

## ИСТОРИЧЕСКИЕ ПАРАДИГМЫ

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### **Religion, Charity, and Following Reason Wherever It Leads: Rethinking Aquinas' Thought**

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Scholars of Aquinas have usually focused on the intellectual aspect of the Christian faith, i.e., on the view that faith is a propositional belief. In this view, faith can be subjected to rational scrutiny, and at least in principle rejected, if this is required by contrary evidence. In this article, I intend to show that for Aquinas, faith is not only a propositional belief. Consequently, it cannot be limited to the intellectual dimension. A moral and a religious one should be included, since faith is also a matter of good choice and relationship with God. Because of this relationship – which is the religious dimension of faith – faith is caused by charity, which makes the faithful firmly believe the fundamental tenets of divine revelation, however convincing contrary evidence may appear to be. Furthermore, when it comes to the relationship between faith and rational arguments, such a firm faith leads the believer to promote intellectual virtues, among which, open-mindedness stands out. The believer is led to follow reason wherever it leads, which means that he is put in the optimum condition to conduct research and debates.

**Keywords:** Aquinas; Faith; Religious dimension of faith; Propositional Belief; Christian philosophy.

**Citation:** Di Ceglie, R. “Religion, Charity, and Following Reason Wherever It Leads: Rethinking Aquinas' Thought”, *Philosophy of Religion: Analytic Researches*, 2024, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 83–96.

## Религия, милосердие и следование разуму, куда бы он ни вел: переосмысление концепции Фомы Аквинского

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Исследователи Фомы Аквинского, как правило, сосредоточены на интеллектуальном аспекте христианской веры, а именно на представлении о том, что вера – это пропозициональное убеждение. С этой точки зрения, вера может быть подвергнута рациональному анализу, в результате которого от нее как минимум придется отказаться, если того потребуют опровергающие ее доказательства. В этой статье автор собирается показать, что для Фомы вера – это не только пропозициональное убеждение, а следовательно, она не может быть ограничена лишь интеллектуальным измерением. В нее равным образом следует включить моральное и религиозное измерения, поскольку вера – это также вопрос правильного выбора и выстраивания отношений с Богом. Через эти отношения – а они и есть то самое религиозное измерение веры – сама вера зарождается в милосердии, благодаря которому верующие твердо убеждены в основополагающих истинах Божественного Откровения, какими бы убедительными ни казались противоположные доказательства. Кроме того, если говорить о взаимосвязи между верой и рациональными доводами, то такая твердая вера способствует развитию в человеке интеллектуальных добродетелей, среди которых особенно выделяется открытость к познанию. Верующий побуждается следовать за разумом, куда бы он ни вел, а это значит, что он находится в оптимальном состоянии для проведения исследований и участия в дискуссиях.

**Ключевые слова:** Фома Аквинский, вера, религиозное измерение веры, пропозициональное убеждение, христианская философия

**Ссылка для цитирования:** Ди Челье Р. Религия, милосердие и следование разуму, куда бы он ни вел: переосмысление концепции Фомы Аквинского // Философия религии: аналит. исслед. / *Philosophy of Religion: Analytic Researches*. 2024. Т. 8. № 1. С. 83–96.

### Introduction

Scholars of Aquinas, especially believers, have usually supported the view that in Aquinas' thought, Christian faith does not conflict with rational arguments. I agree with them. As I will show later in this essay, Aquinas is firmly convinced that there is no contradiction between faith and reason. However, I disagree with those scholars when the view in question leads them to concentrate only on the intellectual aspect of faith, i.e., the view that faith is propositional belief, from which follows that faith can, at least in principle, be rejected once contrary evidence seems to emerge. While putting forward his view of how rational arguments relate to Christian faith, Thomist thinkers such as Jacques Maritain and recent followers of him focus on the latter as if it only consisted in a set of beliefs; beliefs which can

be either confirmed or rejected by the philosophical reflection. Maritain by no means mentions other factors such as charity, i.e. the love for God, which God himself grants to the faithful<sup>1</sup>.

