attain save through the activity and teaching of God, who is the perfect knower of himself. But man in the beginning is not capable of this perfect knowledge, so it is necessary that he accept, through believing, things by which he is led to reach perfect knowledge. Some of these things are of such a nature that it is impossible for us to have perfect knowledge of them in this life, because they totally exceed the power of human reason. These it is necessary for us to believe while we are pilgrims in this life; we will have perfect knowledge of them in our heavenly fatherland. Others can be known perfectly even in this life, as those things concerning God which can be given a demonstrative proof; but even with these things it is necessary to believe in the beginning.²⁷

The necessity of learners' believing is thus given as a reason for the necessity of faith. We must begin by believing (not knowing) as

²⁷ *D. V.* 14, 10 (the translation is my own). 'Perfect knowledge' of God is meant to be opposed to imperfect or defective knowledge; the perfect knowledge referred to would not be imperfect or defective, because it would be a grasp of God's essence. It does not mean a complete and comprehensive knowledge of God that would leave nothing else to be grasped, since Aquinas holds that such knowledge is impossible for created intellects.

principles the articles of faith that God reveals to us, so that later we can be led by God to the knowledge to which these principles lead, the knowledge of his essence. Aquinas attributes the view that learners must believe to Aristotle,²⁸ but this position is not clearly to be found in Aristotle's text; it seems rather to have originated in Alexander of Aphrodisias's commentary on the beginning of the *Posterior Analytics*. This position on the necessity of learners believing has implications for the status of testimony as a source of belief that Aquinas did not explore. It means that belief in testimony need not be based on other sorts of belief, since the learners in question will not have the opportunity to determine whether or not the teachers they are believing know what they are talking about; if they were able to know this, they would not be learners. (If they were to accept that the teachers were knowledgeable on the basis of other people's assertions, they would have to know that the others possessed the knowledge that would enable them to tell that the teachers knew what they were talking about, which would again require them to not be learners; and so on.) Alexander of Aphrodisias's commentary did lead some thinkers to draw this conclusion, and was influential in persuading Jewish and Muslim philosophers that traditions require no proof.

Faith in divine testimony is not however the same as faith in human testimony. The chief difference between the two comes from the fact, alluded to above, that although human testimony is fallible, the testimony of God,²⁹ who can neither deceive nor be deceived, is not. This means that it is impossible to be credulous in believing God.

²⁸ Aquinas asserts the necessity of learners believing when he comments on the text of the Letter to the Hebrews that states that faith is the substance of things hoped for: *In Heb.* c.11 l.1; 'Ipsa ergo plena visio Dei est essentia beatitudinis. Hoc autem videmus in scientiis liberalibus, quod si quis aliquam velit addiscere, oportet eum primo accipere principia ipsius, quae oportet credere cum sibi tradentur a magistro. Oportet enim credere eum qui discit, ut habetur 1 Poster. Et in illis principiis quodammodo continetur tota scientia, sicut conclusiones in praemissis, et effectus in causa. Qui ergo habet principia illius scientiae, habet substantiam eius, puta geometriae. Et si geometria esset essentia beatitudinis, qui haberent principia geometriae, haberent quodammodo substantiam beatitudinis. Fides autem nostra est, ut credamus quod beati videbunt et fruuntur Deo. Et ideo si volumus ad hoc pervenire, oportet ut credamus principia istius cognitionis. Et haec sunt articula fidei qui continent totam summam hujus scientiae, quia beatos nos facit visio Dei trini et unus.' Aquinas (1953b), p. 458. The view that learners must believe is also stated in *Super Boet. de Tr.* 2, 2. The text from Aristotle that Aquinas seems chiefly to have in mind is *De sophisticis elenchis* c.2, 165b3.

²⁹ Cf. *In Heb.* c.6 l.1, cited above, and *3 Sent.* d.23 q.2 a.4 sol.1 ad 2.

