



The Predominant Christian Interpretation of Religious Faith in the Middle Ages: Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to reveal the prevailing Christian interpretation of religious faith during the medieval period, using Augustine's and Aquinas' corpora as primary sources. This study is distinct in that it explores the reasoning behind why an act of faith by a Christian is regarded as morally praiseworthy. To this end, the paper begins with a preliminary investigation into the nature of faith as understood by these two thinkers. Following that, the question of whether reason should precede or follow faith will be scrutinised in a theoretical sense. The study will also explore the impact on human free will of God's intervention in the act of faith, and whether faith can be considered an act of man or of God. The study will also consider whether it is possible to reconcile these perspectives or avoid conflicts between them. The findings of this study show that, according to the Christian interpretation, conclusive reasons cannot be used to justify religious faith, as they undermine or eliminate human free will. If evidence were to exist, it would no longer be a matter of free choice for an individual to believe but rather a matter of necessity. For faith to be considered morally praiseworthy, it must be caused by one's own free will, not by conclusive evidence.

Keywords: Faith, Intellect, Reason, Assent, Knowledge, Free will, Divine intervention, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, Christianity, Christian Philosophy

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Introduction

Augustine's interpretation of religious faith, later adopted and brought to maturity by Aquinas, evolved into a commonly accepted method of justification for Christian beliefs during the Medieval Era. These two distinguished scholars not only shaped the dominant Christian understanding in the Middle Ages but also profoundly influenced the doctrines of the Christian faith and their interpretation by today's Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, studying Augustine's and Aquinas' works is critical to revealing how faith was interpreted during the Medieval period and to understanding the roots that have shaped the modern Roman Catholic Church. This paper aims to answer the question of what makes religious faith praiseworthy, both intellectually and morally, in medieval Christian thought. To achieve this objective, several secondary or ancillary questions must be addressed: What is the nature of faith? Are faith and reason mutually exclusive? Is faith based on conclusive evidence? Does the grace of God overshadow or surpass the freedom of the servant in the act of faith? I will seek to answer these questions first by examining Augustine's works. Then, to further clarify the issue, I will extend my inquiry to Aquinas' philosophy, particularly to the areas left ambiguous by Augustine, such as the relationship between divine intervention and human freedom.

For now, we can say that, in medieval Christian thought, faith is praiseworthy only when it arises from free will. Faith cannot be grounded in knowledge (conclusive reason or evidence) because, according to Augustine and Aquinas, if there is knowledge, one necessarily assents to the proposition in question. Due to the compelling nature of the evidence, one is obliged to believe it. In other words, because of the strength of the evidence, one has no choice but to accept it. Therefore, to make faith praiseworthy, there should be no conclusive evidence in the act of faith, according to this understanding. Only in this way can one be free to believe. As a result, in medieval Christian thought, faith and knowledge are mutually exclusive.

I have set forth this initial conclusion in a hedged fashion since, during the course of this paper, there will emerge some reasons for rethinking it. Nevertheless, one thing remains true even after such a reassessment: Since faith lacks conclusive evidence similar to that of science, man must possess a strong will in order to embrace it. The will of man that is unaided by divine grace can do nothing but fall into sin, let alone attain faith. Only God is capable of granting the will to believe. Yet human beings are morally responsible for the sins they commit, and God cannot be condemned for punishing those who do not believe, despite their inability to do so.

The Nature or Real Essence of Religious Faith

Augustine's concept of faith is characterised by the idea of thinking with assent. As he stated, religious faith is "...*nothing else than to think with assent.*"¹ The possession of genuine love for God is what leads a faithful person to acknowledge (*agnitio*)² the articles of faith, which are promulgated by the Catholic Church within the Creeds. Thus, in this interpretation, it is the love of God that forms the foundation of religious faith rather than knowledge or conclusive evidence. It could be argued, then, that religious convictions or beliefs, in Augustine's account of faith, are justified by one's true love for God rather than rational demonstration.

Furthermore, according to Augustine, faith is ultimately a movement of the heart toward God. In other words, the ultimate object of this action or motion is God Himself. In this regard, Augustine's interpretation of religious faith could be classified as "belief-in" rather than "belief-that."³ The heart is capable of establishing this "belief-in" relationship with the Infinite Being only through the conversion of the will and the purification of the heart from pride and arrogance.⁴ Therefore, these two are essential prerequisites for the movement of faith. As we will discuss in more detail later, only through the grace of God are human beings capable of forming a fully matured will and a purified heart.

The teaching of Augustine that faith is "to think with assent" was largely followed by Aquinas. However, he further developed the concept of assent into

- 1 Augustine of Hippo, *A Treatise on the Predestination of the Saints*, bk.1, ch.5. [Unless otherwise stated, for all Augustine's works, I used "*A Select Library of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*," ed. Philip Schaff, 8 vols., 1887–1902, reprinted edition of the American edition (New York: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995.) Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Accessed Sept. 22, 2022. <https://ccel.org>.]
- 2 *Agnitio* (assent) refers to both the internal acknowledgement of articles of faith and the external declaration of this acknowledgement through speech. As we will discover later, Aquinas does not consider external speech to be necessary for one to be considered a believer. *Agnitio* is the standard concept employed for religious assent in Augustinian literature, which was later accepted by Aquinas and the Roman Catholic Church. It largely coincides with the concept of *taṣḍīq* used to define faith (*īmān*) in the Muslim Kalām tradition.
- 3 "Belief-in" refers to a personal relationship based on trust and love. It is an attitude towards a person, whether human or divine. In other words, the object of faith here is directly God Himself. This kind of relationship can be compared to the bond of trust and friendship that a person establishes with their fellow human beings. As for "belief-that," it is just an attitude towards a proposition. The object of faith here is not God Himself but a proposition about Him, for instance, "I believe that God exists." For more information, see, Henry H. Price, *Belief: The Gifford Lectures Delivered at the University of Aberdeen in 1960*. (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1969), 426-55. ; John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*. 2nd. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 52.
- 4 Augustine, *On the Trinity*, bk.1, ch.13.30 and ch.13.31.

two dimensions.⁵ First, it is the assent to the articles of faith which are declared in the form of propositions in the Creeds. This is called the inner act of faith,⁶ which is a mental process in which one acknowledges the truth of certain propositions and adopts them as guiding criteria for life. Second, it is a confession or direct expression of what is believed, which is the outward act of faith.⁷ The cause of the outward act is, of course, the internal act. Thus, it is the inner act that needs to be emphasised more in this understanding,⁸ for, the purpose of the outward act—the verbal speech or the declaration of what is believed by the tongue—is to express what is assented to in one’s heart. Although the inner act constitutes the essence of faith, both one’s inward commitment to the articles of faith and the outward expression of that sincere devotion are regarded properly as an act of faith in Aquinas.⁹

Faith is one of the three theological virtues, along with “hope” and “charity,” in Aquinas’s thought. These three virtues are known as “infused virtues” because they are bestowed upon the faithful as a gift from God. They are obtained without any effort on the part of the recipient. The “acquired virtues,” on the other hand, can be obtained through the efforts of individuals, and this is what distinguishes them from infused virtues. As a virtue, there is no difference between the definition of faith as an infused theological virtue and the definition that applies to acquired virtues. The only difference, as noted, is that the latter is not given to us by God as a gift but can be acquired by individuals through their own efforts. Accordingly, as expressed in the *Summa (I-II. q.55, q.4, first objection,)* faith like other virtues, “*is a good quality [habit or disposition] of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us.*” Yet, as the final part of the definition implies, God is the efficient cause and the source of all infused virtues. It is worth noting that this point is emphasised in the following phrase: “*... God works in us without us.*” If this phrase is removed from the definition, the remainder of the definition will be in agreement with the rest of all virtues, whether acquired or infused.¹⁰

5 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II–II, q.2, a.1. [For all references and quotes from the *Summa*, I used the following: Thomas Aquinas, “*Summa Theologiae*,” trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Bros. edition, 1947), The Thomistic Institute. Accessed Sept. 22, 2022. <https://aquinas101.thomisticinstitute.org/st-index>. Note: Henceforth, it will be abbreviated to *ST*.]