In this article, I intend to show that charity plays a crucial role in Aquinas' thought on the relationship between Christian faith and rational arguments. I first focus on how interpretations of this relationship by scholars of Aquinas are affected by problems, which I show are caused by the lack for consideration of the aforementioned role of charity. I then argue that for Aquinas, faith is not only propositional belief and cannot be limited to the intellectual dimension. A moral and a religious one should be included, since faith is also a matter of good choice and relationship with God. Because of this relationship – which is the religious dimension of faith – faith is mainly caused by charity, which Aquinas says makes the faithful firmly believe whatever God has revealed<sup>2</sup>. Finally, I argue that the role that charity plays in Aquinas' understanding of faith has positive repercussions for faith's relation to rational arguments. Once charity has perfected faith and has enabled the faithful to firmly believe at least the fundamental tenets of divine revelation, the faithful in question are put in a condition to promote intellectual virtues, among which, open-mindedness plays a crucial role. They will be able to follow reason wherever it leads, which is the optimum condition to conduct research and debates.

### **1. Lack of consideration of charity as a usual cause of problems with interpretations of Aquinas**

In this section, I argue that there are problems with the interpretation of Aquinas' doctrine of faith and reason that scholars of him have often posited throughout previous decades. My view is that the reason these problems emerge is that the scholars in question do not consider the crucial role that charity plays in that doctrine. For the sake of brevity, I will take into consideration only two among those scholars<sup>3</sup>: a believer interpreter of Aquinas such as Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), whose view I will show still exerts influence in the field, and an unbeliever scholar such as Anthony Kenny (1931).

Maritain participated in the well-known *querelle* on Christian philosophy, which prominently took place in France in 1920s and 1930s<sup>4</sup>. A number of scholars – not only believers but also unbelievers<sup>5</sup> – focused on the question whether or not philosophers who are also believers can shape the philosophical activity without turning it into theology. To put it otherwise, the question was whether faith

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<sup>1</sup> See: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 24, a. 2 (hereafter: ST).

<sup>2</sup> See: ST, II-II, q. 2, a. 10, ad 2.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the scholars in question, see: [Di Ceglie 2022: 9–38].

<sup>4</sup> See: [Sadler 2011]. The book in question aims at offering the translation, for the first time in English, of substantial portions of the documents that constituted the various phases of the *querelle*.

<sup>5</sup> Among the unbelievers, let me mention a historian of philosophy such as Émile Bréhier (1876–1952) and a philosopher such as Léon Brunschvicg (1869–1944).

can exert an influence on rational investigations without limiting their autonomy from any kind of external authority.

Maritain was among those who argued that it is possible for believers to develop a Christian philosophy. According to him, one should take into account “the classical distinction between the order of specification and the order of exercise” [Maritain 1955: 11]. Specifically, he examined the distinction “between the *nature* of philosophy, of what philosophy is in itself, and the *state* in which it is found factually, historically, in the human subject” [Maritain 1931: 59]<sup>6</sup>. According to Maritain, when “considered in its pure *nature*, or essence’, philosophy ‘depends only on the evidence and criteria of natural reason”. However, if “taken concretely, in the sense of being a *habitus*”, philosophy “is in a certain *state*”. This can be Christian, Jewish, Islamic, etc., and “has a decisive influence on the way it exists and develops” [Maritain 1938: 79]. In fact, the beliefs that emerge from the state in which philosophers find themselves should be subjected to philosophical scrutiny and then either accepted or rejected in the philosophical realm. If accepted, they will shape the philosophical reflection, and a Christian philosophy – as well as a Jewish philosophy, an Islamic philosophy, and so on – will emerge. Maritain, however, applies this view only to theoretical philosophy. When it comes to moral philosophy, he argues that new distinctions are needed. Not only the state, but also the nature of philosophy, should be related to Christian faith. A “moral philosophy adequately considered”, as Maritain describes it, “must be guided by the knowledge of our ultimate end, which, as Christian we cannot pretend not to know is supernatural” [Maritain 1955: 38ff]<sup>7</sup>.