Credulity is excess in belief, but it is impossible to exceed in believing God.³⁰ As stated above, since divine faith always attains the object of the intellect, which is truth, its act is always good, and hence it can be a virtue. Belief in human testimony does not always attain the truth, because men can deceive or be deceived, so it is not a virtue (cf. *3 Sent.* d.23 q.2 a.4 sol.1 ad 2; *D. V.* 14, 8; *2a2ae* 4,5). Aquinas considers the objection to the rightness of faith raised by Abelard, that appeals to Ecclesiasticus 19:4 (‘Qui cito credit levis est corde, one who trusts others too quickly is lightminded’) to argue that believing what you can in no way see is excessively light-minded. He answers that to believe a man in the absence of probable reasons is excessively light-minded, because the understanding of one man is not naturally ordered to the cognition of another man as its rule. But human cognition is thus ordered to first truth.³¹ Divine faith gives a real participation in the divine knowledge.³²

Aquinas’ s position on objections to the truth of the propositions we believe through faith is significant. He does not say that First Truth speaking gives a better reason for accepting a proposition than any reasons that could be found for rejecting it. Rather, he holds that the fact that a proposition is known through faith means that there cannot be such a thing as a good reason for not believing it. The propositions given to us in faith cannot be contrary to what is discovered by the light of reason implanted in us by nature, because if they were God would be the author of falsehood, which is impossible. If, therefore, something is found in the assertions of philosophers that is contrary to the faith, it is not philosophy, but rather an abuse of philosophy that springs from a

³⁰ *D. V.* 14, 10 ad 6; ‘...esse credulum in vitium sonat quia designat superfluitatem in credendo, sicut esse bibulum superfluitatem in bibendo; ille autem qui credit Deo non excedit modum in credendo quia ei non potest nimis credi...’ Aquinas (1972), p. 468.

³¹ *3 Sent.* d.24 a.3 sol.2 ad 1; ‘credere hominum absque ratione probabili est nimis cito credere; quia cognitio unius hominis non est naturaliter ordinata ad cognitionem alterius, ut per ipsam reguletur. Sed hoc modo est ordinata ad veritatem primam.’ Aquinas (1933), vol. 3, p. 775–6.

³² *Super Boet. de Tr.* 2, 2; ‘de diuinis duplex scientia habetur: una secundum modum nostrum, qui sensibilium principia accipit ad notificandum diuina...Alia secundum modum ipsorum diuinorum, ut ipsa diuina secundum se ipse capiantur, que quidem perfecte in statu uie nobis est impossibilis, set fit nobis in statu uie quedam illius cognitionis participatio et assimilatio ad cognitionem diuinam, in quantum per fidem nobis infusam inheremus ipsi prime ueritati propter se ipsam.’ Aquinas (1992), p. 95.

defect in the reason.³³ The inspired teachings of the prophets and the Apostles contain nothing that is contrary to what natural reason teaches, but they do contain things that surpass natural reason. That is why these teachings seem to be contrary to reason, although they are not; just as it seems to a peasant that it is contrary to reason that the sun is larger than the earth, or that the diagonal is incommensurable with the side, although the wise see that these things are reasonable. (*D. V.* 14, 10 ad 7). This means that there is nothing like a rational obligation for the believer to provide answers to objections against the faith, or even to take such objections seriously. Indeed, it would be unreasonable to take them seriously, just as it would be unreasonable to take the peasant's views on the relative size of the earth and the sun seriously.

To present-day inquirers, this dismissive stance might seem overconfident and unwarranted. Those who are inclined to criticize Aquinas' s position in this way need however to take into account the fact that his conception of knowledge and reasonable belief differs in important respects from the conceptions that are dominant today. Knowledge, as he understood it, did not include anything like what is presently described as justification, where justification is thought of as something that can be present in both knowledge and false belief. As we have seen, Aquinas held that the powers of our reason that give us knowledge are intellectual virtues, whose purpose is to give us true beliefs, and whose operation consists in arriving at true beliefs. What confers the status of knowledge upon a belief is its being arrived at through the exercise of an intellectual virtue. If a proposition that we believe is false, that means that it is not arrived at through the action of an intellectual virtue, and thus that we do not have reasons of a sort that could form a basis for knowledge. When we have reasons for both a proposition and its negation, therefore, it is impossible for both these sets of reasons to be good ones. Since one of the two propositions must be false, one of the sets of reasons must be a bad one. In the sphere of *opinio*, as opposed to that of knowledge, Aquinas would admit the existence of something that could be called justification and that could apply to both true and false beliefs; it would simply be the existence of probable reasons for a proposition. But evidence that makes a proposition probable does not belong to the same epistemic category as

³³ *Super Boet. de Tr.* 2, 3; 'Si quid autem in dictis philosophorum inuenitur contrarium fidei, hoc non est philosophie, set magis philosophie abusus ex defectu rationis.' Aquinas (1992), p. 99.

the reasons that enable you to know a proposition.³⁴ And such probable evidence is not what underlies the propositions accepted in faith, because faith is not a kind of *opinio*. If it were, it would not be a virtue. Since it is a virtue, it provides good reasons for believing the propositions it assents to, and thus there cannot be good reasons against these propositions; objections to them can only be an abuse of philosophy.