6 Aquinas, *ST*, II–II. q.2, a.1.

7 Aquinas, *ST*, II–II. q.3, a.1.

8 Aquinas, *ST*, II–II. q.3, a.1, ad.3.

9 Aquinas, *ST*, II–II. q.3, a.1.

10 Aquinas, *ST*, I–II. q.55, q.4.

As for what faith is in terms of its object, whether it is God Himself or a certain proposition about Him, it seems that Aquinas rejects the presence of any explicit distinction between “believe-in” and “believe-that.” According to him, the real object of faith is God as the First Truth.¹¹ The human nature of Christ, the sacraments of the Church, and all other articles of faith that can be expressed in a form of proposition are inherent in this Ultimate Object, namely, the First Truth. A faithful person assents to those propositions on account of God and again they are directed to Him by those propositions.¹² The following passage from Aquinas may be helpful in clarifying this point. Aquinas says that the object of faith may be approached from two different aspects: “*First, as regards the thing itself which is believed, and thus the object of faith is something simple, namely the thing itself about which we have faith. Secondly, on the part of the believer, and in this respect the object of faith is something complex by way of a proposition.*”¹³ In terms of the thing that we believe and trust, the object of faith is one and simple, namely, God Himself. In addition, although faith is described as assent to certain propositions, God—who provides the internal consistency and credibility of these propositions—is inherently present in those propositions. Or vice versa, those propositions are inherently present in God. The object of faith should therefore be considered as a phenomenon consisting of their unity, rather than making a sharp distinction between God and the propositions about Him.¹⁴ Further, according to Aquinas, the articles of faith should be enunciated in the form of a proposition under the notion of faith since this is the only way of having knowledge about God.¹⁵ It seems that Aquinas suggests that we should consider the object of faith as a phenomenon which is the union of these two; God Himself and the propositions about Him. Such an interpretation gives a more consistent understanding of what Aquinas really meant when he argued against distinguishing between the objects of faith.

Aquinas also states that there are three dimensions to faith, namely, *to believe that God (credere Deum,)* *to believe God (credere Deo,)* and *to believe in God (credere in Deum.)*¹⁶ A detailed examination of these dimensions could provide

11 Aquinas, *ST.*, II–II. q.1, a.1.

12 Aquinas, *ST.*, II–II. q.1, a.1, ad.1.

13 Aquinas, *ST.*, II–II. q.1, a.2.

14 See, Tad W. Guzie, “The Act of Faith According to St. Thomas: A Study in Theological Methodology,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 29, no. 3 (1965): 239–80, doi:10.1353/tho.1965.0014.

15 Aquinas, *ST.*, II–II. q.1, a.2, ad.2.

16 Bruno Niederbacher, “The Relation of Reason to Faith,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 339, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195326093.013.0026>.

valuable insights into Aquinas's conception of faith. The first formula or dimension emphasises the content of faith, in other words, it gives us what is believed, which may be expressed through a basic proposition, as in, "I believe that God exists." The second refers to the trust dimension of faith, that is, what is believed is believed under the authority of God. This means that the believer holds a strong trust in God fully believing that His promises will not be broken, and that He will not deceive the believer. As for the last dimension, it emphasises entrusting one's self to God (existential aspect of faith). As a whole, what one believes heavily influences how one lives.¹⁷

Given the cognitive attitudes of the mind, the act of faith rather corresponds to "opinion" and "conjecture" in Aquinas.¹⁸ Due to the absence of conclusive reason or evidence, the intellect cannot reach a firm assent in these cognitive states. For Aquinas the act of faith is a cognitive action, just as the rest of the cognitive acts of the human mind, but with one major difference; here, an act of will is necessary. In the act of faith, in Aquinas' words:

...the intellect assents to something, not through being sufficiently moved to this assent by its proper object, but through an act of choice, whereby it turns voluntarily to one side rather than to the other: and if this be accompanied by doubt or fear of the opposite side, there will be opinion, while, if there be certainty and no fear of the other side, there will be faith.¹⁹

Thus, even though faith is a cognitive act, there is a fundamental role played by the will that sets it apart from the rest of the cognitive acts of the human mind. The mind, however, is the proper subject of faith and therefore, the virtue of faith cannot be in the irrational part of the soul.²⁰

Faith, as a theological virtue, is infused by divine grace, and unlike natural (or acquired) virtues, it does not depend on any natural ability we possess, as noted earlier. Faith comes "...*entirely from without*," to borrow Aquinas' words.²¹ Natural virtues which derive from man's natural aptitude are common to all men and do not perish because of sin. However, theological virtues are not common to all, nor do they originate in man's natural aptitudes. Therefore, they are lost by a single sin.²² As a result, faith can no longer be spoken of if someone refuses even one

17 Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q.2 a.2. ; Niederbacher, "Relation of Reason to Faith," 339-340.

18 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *The Pocket Aquinas: Selections from the Writings of St. Thomas*, ed. Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), 287.

19 Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q.1, a.4.

20 Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q.55, a.4, ad.3.

21 Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q.63, a.1.

22 Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q.63, a.1.

article of faith. In this scenario, one's unbelief holds true even though he or she still accepts the rest of the articles of faith.

According to Aquinas, one's faith, in terms of its quality, can be greater or less than another's faith. God does not work based on nature's dictate but according to the order of His wisdom, thus God may bestow virtue and privilege on people in varying degrees. This idea is in line with the Scriptures. According to Eph. 4:7: "To every one of you [Vulg.: 'us'] is given grace according to the measure of the giving of Christ."²³

Lastly, both for Augustine and Aquinas, charity is the greatest factor that imbues faith with its fundamental character and that gives the proper colour to what faith is. The act of faith is to believe in God and to believe means to assent to something through one's own free will. Thus, if someone fails to will in a proper way, it will not be a perfect act of faith. According to Augustine, every right motion of the will is rooted in a right love. For a person to be able to will as one ought, his or her will must be perfected by charity, or in other words, an ideal or perfect will can only arise as the fruit of charity. Aquinas again follows his predecessor's footsteps and declares that friendship with God is the essence of charity.²⁴ The purpose of charity is to bring man closer to God and although faith can exist without charity, it cannot exist as a virtue of the highest order.²⁵

The investigation made so far leads us to the conclusion that the thinkers in question regard faith as a phenomenon justified not on the ground of knowledge or conclusive evidence, but rather on the ground of one's true love for God. In the Christian understanding, faith is ultimately a movement of the heart which is again motivated by one's genuine love for the Creator. It is only God Himself who leads a person to embrace faith, not knowledge or a piece of evidence. It is because all theological virtues are the gifts bestowed upon the servant by God without any work from the servant. Although both Augustine and Aquinas ultimately accept this view, they do not simply claim that man has no responsibility or has nothing to contribute to the act of faith. Nevertheless, as we shall see in later sections of this study, there do appear to be some challenges regarding what an individual's duty or responsibility is in the act of faith and how to explain this in a reasonable

23 Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q.66, a.1 and ad.3.

24 Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q.23, a.1.

25 Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q.65, a.4. For faith and its relation to charity, see, Joseph P. Wawrykow, "The Theological Virtues," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies, online ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 288–305, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195326093.013.0023>.

and consistent manner. Now, let me turn to Augustine who asserted that the most essential obligation of man in the act of faith is to make room or space for faith through the use of human reasoning.

Faith versus Reason: Faith Precedes Reason or Reason Precedes Faith?

According to Augustine, human reason plays a dual role in the domain of faith: first, reason precedes faith, and second, reason is subordinate to faith as faith is considered the supreme authority in his thought. Prior to discussing the question of when and how reason precedes faith and vice versa, it would be prudent to analyse Augustine's general writings on the concept of reason.

Augustine highly emphasised the significance of natural reason by considering it as a gift to be deeply respected. He drew attention to the fact that it would be a fatal mistake to abandon reason by citing some misuses of it in numerous cases.²⁶ He argued that human beings must use their rational soul appropriately and correctly. In his words:

For I may with good right in any man love reason, even though I rightly hate him, who uses ill that which I love. Therefore, I love my friends the more, the more worthily they use their rational soul, or certainly the more earnestly they desire to use it worthily.²⁷

The idea of describing man as the image or likeness of God is founded on the fact that he has the capacity to reason.²⁸ Augustine remarks that mind, reason, deliberation, all these abilities are intrinsic to man. Our very nature is to reason, and we are, thanks to our rational souls, distinguished from the rest of the animals. It is the spirit of human reason that drives man to seek understanding. Man is capable of cognition and understanding by virtue of reason. Again, we should value reason above all else since our superiority over the rest of the creatures lies in our ability to reason.²⁹ I would like to leave it at that since the value he assigns to human reason has already become sufficiently clear through the remarks above. Now we can turn our attention to the question of when and how reason precedes faith in Augustine.