However convincing Maritain’s view may be<sup>8</sup>, it remains true that the distinction between the nature of philosophy and the state in which philosophers find themselves seemingly offers a solution to the problem of how to counterbalance faith with philosophical reflection. It should not surprise us that this view has exerted a substantial and lasting influence. It is in Maritain’s footsteps that John Wippel, for example, has distinguished between the *moment of discovery* and the *moment of proof* [see: Wippel 1984: 272–290]. According to Wippel, “in the moment of proof, his [the Christian’s] procedure cannot be described as Christian philosophy”. In contrast, “since in the moment of discovery it was his religious belief that first suggested this particular issue to him as a possible subject for philosophical investigation, one might refer to such a procedure as Christian philosophy in the order of discovery” [Ibid.: 280]. In short, beliefs of various origins can contribute to philosophical discourse as suggestions and as possible answers for the philosophical process to verify. This process remains “philosophical” only if strictly argumentative, whereas “Christian” is what Wippel names the “moment of discovery”.

<sup>6</sup> See also: [Maritain 1955: 11f].

<sup>7</sup> Maritain points out that it does not follow from this view that moral philosophy is to be identified with theology, as many critics argue. Rather, it must be seen as “a formally philosophic science subalternated to theology” [Ibid.: 86]. “Theological truths are indispensable for the full constitution of ethics and the object of morals is only adequately known in light of these truths” [Maritain 1938: 109].

<sup>8</sup> Peter Redpath, for example, argues that philosophy simply does not exist *in itself*, i.e., apart from its state, see: [Redpath 1987: 110].

The latter is a pre-philosophical context from which hypotheses, suggestions, and possible answers are drawn. In the same vein, while reflecting on how he became a Christian philosopher, Ralph McInerny argued that the *state* in which a philosopher finds himself cannot be confused with the *nature* of philosophy. In fact, philosophy is not subjected to the differences that characterize the various states in which people philosophize [see: McInerny 1998: 145f].

However, Maritain's view seems to be contradictory and useless. The contradiction emerges because, on the one hand, Maritain holds that the beliefs that characterize the state in which philosophers find themselves will be either accepted or rejected by philosophy; on the other hand, when it comes to Christian beliefs, Maritain claims that they can only be accepted by philosophy. He claims that "faith guides and orientates philosophy, *veluti stella rectorix*, without thereby violating its autonomy" [Maritain 1955: 29]. Furthermore, Maritain's theory seems to be useless because it does not offer any explanation of *why*, unlike any other subjective state, faith "guides and orientates philosophy" and philosophy never rejects faith, which was precisely what his reflection on Christian philosophy was aimed at. Not surprisingly, although Maritain's view has had lasting influence on scholars who reflect on the possibility of a Christian philosophy, contemporary debates in the field still focus on the risk that such a philosophy simply turns into theology. J. Aron Simmons, editor of a 2018 book devoted to discussing the concept of Christian philosophy, claims that "exactly how [philosophy] is distinct from Christian theology is often difficult to tell" [Simmons 2018: 12]. And in the same book, John Schellenberg claims that Christian philosophy is not really a philosophy [Schellenberg 2018: 229–243].

My view is that Maritain's theory suffers from the aforementioned problems because Maritain did not make reference to the fact that faith is not only a set of beliefs, i.e. the beliefs which he said emerge from the state in which the philosopher finds himself. According to Aquinas, whose doctrine of faith and reason Maritain allegedly followed, faith is mainly due to a love-relationship with God, whereby the faithful, at least the paradigmatic ones, firmly believe that divine revelation is true and that no contradiction can emerge with philosophy.

In the next section, I will elaborate on this. Before proceeding, however, let me mention another interpretation of Aquinas' thought that seems to misunderstand Aquinas because it lacks any consideration of faith as mainly due to charity. I am referring to the view put forward by Kenny, who argues that faith is a vice since its firmness is not supported by appropriate evidence. This is why faith's high degree of commitment is "really objectionable" [Kenny 2007: 396]. Kenny presents Aquinas' view of faith as follows. Faith is "the acceptance of the testimony of a sacred text or of a religious community" [Ibid.: 394]. This acceptance is characterized by *certainty* and *irrevocability*. The faithful irrevocably believe, although no full evidence can be shown in support of such irrevocability; accordingly, they are not willing to change their mind if contrary arguments emerge. This is why Kenny says that "faith is not, as theologians have claimed, a virtue, but a vice" [Kenny 1992: 57]<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> I will quote passages from this work but also from his previous book – [Kenny 1983]. The latter constitutes the first of the two parts into which the former is divided.