Whether Aquinas is right or not in refusing to admit the possibility of reasonable objections to the articles of faith will thus depend on whether it is right to think of knowledge as produced by intellectual virtues, and on whether Christian faith is an intellectual virtue. (His view of faith as a virtue in the intellect, but not an intellectual virtue, does not recommend itself very strongly.) These are the central questions of this book; the truth of Aquinas' s views on them will be investigated when these questions are examined.

This account of faith as believing First Truth has considerable merits when considered on its own; as does the first account of faith that is described above. The problem for Aquinas' s view of faith is reconciling the two. The incompatibility between them has already been brought out, in the discussion of the difficulties with Aquinas' s view of the cause of the firmness of assent of faith. The source of the incompatibility between them lies in this: if the formal object of faith, the reason for believing, is God' s speaking, why does faith involve a will to salvation, as the first account says it does? Our intellect can tell us that God cannot speak falsely, and knowledge of this fact is sufficient to bring us to believe what God says without in any way willing to reach him. Moreover, it is quite possible for us to see that there is a contradiction implied in God' s speaking falsely, and hence that it is impossible that this could happen. Since this is so, why should faith differ from knowledge? and why should it necessarily be voluntary?

The reason why this difficulty lets us speak of two positions on faith in Aquinas, rather than simply a lasting inconsistency, is that his second view of faith is virtually absent from his earlier works, but dominant in his later works, although his first view of faith is

³⁴ This distinction of epistemic categories means that much contemporary debate about whether Aquinas' s understanding of knowledge is internalist or externalist is beside the mark. Contemporary internalist and externalist accounts of justification usually agree in describing justification as something that can occur in both knowledge and false belief. Justification of this sort does not exist in Aquinas' s thought.

never explicitly renounced. The first view is found principally in his *Commentary on the Sentences* and the *De Veritate*, written in the period 1252-1256. In 1259 he moved from Paris to Rome. The discussions of faith in the works written after this departure - principally in the *Summa Theologiae* and the scriptural commentaries - present his second view of faith, and contain no proper exposition of his first view of faith.

This move to Rome suggests an explanation for his move from the first position on faith to the second. The libraries in Rome and Orvieto gave him much better opportunities to become acquainted with the works of the Greek fathers, and his very extensive quotations from St. John Chrysostom almost all date from after his departure to Italy. The importance of Aquinas's exposure to Chrysostom in this period is that Chrysostom holds the second view of faith. Chrysostom spells out this second view in some detail throughout his works. He maintains that the object of faith is the spoken word of God. In believing the Scriptures, we are believing God's direct assertions, because he is their author (*in Gen.* 5, 1-2; *in 2a Tim.* 3, 15). He makes it clear that the only reason we believe God's message is that God says it. We should not ask proofs of veracity from God as we should from a man (*in 1a Cor.* 2, 5). It is right to weigh the veracity of human assertions, but with divine ones we must simply revere and obey (*in 1 Tim.* 1, 4). The miracles and signs that accompany God's message do indeed show that we should believe, and that is why God brings them about, but they are a condescension to those weak in faith and character. We ought to believe simply because of the preaching of the word, and not because of signs that accompany it. The preaching of God's word is in fact something greater than any sign.