Augustine's theology has been largely characterised by his explicit prioritisation of faith over reason in almost every Augustinian study. There are very few things that can be said to argue against this conclusion. However, one should not overlook

26 Augustine, *Soliloquies*, bk.1, ch.7.

27 Augustine, *Soliloquies*, bk.1, ch.7.

28 Augustine, *On the Trinity*, bk.14, ch.8.11.

29 Wilma Gundersdorf Von Jess, "Reason as Propaedeutic to Faith in Augustine," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 5, no. 4 (1974): 230, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40024636>.

or ignore the fact that the proposition that “faith precedes reason” is also grounded on reason in Augustine’s thought. Therefore, a counter proposition that “reason precedes faith” is also equally correct in this respect for Augustine, yet the latter is not as explicitly stated or emphasised as the former. The following lines from Augustine strongly suggest that reason should precede faith:

For who cannot see that thinking is prior to believing? For no one believes anything unless he has first thought that it is to be believed. For however suddenly, however rapidly, some thoughts fly before the will to believe, and this presently follows in such wise as to attend them, as it were, in closest conjunction, it is yet necessary that everything which is believed should be believed after thought has preceded; although even belief itself is nothing else than to think with assent. For it is not every one who thinks that believes, since many think in order that they may not believe; but everybody who believes, thinks, —both thinks in believing and believes in thinking.³⁰

No one believes, as the passage emphasises, unless some sort of rational thinking takes place in the human mind. Then, according to Augustine, we should admit that faith comes before reason in the normal order of things. As for the relationship between reason and faith, Augustine again declares the priority and necessity of reason. For it is because of this faculty that we are able to believe in the first place. In his words:

God forbid that He should hate in us that faculty by which He made us superior to all other living things. Therefore, we must refuse so to believe as not to receive or seek a reason for our belief, since we could not believe at all if we did not have rational souls.³¹

Even though he more distinctly and more often stressed the idea that “faith precedes reason” throughout his works, he also pointed out that reason in fact always comes first, as the two passages above demonstrate. For, according to him, reason itself convinces us that faith should come before reason and again, reason causes us to think that accepting this attitude (the priority of faith) is not irrational.³² Therefore, if one approaches Augustine’s theology from the right angle, these two propositions, that “faith comes before reason” and that “reason comes before faith,” do not contradict each other.

Thus, the first role of human reason in the domain of faith is closely related to the passages quoted above. Accordingly, the task of reason is first to acknowledge

30 Augustine, *Predestination of the Saints*, bk.1, ch.5.

31 Augustine, *Ep.* CXX, i, 3, 4; CSEL 34, p. 706, quoted in Gundersdorf Von Jess, “Reason as Propaedeutic,” 230.

32 Gundersdorf Von Jess, “Reason as Propaedeutic,” 231. ; Cf. Robert E. Cushman, “Faith and Reason in the Thought of St. Augustine,” *Church History* 19, no. 4 (1950): 271, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3161161>.

its own limits and invite man to the road to faith. In other words, the first task of human reason is to remove the barriers that stand in the path of faith. In this regard, Augustine assigns many duties to human reason. For instance, human reason, he argued, could conclusively demonstrate the existence of God and His divine attributes. He believed that the Platonists had already presented convincing arguments in this respect and that they had demonstrated other numerous truths about God alongside His existence by natural reason. Augustine considered this role to be one of the most significant functions of natural reason through which one can remove the hurdles to the path of faith.

I think, at this point, it is worth mentioning Augustine's personal attitude towards demonstrating God's existence by rational arguments. It is true that Augustine believes man can benefit from rational arguments to prove God's existence and His attributes, yet he thinks this is a pointless affair,³³ for he declares that he has never truly doubted the existence of God.³⁴ According to him, there is no point in attempting to prove the obvious. Reason must be employed to understand God's nature and attributes as well as the relationship between Him and His creatures rather than His existence.³⁵

Now coming back to the topic at hand, Augustine uses many other examples to show that reason precedes faith and can assist man on the road to faith.³⁶ For instance, Augustine suggests to his pupils that the teachings of heretics should be refuted and invalidated based on the principles of natural reason, rather than faith. He, too, followed this method against heretics and apostates, and in his debates against his opponents. Furthermore, reason can lead minds to the truth and prepare one to accept the gift of faith.³⁷ Again, those with weak faith can also be bolstered by reason and their faith can be strengthened on rational grounds. This is another place where priests can rely on reason to enhance the persuasiveness of their speech

33 Augustine, *The Confessions*, bk.7, ch.20.26.

34 Augustine, *The Confessions*, bk.6, ch.5.7–8. ; bk.7, ch.9.13–15. ; bk.7, ch.10.16.

35 Rist, *Ancient Thought*, 68. ; Gundersdorf Von Jess, "Reason as Propaedeutic," 231–32.

36 It may seem to the reader that an ambiguity relating to the meaning of the word 'precede' is arising at this point. Some may have even been aware of it earlier. 'Precede' could mean "comes before in the order of events", or it could mean "comes before in priority of importance." Surely, in Augustine's view, there is always 'faith' in 'something' before reasoning gets underway. Therefore, in the thought of Augustine, the supremacy of faith over reason should be perceived as the default state. In other words, faith always comes before reason in "priority of importance." However, in certain contexts, as we will explain now, reason should be emphasised rather than faith. And here, although faith still comes before reason in "priority of importance," it comes after reason in "the order of events."

37 Gundersdorf Von Jess, "Reason as Propaedeutic," 227.

and admonition.³⁸ These are some examples from Augustine's thought that illustrate how reason takes precedence over faith and how it serves man to remove obstacles from the path of faith. I content myself with quoting this much from Augustine, assuming that the point is adequately made clear.

In Augustine, taking the twofold meaning of natural reason into account, the second role of reason arises after the act of faith. According to Augustine, although reason can reveal many truths about God, such as the existence and attributes of God, which are considered preambles to faith, he concedes that some truths of faith are still beyond rational demonstration.³⁹ For example, in Augustine's view, even the Platonists, through the light of natural reason, cannot demonstrate or prove anything regarding the Incarnation or explain it on rational ground, despite the fact that their principles are the closest to those of Christianity.⁴⁰ Therefore, when it comes to such mysteries of faith, "faith precedes reason," for, "*unless you believe, you will not understand,*" as he mentioned in his famous dictum.⁴¹ In spite of Augustine's appreciation of reason in preparing man for faith, he also notes that using reason in this manner is always dangerous. For, natural reason, if left unguided by faith, could equally lead someone to deception and error. Therefore, if one does not surrender his will to God, human reason is fallible, and thus unreliable.⁴² It is, therefore, more trustworthy and more secure to accept these truths on the authority of faith. This is where faith precedes reason, and here, reason itself commands man to put faith before reason.

According to Augustine, the effects of original sin can only be reversed through divine grace. Again, only through divine grace can a soul be healed and restored to its original state. He argues that this is the only path to salvation, therefore, in this sense, faith has priority over reason in the last instance.⁴³ Reason should admit its limitations first, then command man placing faith before reason, for faith is the only path to truly knowing and understanding God. "*If ye will not believe, ye shall not understand*" or, "*If ye will not believe, ye shall not abide.*"⁴⁴ The purification of the soul through faith then is the first step to understanding. However, other

38 Gundersdorf Von Jess, "Reason as Propaedeutic," 228–29.

39 Augustine, *The City of God*, bk.21, ch.5.

40 Augustine, *The City of God*, bk.10, ch.29.

41 Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, ch. 5.

42 Cushman, "Thought of St. Augustine," 274–75, 283.

43 John Peter Kenney, "Faith and Reason," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. David Vincent Meconi and Eleonore Stump, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 275–76, doi:10.1017/CCO9781139178044.022.

44 Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, bk.2, ch.12.17.

Christian virtues, such as hope and charity, are also necessary in order to reach a mature understanding of the Divine. Faith and other Christian virtues are impossible unless the consequences of the Fall are removed from the soul. This power of healing and restoring will to its original state comes as a gift from God. Faith, then, is not another or an alternative way of reaching the true knowledge of God in Augustine, but rather, it is the only way to know God.⁴⁵

Having been inspired by the Gospels, Augustine concludes that faith is the only form of knowledge through which we can see God in this world. In the afterlife, however, we will be able to move beyond that limited knowledge provided by faith and see Him directly face-to-face.⁴⁶ For Augustine, without the human mind first having been healed through faith, any attempt to understand the Truth only by means of pure natural reason is a vain endeavour.⁴⁷ Accepting the proposition that “reason precedes faith” as a guiding principle in all circumstances by ignoring that reason itself sometimes commands the proposition that “faith precedes reason,” is a sign of arrogance. According to Augustine, this attempt is nothing other than a sign of pride:

Will you be able to lift up your wounded heart unto God? Must it not be first healed, in order that thou mayest see? Do you not show your pride, when you say, “First let me see, and then I will believe?”⁴⁸

To Augustine, faith, in a sense, serves as a starting point leading to a true knowledge of the Christian God.⁴⁹ Yet this knowledge, as stated before, is somewhat limited in this world and can only be fully achieved in the afterlife by those who follow the right order. “...if there be anything in them of either love or fear towards God, they may return and begin from faith in due order...”⁵⁰ To begin from faith is crucial, otherwise, as Rist, a British scholar of early Christian philosophy, points out: “*Miracles and special graces aside, a non-Christian, lacking faith, cannot reasonably hope for the type of experience necessary for a proper understanding of the Christian God.*”⁵¹

45 Kenney, “Faith and Reason,” 284–85.

46 Augustine, *Soliloquies*, bk.1, ch.14.

47 Augustine, *The City of God*, bk.10, ch.28.

48 Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, psalm 40, 20.