Faith could be a virtue only if appropriate evidence were provided in its support and believers were ready to abandon their faith once confronted with convincing contrary evidence. According to Kenny, the following two things must be done. First, the existence of God needs to be demonstrated (it cannot simply be believed by faith). Second, the historical accounts that are part of the divine revelation must be proven to be true: “Whatever are the historical events which are pointed to as constituting the divine revelation must be independently established as historically certain” [Kenny 1992: 57]. Since neither God’s existence nor the historical accounts in the biblical narrative can be demonstrated [see: Kenny 1969: 4; 1983: 55], faith is a vice. The certainty and irrevocability that faith requires should be supported by full or conclusive evidence, which is not the case. As I will show in the next section, Kenny does not take into consideration that Aquinas is well aware that the certainty and irrevocability under consideration are due to the will to believe, and not to full evidence. According to Aquinas, the will in question is purposely moved by God’s grace to cause intellect to assent to divine revelation.

In conclusion, there are problems with both Maritain’s and Kenny’s views. I argue that these problems are due to the fact that the scholars in question only consider the intellectual dimension of faith, i.e., they take faith as a propositional belief, which is somewhat grounded on evidence. Maritain sees evidence as the criterion based on which religious beliefs that are part of a philosopher’s personal experience should be either accepted or rejected in the philosophical domain once subjected to philosophical scrutiny. Predictably enough, he cannot explain why he remains convinced that such beliefs cannot be rejected when it comes to the Christian religion. More coherently, with an emphasis placed on evidence, albeit against Aquinas’ doctrine of faith, Kenny rejects Aquinas’ view that, although they are not supported by conclusive evidence, Christian beliefs should be held with certainty and irrevocability.

## 2. Aquinas’ view of faith, charity, and the will to believe

In this section, I intend to depict Aquinas’ view of faith to show that, unlike the scholars taken into consideration so far, Aquinas believes that faith is mainly due to God’s initiative, making faith more certain than any rational argument.

A *caveat* needs registering. According to Aquinas, a believer sometimes mistakes his own conjectures for the Christian faith<sup>10</sup>. To put it otherwise, not everything the faithful as faithful believe is to be considered *truth of faith*, and then surer than any rational certainty. There are non-core beliefs that should be abandoned after being subjected to rational scrutiny. Therefore, when Aquinas talks about truths of faith to which the believer is expected to stick tenaciously, he seems to refer only to some core beliefs, which believers are expected to consider undeniably true. “God exists” or “Jesus is the Lord” may be numbered among them. It must be said

<sup>10</sup> ‘It is possible for a believer to have a false opinion through a *human conjecture* (*ex coniectura humana*), but it is quite impossible for a false opinion to be *the outcome of faith*’ [ST, II-II, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3] (my emphasis).

that Aquinas seems to include among these truths of faith propositions such as the articles of the creed and the affirmations of Scripture<sup>11</sup>. However, he does not offer any criterion to distinguish these core-beliefs from non-core beliefs. At any rate, I am only interested in emphasizing his view that the believers should hold some of the truths contained in divine revelation *with certainty*<sup>12</sup>.

According to Aquinas, faith is “an act of the intellect assenting (*actus assenti-entis*) to the Divine Truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God (*ex imperio voluntatis a Deo motae per gratiam*)” [ST, II-II, q. 2, a. 9]. This definition involves three dimensions, and not only the intellectual one taken into consideration by the aforementioned scholars. Faith is not only an act of the intellect. The intellect, in fact, is caused to assent to divine revelation, seen as the good itself, by human will (moral dimension), which in turn is moved by divine grace that makes the believer love God and trust him (religious dimension). In this view, charity, which is love for God and the neighbor that God himself grants to believers, moves the will, which in turn causes the intellect to assent. As Aquinas says, charity “makes the will ready to believe” [Ibid., a. 10, ad 2]. In other words, God makes believers love him, trust him, and believe whatever he has revealed. Furthermore, since Aquinas argues that there are various levels of intensity at which believers can experience faith<sup>13</sup>, one may say that for him, the more they love God and trust him, the more they will be ready to believe the divine revelation. It is charity, therefore, that makes faith firm, and those who have charity believe in a paradigmatic way<sup>14</sup>.