Our motive for believing is simply that God's word is worthy of faith (*in 1a Cor.* 6, 14; *in 2a Cor.* 4, 18). God's word is more worthy of belief than is sight, because sight sometimes errs, but God's word never does (*in Jo.* 3, 5). What is true of sight is true of reasoning in general. Reasoning never gives full certainty (*contra Anomaeos*, 11), but faith does (*in Hebr.* 13, 16; *in 1a Cor.* 3, 20). In fact, what before the time of Christ was known by reason, like the existence of God, ought now to be accepted solely on the more sure basis of faith (*in Hebr.* 11, 6; *in 1a Cor.* 1, 29). Faith completely excludes doubt, and the existence of any doubt means that there is no faith. As sight is to visible things, so faith is to invisible ones. Faith is a vision of the invisible, that brings the same full certitude as sight. It is not possible to have faith if one is not more undoubtingly assured of what we do not see, than we are of what we do see (*in Heb.* 11, 1).

Aquinas' s veneration for Chrysostom is well documented. It is thus probable that his change from the first to the second position on faith was brought about by his move to Rome in 1259, and his resulting exposure to the works of Chrysostom.

The difficulty posed by these two accounts is not one that could easily be resolved by abandoning one or the other. The description of faith as lying between science and opinion enables it to be called voluntary, and hence makes it capable of being meritorious. The description of faith as having First Truth as its object states the basic idea of faith as belief in divine revelation, and gives the grounds for belief that makes faith rational. If Aquinas were to have considered abandoning or or the other of these accounts, he would have been left with the choice of either having no explanation for the voluntariness of faith, or of having no explanation for the rationality of faith. This unresolved tension within his conception of faith is produced by a part of what has come to be called the problem of the act of faith: the difficulty of reconciling the contentions that faith is rational, that it is voluntary, and that it requires grace.

It is Aquinas' s explication of two of these three contentions - the contention that faith is rational, and the contention that it requires grace - that determines his position on the role of the motives of credibility in faith. The question of the role of motives of credibility in faith is not one that he addresses as a separate question. Like most of his predecessors, his main concern in discussing the relation of faith and reason is not with why we believe, but with what we believe. When he talks about 'arguments that compel us to faith', he has in mind arguments for the propositions believed in faith, not arguments for the reasonableness of believing.³⁵ Nonetheless he has a clear position on the role of motives of credibility.

His understanding of grace and his assertion that faith requires grace mean that he cannot accept that faith be rationally grounded on the motives of credibility. Since grace means the conferral of a property that surpasses created nature, if the act of believing requires grace, it is impossible for faith to be based on the motives of credibility. This is because the comprehension of these motives and the inference from them to Christianity' s being divinely revealed is

³⁵ *3 Sent.* d.24 a.2 sol.2 ad 4; 'argumenta quae cogunt ad fidem, sicut miracula, non probant fidem per se, sed probant veritatem annuntiantis fidem.' Aquinas (1933), vol. 3, p. 770.

within human power. Aquinas holds (2a2ae 6, 1) that not only the proposal of the truths to be revealed in faith, but also the act of assenting to them, requires grace. The former requires grace because some of the things to be believed in faith surpass human reason, and thus can only be known through God's revealing them. As for the latter, he argues that there are two causes that can be suggested as causing men's assent to the articles of faith. One is external inducements, like miracles and human persuasion. But these cannot be sufficient causes, since some of those who see miracles and hear preaching believe, and others do not. There must therefore be some internal cause for belief. The Pelagians claim that this cause is the choice of our will, but this is false. Because man in assenting to the teachings of faith is elevated above his nature, it is necessary that this assent be found within him as a result of a supernatural principle affecting him interiorly, which is God. Thus the *habitus* of faith is infused by God, not by any natural cause. Significantly, unlike previous scholastic theologians, Aquinas does not postulate the existence of acquired faith as well as infused faith. Infused faith, for him, is the only faith there is in Christian believers.

It might be pointed out that Aquinas describes the devils, who are without faith, as believing on the basis of signs, and that this is hard to reconcile with the claim that Christian faith is not based on signs. But he thinks of the knowledge of faith possessed by Christians as entirely different from that possessed by devils; believing is said equivocally of the faithful and devils (*D. V.* 14, 9). Belief in the articles of faith can serve as a foundation for *scientia* in Christian believers, but the belief of devils in the articles of faith cannot serve as principles that give rise to new knowledge (*De Malo*, 16, 6). The faith of the devils is compelled by the evidence of signs, but the faith of humans is voluntary. One might ask how the faith of the devils can be compelled by signs, while the faith of humans cannot be; Aquinas's explanation would probably be that the devils have much greater intellectual powers and access to evidence than humans do.