49 Augustine, *On the Trinity*, bk.9, ch.1.1.

50 Augustine, *On the Trinity*, bk.1, ch.2.4.

51 John Rist, “Faith and Reason,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 29, doi:10.1017/CCOL0521650186.003.

As a result, the propositions “faith precedes reason” and “reason precedes faith” are simultaneously valid to some extent in Augustine’s thought. This interpretation is also supported by the two-fold meaning or function which is assigned by Augustine to the notion of *intellectus* (comprehension; understanding.) Accordingly, *intellectus* first refers to the degree to which one understands or grasps divine truths by natural reason.⁵² This is a limited understanding which prepares man for proper acknowledgement of the articles of faith. Man, through this limited understanding, recognises that natural reason, on its own, is not sufficient on the path of faith. This is, in Augustine’s thought, where reason precedes faith, and here, reason should serve man by removing the impediments and making room for faith. Second, the notion of *intellectus* represents a further or deeper understanding of divine truths. This more comprehensive understanding occurs only as a “*fruit of faith*” since it is “*one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.*”⁵³ Here, faith precedes reason. Thus, those who seek a deeper understanding of the truth should prioritize faith.

I would like to conclude the discussion by quoting a passage from Von Jess, which, I think, captures the two dimensions of reason in Augustine:

Augustine, then recognized that there were rational proofs for the existence of God, and these proofs speak simultaneously of some of his attributes, but, drawing on his own experience, Augustine knew also that such an intellectual conviction was not, in itself, sufficient to guarantee a Christian lifestyle. The impetus of grace was needed to complete a man’s moral conversion. Hence, these arguments from reason were seen as a stage to a fuller knowledge. Dialectical proofs adduced for the existence of God were considered instrumental in the process as viewed from its final end. But reason truly functioned in a vital way at both termini, for in the beginning it led man to see the reasonableness of faith, and later, with grace more abundantly operative, reason assumed the new role of helping man to penetrate the mysteries of faith.⁵⁴

Reason, then, has two dimensions in Augustine’s view: in the first place, its duty is to demonstrate the reasonableness of faith, which is a preparatory phase or a prelude to the actual virtue of faith in the Christian sense. Following this, there is the phase where the grace of God predominates over reason and will. The role of reason here is to help one achieve a deeper understanding of the mysteries of faith.

The Relation of Intellect to Religious Assent

Aquinas distinguished two cases in which one assents to a proposition. First, the proposition in question is either self-evident truth, or supported by conclusive evidence and demonstrative reasoning. In such cases, one necessarily and firmly

52 Gundersdorf Von Jess, “Reason as Propaedeutic,” 226, fn. 3.

53 Gundersdorf Von Jess, “Reason as Propaedeutic,” 226, fn. 3.

54 Gundersdorf Von Jess, “Reason as Propaedeutic,” 233.

assents to the proposition in question.⁵⁵ This sort of assent is mostly associated with “scientific knowledge.”⁵⁶ Second, there is no conclusive evidence in support of the proposition, nor does it seem to be self-evident truth. Assent to the proposition here is subject to one’s own control and volition, and it is not a firm assent –except “to believe” (*credere*), which will be explained later.

In Aquinas, there are four intellectual states of the human mind in which assent to a proposition may be given voluntarily:

...some acts of the intellect have unformed thought devoid of a firm assent, whether they incline to neither side, as in one who “doubts”; or incline to one side rather than the other, but on account of some slight motive, as in one who “suspects”; or incline to one side yet with fear of the other, as in one who “opines.”⁵⁷

Alongside these three acts of the intellect, the fourth act, in which one voluntarily assents to a proposition, is the act of believing (*credere*.) However, in this act of the intellect, one adheres firmly to one side rather than the other, and in that respect, belief is no different from *science* and understanding, indeed it is more certain.⁵⁸ Yet, due to the lack of conclusive evidence, belief cannot distinguish itself from *doubt*, *suspicion*, and *opinion*. In short, whereas belief has something in common with *science* and understanding in terms of firm assent, it accompanies *doubt*, *suspicion*, and *opinion* with respect to the epistemic status of the proposition to which assent is given.⁵⁹ Thus, Aquinas views faith as a mean between *science* and *opinion*.⁶⁰ Since the firmness or certainty of belief cannot be ascribed to the intellect’s epistemic nature, it must come from the will that commands the intellect, or, in the act of faith, one is not triggered by anything we understand. It is the eternal life promised by God that moves the will to assent to what has been revealed by God.⁶¹

55 Frederick R. Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, II vols., vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 301.

56 The term ‘science’ (*scientia*) should not be understood here in its modern sense. In the Middle Ages, there was no clear distinction between theology and science. Therefore, neither of these two disciplines differed from the other in terms of furnishing knowledge. The only difference between them was in the principles through which knowledge is acquired. In short, science is understood as knowledge that is derived from self-evident principles, whereas theology is understood as knowledge that acquires its principles from God, who is regarded as the source of all principles in the Medieval period.

57 Aquinas, *ST.*, II–II, q.2, a.1.

58 Aquinas, *ST.*, II–II, q.4, a.8.

59 Aquinas, *ST.*, II–II, q.2, a.1.

60 Aquinas, *ST.*, II–II, q.1, a.2.

61 Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, trans. Robert W. Mulligan, James V. McGlynn and Robert W. Schmidt (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952-54), q.14, a.1. Accessed Sept. 27, 2022, <https://isidore.co/aquinas/QDdeVer.htm>.

According to Aquinas, if one has sufficient reason to believe in something, he is then not free to remain in unbelief. Faith does not belong to the domain of natural reason in which what is believed is verified by proof.⁶² The relationship between faith and knowledge is, therefore, mutually exclusive in Aquinas' philosophy.⁶³ For faith to be a meritorious act, it must be free from conclusive evidence. Aquinas believes that this is the only scenario in which an individual's free will may come into play.

Aquinas has argued, thus far, that faith cannot be a meritorious act when it is based on conclusive evidence, since such sufficient reason or conclusive evidence would violate or interfere with the free will of the individual. Nevertheless, this raises another concern: if the will has such strong power over the intellect, then it is possible to command the intellect to believe in another religion rather than Christianity. To put it another way, what drives us to choose one religion over another? Even though Aquinas sacrifices sufficient reasons to make the will free and faith praiseworthy, he is aware that faith once again will be a worthless act if there is no sufficient motive for it, because faith, without any foundation or grounding, is frivolous and blind.

Aquinas suggests the Scriptures and Divine Authority as sufficient ground to justify Christian faith. Through these two motives, which he claims are verified by countless miracles throughout history, a person is induced to believe that such and such things have been revealed by God.⁶⁴ Aquinas again holds that the miracles in the history of the Church, the fulfilment of prophecies, and the conversion of the world to the Christian faith attest to these strong motives for accepting Christian revelation. "*For it would be the most wondrous sign of all if, without any wondrous signs, the world were persuaded by simple and lowly men to believe things so arduous, to accomplish things so difficult, and to hope for things so sublime.*"⁶⁵ He claims that these miraculous events provide a rational basis for the believer. In other words, these are the credentials or grounds on which the believer places his trust in authority.⁶⁶ In short, scientific or natural knowledge cannot serve as

62 Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q.2, a.1, ad.1.

63 Terence Penelhum, "The Analysis of Faith in St Thomas Aquinas," *Religious Studies* 13, no. 2 (1977): 139–40, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412500009938>.

64 Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q.2, a.1, ad.1. ; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, bk.1, ch.6. (For all references and quotes from *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I used, Aquinas Institute's translation of *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Fr. Shapcote, Marietti, 1961 edition, available at: <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~SCG1>. Accessed Sept. 11, 2022. Note: Henceforth, it will be abbreviated to *SCG*.)