Why does Aquinas say that the intellect needs charity to give assent to divine revelation? The answer is that, unlike knowledge, faith does not have a fully evident object; that is, its object is not characterized by conclusive evidence. This is why Aquinas says that this object is unable to cause our intellect to firmly assent, no matter whether this occurs intuitively or demonstratively. Consequently, although “faith implies assent of the intellect to that which is believed” [Ibid., q. 1, a. 4], the intellect can only assent “through an act of choice”:

the intellect assents... 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

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example: [ST, II-II, q. 2, a. 5].

<sup>12</sup> Note that Augustine had already supported the view that there are truths of faith that the believer should consider undeniable and other truths that he should be willing to modify or abandon given contrary evidence. Augustine offers this view in a passage contained in his *Letter 143*, no. 7. See: [Augustine 1887].

<sup>13</sup> ‘The act of faith proceeds both from the intellect and from the will... Consequently, a man’s faith may be described as being greater, in one way, on the part of his intellect, on account of its greater certitude and firmness, and, in another way, on the part of his will, on account of his greater promptitude, devotion, or confidence’ [ST, II-II, q. 5, a. 4].

<sup>14</sup> See: [Ibid., q. 4, a. 3]. Aquinas makes reference to the possibility that believers have *unformed* faith, which is faith in the absence of charity (see: [Ibid., q. 4, a. 4]). This is of no interest for present purposes. In this essay, in fact, I only intend to show that paradigmatic believers, whose faith is formed by charity, are put in the best possible condition to promote rational investigations.

the opposite side, there will be opinion, while, if there are certainty and no fear of the other side, there will be faith [ST, II-II, q. 1, a. 4].

In this passage, Aquinas offers an accurate distinction between *knowledge* – which is achieved when the intellect *sees* the object of faith and consequently gives its assent – and *faith*, which occurs when the intellect *does not see* the object in question, which is why the assent of the intellect can only be given because of the intervention of *the will*. Furthermore, this distinction is radicalized by Thomas' view that, although the intellectual content is unseen, faith is expected to be characterized by *certainty*. On the basis of this distinction, it can be concluded that, unlike knowledge, faith is at least partly unresponsive to rational criteria, since the believers give their firm assent because they *will* to. And their will, as shown above, is moved by charity at different levels of intensity, which is why the more intensely one loves God and trusts Him, the more one wills to believe.

Plausibly enough, insisting that the will is moved by God's love may seem to be incompatible with Aquinas' conviction that faith is a free act. Unsurprisingly, well-known and long-standing disputes ignited in both ancient and modern times. A plausible solution may be one that Frederick Bauerschmidt mentions when he says that "God can move the will without compromising human freedom" [Bauerschmidt 2013: 147]. Bauerschmidt refers to Aquinas' treatment of grace, where grace is seen as both "operating", attributable to God, and "cooperating", attributable to the human being. For Aquinas, "God does not justify us without ourselves, because whilst we are being justified, we consent to God's justification by a movement of our free will. Nevertheless, this movement is not the cause of grace, but the effect" [ST, I-II, q. 111, a. 2, ad 2]. In this connection, Fergus Kerr argues that:

when Thomas speaks of "co-operation" between creatures and God, he almost always rules out the picture of two rival agents on a level playing field. On the contrary, he sees it as the mark of God's freedom, and ours, that God "causes" everything in such a way that the creature "causes" it too... As he quite flatly asserts, there is nothing to stop us from thinking that the same effect is produced by a lower agent and by God – by both, unmediately, of course in different ways [Kerr 2002: 143].

Eleonore Stump has proposed the view that the will should be seen as "inactive or quiescent", and not only ready to assent to something or reject it. If God grants us his grace when the will is quiescent, then it is possible to reconcile human freedom and divine grace [Stump 2003: 389ff]. While putting forward this original proposal, Stump shows awareness that any attempt to offer a detailed solution to a long-standing dispute such as the one between grace and freedom in Aquinas' thought will probably provoke further controversies rather than put an end to them. This is why she arguably says that her aim is only to show a perspective that she sees as consistent with Aquinas' texts, whether or not Aquinas himself actually held this perspective or would have liked it if he could have seen it [Ibid.: 389, 403ff]. My impression is that, to use Augustine's terminology, Stump seems to focus on God's grace and *liberum arbitrium*, whereas she should focus on God's grace and



*libertas*. In other words, what we need is an explanation of how to reconcile divine grace with (the merit due to) the human freedom of a good act, not with rejection of divine grace or failure to reject it, which obviously are not good acts and are not meritorious<sup>15</sup>.