It might also be asked how it is that Aquinas can claim that the divine origin of the Christian revelation is shown by many evident proofs (cf. *S. C. G.* 1, 4), while at the same time denying that belief in this revelation is based on these proofs. Although Aquinas does not address this question, it is not hard to see how it could be answered on the basis of his views. These evident proofs are not strong enough to force humans to believe against their wills. Since this is so, someone who is presented with the claims of the Christian religion

will choose not to believe, if he has a bad will; and if he has a good will, he will choose to have infused faith. Fr. R.-A. Gauthier's remarks on Aquinas's application of the term 'convincere' to unbelievers are worth recalling. 'It is important to remind ourselves of something that often seems to have been forgotten, which is that 'convincere' does not mean to *convince* someone of their error, that is, to *persuade* them that they are in error, but rather to *convict* them of error; to provide a (juridical) proof of their error.'

³⁶

This reason for thinking that faith cannot be rationally grounded on the motives of credibility does not exclude the possibility of these motives entering into the rational grounding of faith, and even being a necessary condition for it, although they are not sufficient to bring it about. However, these possibilities are not compatible with Aquinas's views. He could not hold that the motives of credibility are necessary to justify faith, because he holds that the justification can work the other way round. He says that 'faith in itself is sufficient to bring us to believe everything that accompanies or follows or precedes faith.'

³⁷ This includes the motives of credibility. But if faith can on its own bring us to believe the motives of credibility, they cannot be needed for producing faith. Nor in his view can the motives of credibility enter in to the rational grounds of faith for some people, while not being necessary for faith in others. Faith in his view has one and only one formal object. But faith can exist without the motives of credibility. In line with the Fathers, he holds that a perfect faith does not require signs, and that miracles are neither necessary nor sufficient for faith (*2a2ae* 2, 10; *In Ioan.* c.2 l.3 n.5). The word of God is of such a power that as soon as it is heard it ought to be believed.³⁸ But if there is only one rational ground for believing, only one formal object, and this formal object can exist in the absence of the motives of credibility, then these motives cannot be part of that rational ground. Aquinas's reason for thinking that there can only be one such formal object has already been described; only belief in infallible First Truth speaking can make faith a virtue in the intellect. The implications of his view

³⁶ Gauthier, introduction to vol. 1 of Aquinas, (1961) *Summa contra gentiles* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1961), p. 98 (my translation).

³⁷ 'fides, quantum in se est, ad omnia quae fidem concomitantur, vel sequuntur, vel praecedent sufficienter inclinatur'; *3 Sent.* d. 24 q.1 a.1 sol. 2; Aquinas (1933), vol. 3, p. 769 (my translation).

³⁸ *In Heb.* c.4 l.1; 'Verba enim Dei sic sunt efficacia, quod statim audita debent esse credenda. Ps. XCII, 7; "Testimonia tua credibilia facta sunt nimis."' Aquinas (1953b), p. 380.

that there is only one formal object of faith are spelt out in his discussion of the status of theology in human knowledge. He concludes from the fact that Sacred Scripture has no superior science that ‘...if an opponent holds nothing of what has been divinely revealed, then no way lies open for making the articles of faith reasonably credible; all that can be done is to solve the difficulties against faith that he may bring up. For since faith rests upon unfailing truth and the contrary of faith cannot really be demonstrated, it is clear that alleged proofs against faith are not demonstrations, but charges that can be refuted (*solubilia argumenta*).’³⁹ (*Ia* q.1 a.8)

The character of our assent to the articles of faith also excludes the possibility of the motives of credibility playing any part in the reason for our believing. Aquinas asserts that the *habitus* of faith makes known the articles of faith in the same way as the intellect makes known the principles of a science that are grasped through *intellectus*.⁴⁰ Faith, like assent to such principles, does not proceed from inference.⁴¹ But if the motives of credibility were to form part of our reason for believing, it would have to be through serving as a basis for inference to the truth of the articles of faith; since there is no such inference, they cannot be part of our reason for believing.

Aquinas does not deny that such motives can play a role in bringing about faith. He only denies that they enter in to the reason for believing.