65 Aquinas, *SCG*, bk.1, ch.6.

66 Penelhum, "Analysis of Faith," 144–145.

a sufficient reason for the believer, since, in that case, he loses merit. However, because believing blindly is not a meritorious act, men should accept faith on the authority of God.⁶⁷

According to Aquinas, holding revelation as a sufficient motive for the Christian faith is reasonable and even necessary since, besides man's need for grace to attain faith and other theological virtues, we even learn of their very existence through revelation.⁶⁸ Once God is accepted as the authority, the believer is now more confident in what he or she hears from God since God never lies and cannot be deceived.⁶⁹ As is well known, both Augustine and Aquinas argued that men rely on others' authority and testimony for most of their decisions throughout their lives. Our actions are shaped under the guidance of the testimony of others; thus, it does not seem unreasonable to do the same for faith. For, according to these ancient thinkers, God is the most trustworthy of authorities.

The ultimate happiness of men, for both Augustine and Aquinas, lies in the sight of the Divine Essence. This ultimate happiness, however, transcends the intellect and the will of men. Therefore, without the grace of God, neither man nor any other creature, including angels, on their own –by their natural powers– is capable of achieving this ultimate happiness.⁷⁰ Augustine believed that human nature is corrupted as a result of original sin, and this is the reason why some divine truths surpass natural reason. Before the Fall, man lived in harmony with God and enjoyed the vision of the Divine Essence. Augustine argued that the intellect and the will can only be restored by grace, and only then would man regain his uncorrupted state in which he enjoyed true happiness. As for Aquinas, the need for grace here does not arise from man's fallen or damaged nature. Even uncorrupted human nature, according to him, cannot attain faith without divine grace.⁷¹ This is because some divine truths inherent in faith are beyond the comprehension of human reason, for instance, God is three and one.⁷²

As Aquinas points out, some may raise the following objection to this account: it is illogical for God to propose such things as objects of faith to mankind, for, as a necessity of His divine wisdom, God does not hold anyone responsible for things that surpass their natural capacity. Yet, according to Aquinas, it is not inconsistent

67 Aquinas, *ST.*, II–II, q.2, a.9, ad.3.

68 Aquinas, *ST.*, I, q.1, a.1.

69 Aquinas, *ST.*, II–II, q.2, a.4. ; *ST.*, II–II, q.4, a.8, ad.2.

70 Aquinas, *ST.*, I–II, q.5, a.5 and a.6.

71 Aquinas, *ST.*, II–II, q.5, a.1. ; *ST.*, II–II, q.5, a.1, ad.1 and ad.2.

72 Aquinas, *SCG.*, bk.1, ch.3.

for God to propose transcendent entities or phenomena to man as objects of faith. Rather, proposing such things is essential, as Aquinas puts it:

For no man tends to do a thing by his desire and endeavour unless it be previously known to him. Thus, since man is directed by divine providence to a higher good than human frailty can attain in the present life, as we shall show in the sequel (bk. III), his mind had to be bidden to something higher than those things to which our reason can reach in the present life, so that he might learn to aspire and to tend by his endeavours to something surpassing the whole state of the present life.⁷³

According to this passage, man has been invited by divine grace to a higher state of happiness than he can attain in this life, a state of happiness that transcends man's finite creation here on earth. It seems that, according to Aquinas, in order to achieve this transcendent happiness, the mind and its reasoning capacity must be tested with those objects of faith that are beyond their natural powers. Only in this way can men be prepared for the eternal enjoyment of that transcendent happiness.

It is true that the intellect is not powerful enough to attain faith on its own, but it must not be totally ignored in this area either. According to Aquinas, the intellect can be used in a demonstrative way to prove the existence and oneness of God for instance,⁷⁴ as we saw in Augustine. He pays tribute to the philosophers by noting that they have established conclusive proofs of the existence of God under the light of natural reason.⁷⁵ In this regard, "*The Five Ways*" of Aquinas is a well-known enterprise where he uses the intellect as a demonstrative tool for the

73 Aquinas, *SCG.*, bk.1, ch.5.

74 Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason, and Following Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 84, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199213146.001.0001>. ; In Aquinas' view, these demonstrative arguments are so compelling that he criticises those who reject them with the following words: "*But he who lacks the aforesaid knowledge of God seems very much to be blamed, since it is a very clear sign of a man's stupidity if he fails to perceive such evident signs of God's existence –even as a man would be deemed dull who, seeing man, did not understand that he has a soul.*" See, Aquinas, *SCG.*, bk.3, ch.38.

75 Aquinas, *SCG.*, bk.1, ch.3. ; For a detailed account of what natural reason can tell us about God according to Aquinas, see, Brian Davies, "Thomas Aquinas," in *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jorge J. E. Gracia and Timothy B. Noone (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2003), 644–52, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bham/detail.action?docID=214126>.

existence of God.⁷⁶ For most people, however, such professional arguments may not be appropriate, either due to lack of time or being devoid of intellectual skills. To this group, Aquinas suggests his fifth way, an argument of the cosmological type, which is simple yet convincing. In such a case, by observing the universe, an individual may realise the order around him and come to the conclusion that there must be a Designer/Creator.⁷⁷ However, it is critical to keep in mind that the things we know about God by natural reason are not articles of faith but rather preambles to those articles.⁷⁸

The possession of the preambles of faith by natural reason does not lead man to the happiness promised by religion.⁷⁹ It is a mere intellectual assent, utterly devoid of charity, thus it is called “formless faith.” However, the believer is expected to possess “formed faith,” which is both a virtue and a living faith. On the other hand, formless faith is dead and is not a virtue.⁸⁰ Faith is a meritorious act and a virtue only if someone gives assent to the articles of faith on the authority of God, not only to things that surpass human nature but also to those that can be attained by natural reason. As Aquinas puts it, “*For the faith of which we are speaking does not assent to anything, except because it is revealed by God.*”⁸¹

As mentioned before, the articles of faith cannot be demonstrated by natural reason, as opposed to the preambles of faith. Therefore, the task of natural reason is rather to defend divine teachings against heretics and at the very least to demonstrate that the articles of faith cannot be contrary to our natural or empirical knowledge.⁸² Augustine also held the same view, as quoted by Aquinas: “... *that which truth*

76 The five ways of Aquinas on God’s existence are discussed in: Timothy Pawl, “The Five Ways,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies, online ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 116–26, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195326093.013.0010>. ; For a comparison between Aquinas and Anselm on demonstrative reasoning regarding the existence of God, see, E. L. Mascall, “Faith and Reason: Anselm and Aquinas,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 14, no. 1 (1963): 67–90, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23954328>.

77 Aquinas, *SCG.*, bk.3, ch.38.

78 Aquinas, *ST.*, I, q.2, a.2, ad.1.

79 Aquinas, *SCG.*, bk.3, ch.38.

80 Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q.14, a.6.

81 Aquinas, *ST.*, II–II, q.1, a.1. ; See also, *ST.*, I, q.1, a.1.

82 Aquinas describes his motivation for using reason defensively as follows: “...*some of them, like the Mohammedans and pagans, do not agree with us as to the authority of any Scripture by which they may be convinced in the same way as we are able to dispute with the Jews by means of the Old Testament, and with heretics by means of the New. But the former accept neither. Thus we need to have recourse to natural reason, to which all are compelled to assent. And yet this is deficient in the things of God.*” See, Aquinas, *SCG.*, bk.1, ch.2.

shall make known can in no way be in opposition to the holy books, whether of the Old or of the New Testament.”⁸³ There can be no contradiction between the teachings of faith and natural reason. If there is a contradiction, the arguments against the tenets of faith are either incorrectly deduced from first principles or a hidden error is relevant. The aim of natural reason, according to Aquinas, should be to identify and resolve these so-called contradictions.⁸⁴

Aquinas asserts that philosophers have mistakenly assumed that natural reason can also reveal divine truths (the articles of faith) alongside the preambles of faith.⁸⁵ Divine truths, however, surpass those of natural reason in Aquinas’ thought, as we have already discussed. It follows that natural reason cannot be relied upon to reach these truths. Aquinas further argues that philosophers, using natural reason, were unable to resolve conflicts even in human affairs, let alone divine truths. Despite their best efforts, they made numerous errors and disagreed almost on every matter. Therefore, it is safer to believe in faith even in matters pertaining to God, which are accessible to natural reason.⁸⁶

Augustine, whom Aquinas followed in many matters and accepted as an authority, held similar views. The role of reason in Augustine, as stated earlier, is twofold: before faith (preparing man for faith), and after faith (leading him into a deeper understanding). Reason on its own is insufficient to grasp the Truth, and the Platonists, surrendering to their pride, made a serious error by arguing to the contrary.⁸⁷ In fact, in having done so, they have reiterated the sin of the Fall.⁸⁸ The right thing to do, according to Augustine, is to confess our need for divine assistance in order to overcome the fallen nature of the soul.