Be these views on how to reconcile human freedom and divine grace persuasive or not, I am aware that, given the importance that Aquinas attributes to the will to believe when it comes to the Christian faith, he may be considered a voluntarist, and may seem to be guided by mere *wishful thinking*. This accusation may regard not only the act of faith, but also the rational investigations which Aquinas conducts in support of faith. As I will show in the next section, Aquinas clearly starts such investigations with the aim of rejecting objections and consequently reinforcing faith. However, wishful thinking can be taken in either a bad or a good sense. As Herbert McCabe notes, wishful thinking in the bad sense leads people to allow “their desires to trespass in a field that belongs exclusively to reason” [McCabe 2007: 10]. In other words, they may be led by these desires to reason dishonestly and to use poor arguments. In contrast, I intend to argue that it is what McCabe calls wishful thinking *in the good sense* that can be found in Aquinas’ thought. It is true that both the researcher who is guided by wishful thinking in a good sense and the one who is guided by wishful thinking in a bad sense hope to show that no objections to their belief can be found. This hope, however, leads only the latter, and not the former, to spoil a rational investigation. As I intend to show in the next section, the wishful thinking that characterizes Aquinas’ view seems to put debaters and truth-searchers into ideal condition for intellectual investigation.

### 3. Charity and promotion of reason in Aquinas’ thought

In a well-known passage, Aquinas says that if natural reason attains conclusions that contradict the truths of faith, this means that the arguments adopted were wrong:

If... anything is found in the teachings of the philosophers contrary to faith, this error does not properly belong to philosophy (*hoc non est philosophia*), but is due to an abuse of philosophy owing to the insufficiency of reason. Therefore, also it is possible from the principles of philosophy (*ex principiis philosophiae*) to refute an error of this kind, either by showing it to be altogether impossible, or not to be necessary [Aquinas 1946: q. 2, a. 3].

Aquinas’ thesis is that once arguments against faith have been rejected – simply because they led to contradiction with faith – reason must start anew from the beginning, “from its own principles”. Thomas shows a firm trust in the potentialities of human reason. In fact, in spite of the mistakes it might have made, reason is to recommence its work:

Since faith rests upon infallible truth, and since the contrary of a truth can never be demonstrated, it is clear that the arguments brought against faith cannot be

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<sup>15</sup> For more on this, see: [Gilson 1960: 157].

demonstrations (*non esse demonstrationes*), but are difficulties that can be answered (*solubilia argumenta*) [ST, I, q. 1, a. 8].

Note that the firm trust that Aquinas is placing in reason is not due to reason. He mentions two principles from which such trust follows. One (“faith rests upon infallible truth”) is clearly due to faith; the other (“the contrary of a truth can never be demonstrated”) is proposed by Aquinas neither as a demonstration nor as an intuition. These alternatives clearly emerge where Aquinas describes the forms of assent to a proposition<sup>16</sup>. The former is not a viable alternative because saying by reason that reason cannot be wrong is a circular argument. The latter cannot be accepted because, if one says that the reliability of our faculties is presupposed to any attempt to establish such reliability, then one should also see that what is really presupposed to the reliability in question is *not* the belief that reason is reliable. This belief can always be denied, as Aquinas perhaps thinks when, with regard to demonstrations that are seemingly correct, he says that “quite often something universal seems to be demonstrated, which is not being demonstrated” [Aquinas 1970: I, lectio 12]. The belief that is presupposed to any attempt to establish the reliability of our faculties seems rather to be the belief that our faculties are reliable *when they work in accordance with their own nature* – in other words, when they do not suffer any abuse<sup>17</sup>. However, the belief that our faculties are reliable when they work in accordance with their own nature presupposes one’s engaging in debates, which need to be conducted by using *demonstrative knowledge*. Furthermore, one should determine *in what circumstances* our faculties work in accordance with their own nature and do not suffer the abuse mentioned above. And determining the circumstances at stake, too, is a task that one performs by way of *demonstrative knowledge*. It follows that, once again, since one tries to argue by way of reason that reason is reliable, one falls into circularity.