There are three things that lead us to faith in Christ. First, natural reason;... second, the witness of the Law and the Prophets;... third, the preaching of the Apostles and others. But when a man has been led to believe by these, we can say that it is not on account of any of them that he believes; he believes, not because of natural reason, nor because of the witness of the law, nor because of the preachings of others, but because of first truth

³⁹ Aquinas (1963), pp. 28-31.

⁴⁰ *3 Sent.* d.23 q.2 a.1 ad 4; ‘lumen infusum, quod est habitus fidei, manifestat articulos, sicut lumen intellectus agentis manifestat principia naturaliter cognita.’ Aquinas (1933), vol. 3, p. 721. *D. V.* 14, 8 ad 16; ‘ipsum autem testimonium veritatis primae se habet in fide ut principium in scientiis demonstrativis.’ Aquinas (1972), p. 461. See also *Super Boet. de Tr.* 2, 2 ad 4.

⁴¹ *D. V.* 14, 1 ad 2; ‘fides dicitur non inquisitus consensus, in quantum consensus fidei vel assensus non causatur ex inquisitione rationis; tamen non excluditur per hoc quin in intellectu credentis remaneat aliqua cogitatio vel collatio de his quae credit.’ Aquinas (1972), p. 438.

in itself.⁴²

One role that signs can play is to strengthen and confirm the virtue of faith (*Quodl.* 2, q.4 a.1 ad 4). Aquinas is not very clear on the role that signs can play in bringing to faith those who do not yet possess it. He does, however, say that faith is both preceded and followed by intellectual activity, and that the reasoning that precedes faith inclines the will to choose to believe, rather than bringing the intellect to assent to a proposition.⁴³

Aquinas' s position on the role of the motives of credibility, and his refusal to postulate acquired as opposed to infused faith, is a return to the patristic position described in the previous chapter. Like the patristic position, his view faces the crucial question – some might say the crucial objection – for positions of this sort; what is it, if not the motives of credibility, that leads us to think that the teachings of the Christian faith are spoken by God, and hence to believe them?

Fr. John Jenkins has offered an account of Aquinas' s view on this question, in his *Knowledge and faith in Thomas Aquinas*.⁴⁴ He presents Aquinas in the *Summa theologiae* as ascribing to two of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Gifts of Understanding and Science, the role of enabling the believer to accept that the propositions of faith are to be believed, and of enabling the believer to actually believe them. But this interpretation cannot be maintained. Aquinas holds that the theological virtues (of which faith of course is one) are

⁴² *In Ioan.* c.4 l.5 n.2; ‘Inducunt nos ad fidem Christi tria. Primo quidem ratio naturalis. Ad Rom. I, 20: “Invisibilia Dei a creatura mundi per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciuntur.” Secundo testimonia Legis et Prophetarum. Rom. III, 21: “Nunc autem iustitia Dei sine Lege manifestata est, testificata a Lege et Prophetis.” Tertio praedicatio Apostolorum et aliorum. Rom. X, 14: “Quomodo credent sine praedicante?” Sed quando per hoc homo manuductus credit, tunc potest dicere, quod propter nullum istorum credit: nec propter rationem naturalem, nec propter testimonia legis, nec propter praedicationem aliorum, sed propter ipsam veritatem tantum; Gen. XV, 6: “Credidit Abraham Deo, et reputata est ei ad iustitiam.”’ Aquinas (1952), p. 124.

⁴³ *3 Sent.* d.23 q.2 a.2 sol.1 ad 2; ‘per hoc quod dicit Damascenus quod fides est non inquisitus consensus, excluditur inquisitio rationis intellectum terminantis, non inquisitio voluntatem inclinans. Et ex hoc ipso quod intellectus terminatus non est, remanet motus intellectus, inquantum naturaliter tendit in sui determinationem. Unde fides consistit media inter duas cogitationes, una quarum voluntatem inclinatur ad credendum, et haec praecedit fidem; alia vero tendit ad intellectum eorum quae jam credit, et haec est simul cum assensu fidei.’ Aquinas (1933), vol. 3, p. 728.