According to Aquinas, if the truths of faith had been left merely to the authority of natural reason, they would be unknown to most people because most people lack either the desire or the ability to acquire knowledge. In addition, there are those who are unable to devote sufficient time to seeking the truth because they are too occupied with household responsibilities and other human affairs, or, sometimes, it is simply people’s laziness that prevents them from searching for the truth.

83 Aquinas, *SCG.*, bk.1, ch.7.

84 Aquinas, *ST.*, I, q.1, a.8. ; Aquinas, *SCG.*, bk.1, ch.7.

85 Aquinas, *ST.*, I–II, q.62, a.2, ad.2. ; See, Mark D. Jordan, “Theology and Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 234–35. doi:10.1017/CCOL0521431956.010.

86 Aquinas, *ST.*, II-II, q.2, a.4.

87 Augustine, *The Confessions*, bk.7, ch.20.26 and bk.7, ch.21.27.

88 Augustine, *The Confessions*, bk.7, ch.20.26 and bk.7, ch.21.27.

Aside from all this, many things must be known in advance to perform well in these sciences, namely, theology and philosophy. By natural reason, knowing God is a very difficult task, one that takes years of practice. In addition, the intellect does not have the appropriate conditions to comprehend such lofty truths in youth when the passions of the flesh are in demand.⁸⁹ In short, if God had not revealed the truths of faith to mankind and there had been no other way to gain knowledge of God than natural reason, most people would remain ignorant of Him. For this reason, God, by His divine grace, reveals all truths whether they are accessible to natural reason or not. This is so that human beings can understand the truths of faith clearly and without error.

Free Will, and Divine Sovereignty: An Analysis of the Tension between Human Agency and Divine Action

According to Augustine, one's moral responsibility depends on free will.⁹⁰ In other words, man bears moral responsibility because of his freedom of choice. Discussing the praiseworthiness and the blameworthiness of human actions is only possible thanks to free will. Therefore, if faith is to be considered a praiseworthy deed which will be rewarded by God, then faith must be acquired through one's own free will. However, although Augustine insists on free choice to secure the praiseworthiness or merit of faith, he also equally maintains the idea that, without grace, "*...they do absolutely no good thing, whether in thought, or will and affection, or in action...*"⁹¹ It seems, according to Augustine, one can do good only with the help of God. In other words, one cannot accomplish good without God's intervention. On the other hand, he believed that man does evil on his own, commits every sin on his own, and thus, he is solely responsible for his sins.⁹² If so, Augustine's approach to the relationship between faith and free will might be summarised as follows: unless God restores and heals one's will, man will have no choice but to carry out sinful acts. Consequently, man cannot acquire faith on his own since neither faith nor any other praiseworthy deed can be achieved without God's participation.

89 Aquinas, *SCG.*, bk.1, ch.4.

90 Augustine, *On Grace and Free Will*, ch.1, and ch.2.

91 Augustine, *A Treatise on Rebuke and Grace*, ch.2.

92 Eleonore Stump, "Augustine on Free Will," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. David Vincent Meconi and Eleonore Stump, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 168, 175, doi:10.1017/CCO9781139178044.014. ; Peter King, "Introduction," in *Augustine: On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), xxvii, doi:10.1017/CBO9780511844720.001.

Following this brief summary of Augustine's general approach to the problem of man's freedom in the act of faith, I would now like to discuss in more depth the relationship between faith, free will, and God's grace. One may perceive God's grace as a form of aid that strengthens or enhances one's faith. Due to the fact that the agent already has faith here, this approach seems to some degree less problematic. However, Augustine asserts that even the "beginning of faith" is induced by the grace of God.⁹³ He further argues that God can instill faith in someone regardless of whether or not that person chooses this. The conversion of Paul the Apostle, which is described as a miraculous event in the Scriptures, can be given as a fitting example for this second scenario. Having accepted that God participates so heavily in the act of faith, a serious tension arises between human freedom and divine grace. Free will and divine grace need to be reconciled one with the other so that the latter does not absolve individual responsibility from human agents. As in the second case cited earlier, Augustine holds that it is possible that one may somehow come to have faith as a result of God's supernatural intervention, regardless of their own intention or preference. Yet, it also seems that embracing faith, according to Augustine, should not be completely out of one's control if we recall his views on free will. How then could this second act of grace be in harmony with man's free will? There seems to be the necessity of giving a reasonable account of where faith comes from, or how faith is achieved by faithful individuals; namely, whether we acquire faith thanks to our free will, or whether it comes entirely from divine grace. As noted earlier, even to make our own free choices, Augustine argues, divine grace is necessary. In any case, if Augustine intends to defend all these views simultaneously, then he should give a realistic explanation of how God's participation in the act of faith does not extend so far as to remove human responsibility.

Augustine makes several attempts to reconcile these two, namely free will and God's grace.⁹⁴ In his later writings, he points out that some might ask questions such as: if it is only God who can grant the will to believe, and if He wants everyone to be saved, then why does He not grant it to everyone? Is it not even more disturbing to imagine that God will punish those who do not believe, despite their inability to do so? Augustine's response to this objection is as follows: "*If you ask wherefore; because I confess that I can find no answer to make.*"⁹⁵ Despite the challenge of

93 King, "Introduction," xxx.

94 See for a detailed discussion of this, Stump, "Augustine on Free Will." (2014); For an old but more extended version of the article, see, Eleonore Stump, "Augustine on Free Will," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 124–47, doi:10.1017/CCOL0521650186.011.

95 Augustine, *On the Gift of Perseverance*, ch.18.

reconciling such a view of grace with free will in the act of faith, Augustine still maintains that it is not impossible. He says there must be a reasonable interpretation, but he admits he has yet to discover it. Nevertheless, the fact that the problem has not yet been resolved does not require him to abandon any of the following propositions: accordingly, he remains equally committed both to the proposition that even the beginning of faith is infused by the Divine and also to the proposition that mankind possesses free will. As a result, Augustine believes there is nothing to do on man's part to reach the will that enables one to believe. It is endowed freely by divine grace as a gift. Yet, according to him, this should not be interpreted as meaning that man does not exercise his free will when acquiring faith.⁹⁶

Augustine continues his response to the question stated in the previous paragraph by declaring that God in fact desires all human beings to be saved.⁹⁷ Otherwise, it would be impossible to approve the goodness of God. It follows that, according to Augustine, man has free will, faith is caused by God, and God desires all men to be saved. However, once all three are defended equally and simultaneously, Augustine realises that this leads to the same dilemma. In the words of Augustine:

...then the question arises whence we have this will? — if from nature, why is not at everybody's command, since the same God made all men? If from God's gift, then again, why is not the gift open to all, since "He will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth?"⁹⁸ ... And if you further ask why is this, it is because in this matter, even as His anger is righteous and as His mercy is great, so His judgments are unsearchable.⁹⁹

According to Augustine, even if the will to believe comes from God, His punishing those without faith still cannot be regarded as injustice. As to the question of why God creates the will of faith for some and not for others, Augustine seems to be content with the claim that God's decrees and decisions are sometimes mysterious, and thus incomprehensible to us.

As for Aquinas, there is no doubt in his mind that all men have free will. Otherwise, it would be futile to counsel, exhort, command, prohibit, reward, or punish them if they had no free will. Predators or brute animals, for example, are guided by their instincts while making judgements. Having no guidance from reason, they are thus incapable of making independent judgments. Unlike animals, humans act according to their rational faculties, namely reason and will. They decide whether to avoid or seek something based on rational judgements, rather

96 Stump (2014), "Augustine on Free Will," 178.

97 Stump (2014), "Augustine on Free Will," 175.

98 Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, ch.57.