Be my argument correct or not, it remains true that it is by way of faith that Aquinas claims that, if there is no abuse of reason, reason cannot contradict faith. This follows from his believing by faith that God is the author of both faith and reason, and that consequently they cannot contradict each other<sup>18</sup>. This supports the view that Aquinas places firm trust in reason because of his faith. This faith needs to be equally firm. Its firmness consists of *adherence* – “to adhere” (*in-haerĕo*) – to the revealed truths, adherence which is due to love for God. By this adherence, believers want to unite themselves to God and are ready to accept whatever is contained in divine revelation as true. By the same token, believers refute all of the arguments that deny the truths of faith, no matter how convincing they appear

<sup>16</sup> The forms in question are understanding, *scientia*, and faith. First, the intellect assents to a thing ‘through being moved to assent by its very object, which is known... by itself (as in the case of first principles, which are held by the habit of understanding)’. Second, the intellect gives its assent ‘through something else already known (as in the case of conclusions which are held by the habit of science)’. Third, the intellect assents ‘through an act of choice’ [ST, II-II, q. 1, a. 4].

<sup>17</sup> See above: [Aquinas 1946: q. 2, a. 3].

<sup>18</sup> ‘It is impossible that those things which God has manifested to us by faith should be contrary to those which are evident to us by natural knowledge. In this case one would necessarily be false: and since both kinds of truth are from God, God would be the author of error, a thing which is impossible’ [Aquinas 1946: q. 2, a. 3].

to be. It is perhaps superfluous to repeat that, precisely because of love for God and everything related to him, this refusal is to be followed by further investigations to show that the argument rejected is wrong from the speculative point of view too. Faith is, therefore, surer than any rational certainty. (I have already said that when Aquinas mentions religious beliefs to which the believer is invited to tenaciously stick no matter how persuasive contrary evidence may be, he only refers to those beliefs that believers should consider undeniable<sup>19</sup>.)

Some may object that the view that at least some religious beliefs should be seen as undeniable, which may appear to lead to a form of fideism and consequent religious fanaticism. In reply, it must be said that it is only full certainty, which Aquinas attributes to the paradigmatic believer, that is not supported by equally full evidence. In addition, faith is substantiated by the intellectual investigation that Aquinas practiced in its support and considered to be meritorious<sup>20</sup>. Finally, the certainty of the paradigmatic believers does not prevent them from arguing for faith. On the contrary, it makes them certain that their firm trust in reason is properly placed, from which follows their confidence that any objection to their faith will be answered<sup>21</sup>.

The confidence in question is manifestly due to believers' love for God and consequent reliance on him. If they love God and accordingly entrust themselves to him, they feel certain that what he has revealed, as well as everything that can plausibly be related to his revelation, is *true*. Given the aforementioned levels of intensity at which believers experience faith and charity, it can be said that the more they love and trust God, the more they will be ready to believe whatever has been revealed, including the view that God created both faith and reason. Consequently, the faithful will firmly believe that no contradiction can arise between faith and reason, otherwise God would contradict himself, which is impossible<sup>22</sup>. This puts paradigmatic believers into ideal conditions for intellectual investigations. Once convinced that human reason cannot contradict that which they are expected to mostly care about, i.e. their faith and other related beliefs, they will promote open-mindedness and be ready to follow reason wherever it leads, which is the mark of philosophy and science. By contrast, the same cannot be said of those who do not love and trust the creator of both faith and reason. They can only rely on the correct functioning of their cognitive faculties. Like everybody else, however, they are well aware that reason is affected by fallibility, fallibility which implies that further research may disprove what they maximally care about. This may prevent them from following reason wherever it leads.

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<sup>19</sup> See above: [Aquinas 1920: II-II, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3].

<sup>20</sup> See: [ST, II-II, q. 2, a. 10].