⁴⁴ Jenkins (1997), pp. 192–4.

presupposed by the Gifts, as the roots from which they are derived (*1a2ae* 68, 4 ad 3). Just as the intellectual virtues are placed before the moral virtues and regulate them, so the theological virtues are placed before the Gifts and regulate them (*1a2ae* 68, 7). In particular, the Gift of Understanding is the fruit of the virtue of faith (*2a2ae* 8, 8 ad 1). If the Gifts of Understanding and Science are founded on faith and presuppose it, it does not seem possible for them to have an essential role in bringing faith into existence. That they do not have this role in Aquinas' s view is clear from the fact that he states that the Gifts cannot exist without charity (*1a2ae* 68, 5). But faith can exist in us without charity; so the Gifts cannot be necessary for faith. This reasoning would not follow if Aquinas had held, as some theologians did, that formless faith is different from formed faith and disappears with the advent of charity, but he explicitly denied that this was so (*D. V.* 14, 7).

If the Gifts do not lead us to faith in Aquinas' s view, what does? He asserts that two things are needed for faith; exterior preaching, and an interior call from God.⁴⁵ Without this call, even when miracles are present to provide evidence for faith, belief is impossible and unbelief is without fault.⁴⁶ The Son and the Holy Spirit cooperate in bringing believers to faith;

For just as the effect of the mission of the Son is to lead us to

⁴⁵ *In Rom.* 10, 1.2; '...ad fidem duo requiruntur: quorum unum est cordis inclinatio ad credendum et hoc non est ex auditu, sed ex dono gratiae; aliud autem est determinatio de credibili et istud est ex auditu. Et ideo Cornelius qui habebat cor inclinatum ad credendum, necesse habuit ut ad eum mitteretur Petrus, qui sibi determinaret quid esset credendum.' Aquinas (1953b), p. 157.

⁴⁶ *In Ioan.* XV l.V n.4; 'Secunda quaestio est de veritate conditionalis utrum scilicet...si Christus non fecisset in eis opera quae nemo alius fecit, immunes essent a peccato infidelitatis. Responsio. Dicendum: si nos loquamur de quibuscumque miraculis, haberent excusationem, si in eis facta non fuissent per Christum. Nullus enim potest ad Christum venire per fidem nisi tractus; supra VI, 44: 'Nemo potest venire ad me, nisi Pater, qui misit me, traxerit eum.' Et ideo Cant. I, 3, dicit Sponsa: 'Trahe me post te: curremus in odorem unguentorum tuorum.' Unde si nullus esset qui eos traxisset ad fidem, excusabiles essent de infidelitate.

Sed est attendendum, quod Christus attraxit verbo, signis visibilis et invisibilis, scilicet movendo et instigendo interiorius corda. Prov. XXI, 1: 'Cor regum in manu Dei.' Est ergo opus Dei instinctus interior ad bene agendum, et qui ei resistunt, peccant:...Est ergo hoc quod Dominus dicit, 'Si opera non fecissem in eis quae nemo alius fecit', intelligendum non solum de visibilis, sed etiam de interiori instinctu et attractu doctrinae: quae quidem si in eis non fecisset, peccatum non haberet.' Aquinas (1952), p. 388.

the Father, so the mission of the Holy Spirit is to lead the faithful to the Son. Since the Son is begotten wisdom itself, he is truth itself. John 14, 6; 'I am the way, the truth and the life.' And therefore the effect of a mission of this sort is that men are made to become participants in the divine wisdom, and knowers of the truth. For the Son hands over teaching to us, since he is the Word; but the Holy Spirit makes us capable to receive this teaching. For the Son says 'He [sc. the Holy Spirit] will teach you all things' ; because no matter what men teach from without, unless the Holy Spirit gives understanding of what they teach, their labour in teaching is in vain; for unless the Holy Spirit is present in the hearts of the hearers, the words of teachers are useless.⁴⁷

But the question of how the Holy Spirit acts in us so as to make us believe is not answered by Aquinas. This is probably because it would not have struck him as a question urgently in need of investigation. We do not have to understand this action of the Holy Spirit in order to cooperate with it. A defence of the rationality of the faith that results from this action would require an account of the nature of the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing us to believe, but Aquinas did not think it necessary to offer such a defence, and perhaps would have thought it rather absurd to defend the rationality of the work of the Holy Spirit. His discussion of faith was after all carried on in the context of theology rather than apologetics, and did not give a high priority to the concerns that loomed large in eras when Christian faith itself was widely challenged.

⁴⁷ *In Ioan*, XIV 1.6 n.6, Aquinas (1952), p. 367 (my translation).