99 Augustine, *On the Gift of Perseverance*, ch.18.

than natural instincts.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, the only actions worthy of being called human actions in the proper sense are those determined by reason and will. Human actions are distinguished from those of other creatures by their rational deliberation.¹⁰¹ And again, according to Aquinas, the will is a tendency to do what is good and right, not “*a neutral steering wheel*.”¹⁰² Therefore, the fact that man is a rational being necessitates him having free will. In other words, being rational simply means having the capacity for free will.¹⁰³

Further, Aquinas holds that human freedom is not in conflict with “natural” or “creaturely” causes. That is, even though there are causal factors in nature that are deterministic in some way, these causal factors do not affect or limit human freedom. And beyond that, man’s free will is not impaired or encroached upon by the fact that God is the first cause of everything that exists.¹⁰⁴ For it is the free will of an individual that causes him or her to act. Free will is therefore the cause of its own movement even though God is its first cause, because free will can only function through the First Cause. In the words of Aquinas:

...it does not of necessity belong to liberty that what is free should be the first cause of itself, as neither for one thing to be cause of another need it be the first cause. God, therefore, is the first cause, Who moves causes both natural and voluntary. And just as by moving natural causes He does not prevent their acts being natural, so by moving voluntary causes He does not deprive their actions of being voluntary: but rather is He the cause of this very thing in them; for He operates in each thing according to its own nature.¹⁰⁵

As for the relation of free will to faith, Aquinas explains it through a metaphor. Accordingly, in order for animals to survive, nature provided them with weapons and clothing, whereas it did not provide these tools for human beings. Instead, they are equipped with reason and hands. Hence, human beings can obtain weapons and clothing through the use of their reason and hands and can therefore deal with the necessities of survival. This ultimately means that human beings, along with animals, are also capable of obtaining their essential requirements to survive, but with one condition: namely, that they must struggle, work hard, and make use of the tools provided by nature. In a similar vein, although God has not provided

100 Aquinas, *ST.*, I, q.83, a.1.

101 Thomas Williams, “Human Freedom and Agency,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies, online ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 200, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195326093.013.0016>.

102 Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London, New York: Routledge, 2003), 278.

103 See, Aquinas, *ST.*, I, q.83, a.1.

104 Williams, “Human Freedom,” 207–208.

105 Aquinas, *ST.*, I, q.83, a.1, ad.3.

human beings with the necessary tools to attain happiness, neither has he brought them into existence in a way in which they are deprived of pursuing and working to attain happiness. They can at least strive for happiness, even though they will not be able to acquire it on their own.¹⁰⁶ God gave man free will, Aquinas says, and we must therefore endeavour to achieve happiness through what we have available to us, even though nature has not endowed us with all the necessary tools. In the words of Aquinas, “*But it did give him free-will, with which he can turn to God, that He may make him happy.*”¹⁰⁷ This statement gives the impression that faith is a collaborative effort between God and the servant. In other words, God and the servant work together in faith, but God is the one who contributes the most. His quote from Aristotle in this regard supports this idea; accordingly, the things we do through our friends are, in a sense, what we do on our own.¹⁰⁸ In this sense, the work we do through or with our friends can then be considered somewhat our own work. Aquinas seems to be saying that God’s intervention in the act of faith does not change the fact that faith is still man’s own act. If we apply the metaphor to our case, then what we do by means of God is done, in a sense, by ourselves.

Yet, Aquinas, in a later part of the *Summa*, writes a few lines that suggest faith is an act that occurs without any participation or involvement on the part of the believer. Accordingly, he first remarks that “*rectitude [or righteousness] of the will*” is necessary to attain ultimate happiness. And since man can achieve ultimate happiness only by transforming his or her corrupted will into its original condition (rectitude of the will) through the virtue of faith, then faith is a prerequisite for happiness. As noted earlier, faith is a theological virtue, and all theological virtues are endowed upon us by God without any participation or work on our part.

To further understand the degree to which God has influence over the will of the believer in Aquinas’ thought, we need to deepen our analysis at this point. He explains “*rectitude of the will*” as “*nothing else than the right order of the will to the last end.*”¹⁰⁹ And he continues, “*But this does not prove that any work of man need precede his Happiness: for God could make a will having a right tendency to the end, and at the same time attaining the end...*”¹¹⁰ Now, these statements imply that faith is an act that occurs without any participation on the individual’s part, because God “*could make a will having a right tendency to the end, and at*

106 Aquinas, *ST.*, I-II. q.5, a.5, ad.1.

107 Aquinas, *ST.*, I-II. q.5, a.5, ad.1.

108 Aquinas, *ST.*, I-II. q.5, a.5, ad.1.

109 Aquinas, *ST.*, I-II. q.5, a.7.

110 Aquinas, *ST.*, I-II. q.5, a.7.

the same time attaining the end.” Again, in the same article, Aquinas also states that achieving happiness without movement only belongs to God. He alone is the source of true joy, and therefore He naturally possesses happiness. In his words, “*since Happiness surpasses every created nature, no pure creature can becomingly gain Happiness, without the movement of operation, whereby it tends thereto.*”¹¹¹ Man obtains happiness through many movements of work which are called merits.¹¹² He also states that the pursuit of happiness requires work on the part of man.¹¹³

Lastly, before concluding Aquinas’ treatment of free will and divine intervention, I would like to discuss two more passages from the *Summa –the first part of the second part, q.55* (which discusses the virtues in their essence) *a.4 ad.6* and *q.63* (which deals with the cause of virtues) *a.2*. In the first passage, Aquinas seems to be giving a clue as to what the role of man is in the act of faith, yet the latter passage undermines this claim. Aquinas first claims that faith and other theological virtues are infused by God and thus no actions on our part are necessary to attain faith but our consent.¹¹⁴ It seems now that the act of consent here is the moral duty of human agents, and this is what makes one’s faith praiseworthy. However, right after this statement, Aquinas asserts that all works that originate from us are also done by God. In his words, “*As to those things which are done by us, God causes them in us, yet not without action on our part, for He works in every will and in every nature.*”¹¹⁵ Aquinas earlier defined human actions as those that we perform with purpose, thanks to our reason and will. Therefore, we are the cause of those actions. Yet, according to Aquinas, the Divine Law is the supreme rule and therefore encompasses everything that exists. This means that everything that is governed by human reason is also simultaneously governed by the Divine Law.¹¹⁶ His argument seems to be that the actions of men and those of God are

111 Aquinas, *ST.*, I–II. q.5, a.7.

112 Aquinas, *ST.*, I–II. q.5, a.7.

113 Aquinas, *ST.*, I–II. q.5, a.7. ; *ST.*, I–II. q.5, a.7, ad.1.

114 Aquinas, *ST.*, I–II. q.55, a.4, ad.6.

115 Aquinas, *ST.*, I–II. q.55, a.4, ad.6.

116 Aquinas, *ST.*, I–II. q.63, a.2. The Divine Law, as understood by Thomas Aquinas, refers to a set of laws or principles that are derived from the nature of God and are believed to be eternal and unchangeable. These laws are believed to govern all aspects of the universe, including human behaviour. According to Aquinas, the Divine Law is the supreme rule and therefore encompasses everything that exists. This means that it is the ultimate standard by which all other laws and principles are judged. In other words, the Divine Law is considered to be the highest authority and is seen as the ultimate source of morality and justice. Aquinas also believed that the Divine Law is accessible to human reason and can be understood by human beings. This means that human beings are able to use their intellect to understand the Divine Law and to discern what is right and wrong according to its principles.

in harmony, and thus our freedom is not lost. However, in the second passage, he once again argues that faith as a theological virtue is neither caused by reason nor by will or actions. An individual's endeavours do not lead him or her to the end, but rather the Divine Law does. Therefore, faith cannot be acquired through the actions or efforts of faithful believers, but only through the work of God, that is, God "*works in us without us.*"¹¹⁷

We can conclude from Aquinas's teaching that man must seek ultimate happiness and the virtue of faith through his own movements and actions. In his writings, however, we do not clearly see those movements, except our consent to the maxim that "*God works in us without us.*" And as our last discussion demonstrated, consenting to God's work in us will again be possible only through God Himself.

Exploring the Contemporary Debate on Faith and Religious Assent: Perspectives from Modern Philosophy

As a final note, given the wide variety of religious beliefs that exist in today's modern world, rational arguments or reasonable grounds appear to be becoming increasingly crucial in justifying religious beliefs. This is because, since there are many different articles of faith inherent in various religious traditions, which on many occasions even contradict each other, rational arguments seem to be the only way by which one can reasonably explain why he or she holds a particular belief rather than another. However, this should not be seen as merely an apologetic attitude for defeating opponents. If individuals are to remain faithful to their faith in an environment where life is constantly changing, such an attitude seems essential.