<sup>21</sup> In the footsteps of Aquinas, McCabe argues that this is by no means unreasonable. Believers "do believe that all objections can be answered somehow. They are not insulated from contact with evidence in the way that the lunatic is" - [McCabe 2007: 9].

<sup>22</sup> 'It is impossible that those things which God has manifested to us by faith should be contrary to those which are evident to us by natural knowledge. In this case one would necessarily be false: and since both kinds of truth are from God, God would be the author of error, a thing which is impossible' [Aquinas 1946: q. 2, a. 3].

Let me now consider one clarification and one objection. The clarification is that one does not need to believe that the faithful are not wrong about the truth of their core beliefs. I mean that everybody, including those who do not share those beliefs, will see that, once believers are convinced that their rational faculties, if correctly employed, cannot deny divine revelation, they will be able to promote open-mindedness. Regarding the objection, one may say that the unwillingness to alter one's core beliefs on the basis of evidence does not seem to be compatible with the willingness to follow reason wherever it leads. However, as Aquinas clearly argues<sup>23</sup>, on the one hand, the believer should remain convinced that faith is true; on the other, he should start reasoning anew from the beginning to show by means of rational argument that no contradiction between reason and faith is possible.

Note that, since those whose conducts are perfected by charity will promote good habits in every activity they take, it can be said that, while taking intellectual activity, they will adopt not only open-mindedness but also other intellectual virtues. Among them, let me mention virtues such as intellectual humility, intellectual courage, intellectual patience, and docility, all virtues that are expected to contribute substantially to the success of research and debates<sup>24</sup>. They should contribute in proportion to faith and charity. As I have already said, Aquinas argues that there are different levels of intensity at which the faithful can experience charity<sup>25</sup> and faith<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, the more the believers firmly believe, the more should they love the neighbour and promote the aforementioned intellectual virtues. Needless to say, adoption of good habits can increase mutual understanding among interlocutors and consequently facilitate the attainment of truth. Again, the same cannot be said of those who only rely on rational faculties. It is true that everyone should seek the virtues mentioned above. Propositions like "be virtuous, keep an open mind, consider evidence carefully, do justice and oppose injustice" have at least a *prima facie* evidence that everybody may often recognize. This, however, cannot be said of love of the neighbour, which it is plausible to say only believers are required to cultivate. And it is equally plausible to believe that such a love best supports the cultivation of the intellectual virtues mentioned above. Furthermore, those who only rely on reason are supposed to adopt good habits only once evidence has been found in support of the view that one should adopt them. This means that at least their research of the aforementioned evidence may not be shaped by good habits<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> See above: [Aquinas 1946: q. 2, a. 3].

<sup>24</sup> The view that adoption of intellectual virtues, taken as a subset of moral virtues, increases the chance to attain the truth, emerges from virtue epistemology. I am referring to its *responsibilist* version, which has been advocated in the course of last decades by thinkers such as L. Code, J. Montmarquet, L. Zagzebski, etc.

<sup>25</sup> Aquinas argues that 'it is essential to the charity of a wayfarer that it can increase' [ST, II-II, q. 24, a. 4].

<sup>26</sup> See above: [Aquinas 1920: II-II, q. 5, a. 4].

<sup>27</sup> For more on the relationship between charity and good intellectual habits, including a comparison with those who are not guided by charity and nonetheless tend to adopt good habits, see: [Di Ceglie 2023].

## Conclusion

In this article, I have put forward a view of Aquinas' thought on the relationship between religion and the philosophical activity, which is different from perspectives that are widely accepted among scholars of him. Like them, I believe that for Aquinas the intellectual dimension of faith is important. Unlike them, I argue that it is because of the moral and the religious dimensions of faith, that the faithful can firmly give intellectual assent to divine revelation. Those who look at faith only from the intellectual viewpoint end up supporting the view that faith can be subjected to rational scrutiny and at least in principle rejected, if this is required by contrary evidence. In contrast, Aquinas seems to believe that charity makes the faithful firmly hold the fundamental tenets of divine revelation, however convincing opposing evidence may appear to be. Furthermore, when it comes to the relationship between faith and rational arguments, such a firm faith enables believers to promote intellectual virtues, among which open-mindedness plays a crucial role. They will be able to follow reason wherever it leads, which means that they will find themselves in ideal conditions for research and debates.

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