Modern discussions of faith have also addressed the necessity of rational proofs for justifying religious beliefs. As an example, Kenny states the following words:

...faith is not, as theologians have claimed, a virtue, but a vice, unless a number of conditions can be fulfilled. One of them is that the existence of God can be rationally justified outside faith. Secondly, whatever are the historical events which are pointed to as constituting the divine revelation must be independently established as historically certain with the degree of commitment which one can have in the pieces of historical knowledge...¹¹⁸

According to Penelhum, Aquinas's theory that religious faith can only be praiseworthy if the evidence supporting it is inconclusive is not appropriate. This idea leads to the conclusion that faith and knowledge are mutually exclusive, which Penelhum believes is not the right approach:

117 Aquinas, *ST.*, I-II. q.63, a.2.

118 Anthony Kenny, *What is Faith? Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 57.

The difficulty prompts me to suggest again that Aquinas, and a great many other thinkers who follow him, are mistaken in holding that the voluntariness, and hence the merit, of faith depends upon the inconclusiveness of the grounds for it. Perhaps acceptance can be given voluntarily even though the grounds are conclusive. If this seems absurd, let us reflect first that there are two ways in which one can accept what is proved to one: one can be reluctant to accept it, as Thomas's devils are, or one can be glad to accept it. Perhaps the man of faith has merit because he is glad to accept the truths of faith when the devil is not. Perhaps what makes faith voluntary is not that its grounds are inconclusive, but that even if they are conclusive, men are free to deceive themselves and refuse to admit that they are. Faith would be the outcome of a willingness to admit this, and faith and knowledge need not then be exclusive at all... Faith might be, or include, supposed knowledge...¹¹⁹

Pure epistemological externalism with regard to the justification of religious beliefs seems unsatisfying. Excluding knowledge from faith for the sake of setting the will free and thereby making faith praiseworthy is dangerous, as it raises the possibility of people believing in evil doctrines in an environment where knowledge is absent. The prospect of what evil doctrines people might believe in in such an environment is frightening in itself. Faith can be grounded in knowledge and still remain a matter of free choice if the concept of assent is given a two-fold meaning.¹²⁰ The first meaning of assent is related to knowledge: as far as knowledge is concerned, there is conclusive evidence that compels one to assent in a way that is totally independent of free will. Here, giving assent to a proposition occurs necessarily, not as a matter of free choice. The second meaning of assent arises following the first assent: it refers to accepting the truth content of the first assent and adopting it as a guiding principle in one's life. The first assent cannot be seen as faith since it does not depend on free will. Faith is praiseworthy only when it is chosen voluntarily. Furthermore, one can still deny the truth even if one is fully aware of it in one's inner world because man is capable of deceiving himself and leading a life contrary to the content of the truth.¹²¹ Therefore, faith cannot be regarded as knowledge. Faith is then a second assent, which is voluntary, on top

119 Penelhum, "Analysis of Faith," 152–53.

120 Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, one of the leading representatives of Islamic theology, also holds this view. See, J. Meric Pessagno, "Intellect and Religious Assent," *The Muslim World* 69, no. 1 (1979).

121 This point is highlighted by the Quran in the following verse: "*Those to whom We gave the Scripture know him as they know their own sons. But indeed, a party of them conceal the truth while they know [it].*" (Quran, 2:146.) Faith cannot be spoken of here, because the individuals mentioned in the verse have no assent although they hold knowledge. Therefore, to be ignorant of something and to deny the truthness of something are different attitudes, that is, the first does not necessarily lead to the latter. In other words, just as ignorance does not necessarily lead to unbelief, knowledge does not necessarily lead to assent. It appears that there is no causal relationship between knowledge and faith.

of the first assent, which occurs necessarily because of the nature of knowledge. Faith is the voluntary adoption of the truth derived from the first assent and its voluntary integration into one's life as a guiding principle.

The dual view of assent appears to hold the key to reconciling the beliefs of religious adherents with the realities of the modern world, where scientific knowledge and empirical evidence may occasionally appear to contradict religious dogma. Specifically, knowledge-based assent provides individuals with the ability to engage in critical thinking and rational inquiry, while the second form of assent, based on individual free will, emphasises voluntarism and enables believers to sincerely embrace the fundamental truths of their faith. This peace of mind and heart can help believers navigate the challenging terrain of the modern religious landscape, where conflicting truth claims and moral imperatives can often appear to clash.

Furthermore, this view of assent challenges the traditional Christian dichotomy between faith and reason, as well as between intellect and religious assent. It provides a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between faith and reason by recognising the importance of rational arguments and reasonable grounds in justifying one's religious faith, while acknowledging the role of personal commitment and subjective experience in shaping religious beliefs and practices. Most importantly, this view of assent enables individuals to establish a unity of mind and heart between their religious beliefs and their way of living in modern times. This unity can help believers find greater coherence and consistency in their religious and secular (or worldly) lives, allowing them to integrate their beliefs into a holistic worldview.

Conclusion:

According to Augustine, natural reason alone is not sufficient when it comes to the articles of faith, though it has much to say about the preambles of faith. Some divine truths are simply beyond human comprehension because our souls are no longer in their original state of purity, which allowed us to perceive God directly. This change in our spiritual condition transpired with the occurrence of Original Sin, which weakened both our moral capacity and intellectual ability to know God. Restoring the soul to its original condition is beyond human capacity. Therefore, we need supernatural intervention, or to be more precise, God's grace, in order to achieve the mentioned motion of the heart, namely, faith. Furthermore, faith involves not just believing in the existence of God, but also accepting and trusting in God's revelation, which is made known through Scripture and the

Church. Augustine believed that faith was a gift from God and not something that could be attained through human effort alone. He maintained that God's grace was essential for people to have faith, and that the act of believing itself was a gift from God. According to Augustine, faith is not merely a matter of intellectual assent or agreement with a set of doctrines or beliefs. Instead, it involves a wholehearted trust in God and a willingness to submit to His will. As he wrote in his *Confessions*, "*Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.*"¹²² Despite Augustine's belief in the necessity of God's grace for faith, he did not deny the existence or importance of free will. He saw these two concepts as complementary rather than contradictory. In short, there were three propositions in Augustine's mind that he held to be undeniably true. First, man has free will and it plays an active role in the act of faith. Second, faith is a gift from God graciously bestowed upon man without any effort on his part. Last, God wants all men to be saved. If, on the other hand, you ask him how each of these statements can be true at once without contradicting each other, he simply admits that he has not yet figured it out.

As for Aquinas, faith is a theological virtue inspired by God without any work on our part. It falls somewhere between *science* and *opinion* (or conjecture) in terms of its cognitive status, being more certain than science but closer to opinion in terms of its epistemic status. It is through the act of will, or a "movement of the heart," as described by Augustine, that we attain a high degree of certainty in faith despite the lack of conclusive evidence. This movement or strong will can only be achieved by the grace of God. Aquinas believes that natural reason can uncover many truths about God, and this stage can be regarded as a preparatory stage for accepting the gift of faith. However, the faith that results from this process is "unformed" and lacks merit in the eyes of God. Instead, true faith—which is one of the three theological virtues, all of which are gifts from God—comes from accepting divine revelations by the authority of God, even without conclusive evidence. Therefore, one should give assent even to the preambles of faith on the grounds that they are revealed by God. One should willingly assent to both the preambles and articles of faith out of devotion to God, rather than a desire for proof. In other words, assent should arise for the sake of God, not for the sake of conclusive evidence. Lastly, when it comes to the relation of grace to free will in Aquinas, one must consent to "*God's work in us without us.*" The act of faith, which Aquinas calls a virtue, is bestowed upon us by God without our contribution, as stated earlier. However, before this infusion of God's grace, there are steps that we must take, such as consenting to God's work. Although God is the first cause of all actions,

122 Augustine, *The Confessions*, bk.10, ch.23.33.

including this very consent, Aquinas believes that this does not invalidate the free will of man. According to him, God is the one “*Who moves causes both natural and voluntary.*”¹²³ The infinite power of God permeates every action in nature, but inspired by Aristotle, Aquinas declares that whatever is done by God is also done by man, because what we do through our friends is our own work.

In conclusion, rational arguments or reasonable grounds are crucial components of any discourse in today’s diverse world, making them increasingly significant in justifying one’s religious beliefs. However, it is important to understand that this should not be seen as solely an apologetic attitude aimed at protecting oneself against the secular world or defeating followers of other religions. Rather, it should be viewed as a crucial motive for individuals to remain faithful to their religion in the ever-changing environment of the modern world.

The previous section of this article demonstrated that the conventional Christian perspective, which separates faith and reason, is challenged by the dual view of assent. The dual view of assent recognises the significance of rational arguments in justifying religious beliefs while also acknowledging personal commitment and subjective experience as crucial factors that shape those beliefs. It allows individuals to engage in critical thinking and rational inquiry while also highlighting the voluntaristic aspect of faith and enabling them to embrace the fundamental truths of their faith genuinely and sincerely.

Perhaps the most critical point is that this view of assent allows individuals to establish a unity of mind and heart between their religious beliefs and their way of living in the modern world by highlighting both the intellectual and emotional dimensions of faith.

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123 Aquinas, *ST.*, I, q.83, a.1, ad.3.

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