We regret that there is no "COMMENT" this month owing to the illness of the Editor.

Heads in the Clouds

Thomas Aquinas and Professor John Hick on Faith[1]

Brian Davies O. P.

Having got over the shock of being dead, Professor Hick began to settle down to enjoying life again. Naturally, he soon sought out some philosophers.

'Which one,' he asked a passing angel, 'is Thomas Aquinas? Or has he, perhaps, gone to the other place?'

The angel looked scornful and flapped its wings in a rather frightening manner. 'You are talking about my namesake,' he retorted. 'And, for your information, not only is he here, but he is also quite respected in the highest quarters. Perhaps you would like an interview?'

The Professor agreed, and some time later he was ushered into a large study filled with shining copies of the Blackfriars *Summa*. In the middle of a pile of books sat Aquinas himself.

'Hic est Hick,' announced the angel.

'Welcome', said Aquinas, lapsing into English. 'What can I do for you?'

'I'm interested in talking to you about faith,' said the Professor.

'I don't see there's much to be said,' replied the Dominican. 'Isn't all that sort of thing behind us now? Haven't you read what I wrote in the *Secunda Secundae?*'

'Well, my point,' replied the Professor, getting himself comfortable, is just that. You see, I am quite sure that what you say

1 In the following narrative, any resemblance to any philosopher, living or dead, is, of course, entirely deliberate; except for the happy circumstance that Professor Hick is still very much alive and in this world.

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about faith is wrong. Indeed, I said so myself in my book *Faith and Knowledge*. You might also look up my lecture 'Religious Faith as Experience-As'. Don't you agree that my criticisms of your view of faith were correct and that I did a much better job on the topic than you did?'

Aquinas looked rather blank. 'Excuse me a moment,' he said. *Faith and Knowledge*, you say? "Religious Faith as Experience-As"? I don't know whether we have any copies. Perhaps you could make things easier by telling me where I went wrong and what you think yourself. You are really here, by the way?'

'Of course I'm here,' the Professor replied in an irritated tone. 'And of course I'll do as you say.'

Thus the two philosophers began their discussion.

* * *

'If I have understood you correctly,' said the Professor, 'your account of faith went something like this. With reference to religion, a man can have knowledge or belief or both. When a man has belief, he can be said to have faith. Many things in religion are not a matter of faith for all people. Some of us can know, for example, that there is a God and that he has such and such attributes. For some people, the existence of God is a matter of faith; but it does not have to be this way. In principle one can be certain of God's existence because one can demonstrate it. There are some things about religion which cannot, however, be demonstrated. These take the form of propositions of Christian revelation. And to have faith in such propositions is a matter of assenting to them. The assent, however, is not compelled by anything that can justly be called evidence. Faith is assent to propostions and it involves an act of will guided by God. Most emphatically, faith is to be distinguished from knowledge. A can know that–P, and B can believe that–P. But if A knows that–P, then A cannot believe that–P. And if B believes that–P, then B cannot know that–P.'

The Professor paused to see what effect his account was having on Aquinas. 'You would agree,' he asked, 'that that is more or less the drift of your position?'

'I would agree,' Aquinas replied, reaching for a book. 'In fact I think I can find a passage of mine which expresses it exactly.'

He pulled out a copy of the *Secunda Secundae* and read the following extract:

> There are two ways in which the mind assents to anything. One way is by being actuated by the object to which it assents: the mind may know this object immediately, as in the case of first principles, the object of understanding or it may know it mediately, as in the case of conclusions, the objects of science. The other way the mind assents is not through a

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sufficient motivation by its proper object, but through some voluntary choice that influences the mind in favour of one alternative rather than another. Now things are said to be seen when they themselves cause the mind or the senses to know them. Clearly, then, no belief or opinion can have as object things seen, whether by sense or intellect.

'It's all a long time ago,' St Thomas sighed, throwing the book away from him with an evident look of satisfaction. 'But I was right to say all that, I think. Would you be so good as to explain why you disagree.'

This, of course, was what the Professor had been waiting for, and he lost no time in replying.

'I think,' he began, 'that we ought to start with this rather silly emphasis on propositions. A person like you, who writes a good deal'—Aquinas looked baffled, but the Professor continued—'naturally imagines that faith is something to be set down in words. So you think of it as propositional. But it isn't like that at all. Faith is really a matter of experience; it is, shall we say, being acquainted with God. The important thing, I'm sure you would agree, is that the man of faith has a personal relationship with God. And such a relationship is really what faith is all about. That's what I'd say against your account of faith for a start. Faith is not faith in propositions. Rather, it is faith in a person.'

'You think so?' said Aquinas.

'I do,' the Professor replied.

'Well up to a point, I suppose you are right,' Aquinas began. 'The object of faith is surely God and not a proposition. But I doubt whether we can get rid of propositions altogether. Now what exactly a proposition is, is not something I think we need to dwell on for the moment. That would be a philosophical problem in its own right. But even if we leave this problem aside, we can surely see that if a man believes something, then the only way we can describe or give an account of his situation is to say what he believes. And when we do try to say what a man believes, we have to use what can only be called a statement or a proposition. In saying this, I do not mean that we can only say what a man believes by saying something ourselves. That is obviously true. The point is that in saying what a man believes one has, so to speak, to quote or refer to a statement or a proposition. In other words, to believe something is to believe *that* something is true, and, when we try to say what the something in question is, we offer a statement. People believe *that* there is a city called Paris (lovely place, by the way; I enjoyed myself there enormously), *that* there is life on Mars, *that* there are fairies at the bottom of my garden. Even though one can believe something without having assented to anything that might be called a statement or a proposition, one

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cannot just believe *simpliciter*. One always believes *that* something is the case, and the man of faith must believe *that* there is a God, *that* Jesus is divine, *that* Christ rose from the dead, or whatever. You say that faith is being acquainted. But the words 'John is acquainted' or 'John thinks he is acquainted' must be completed with some reference to what John is acquainted with, or to what John thinks he is acquainted with. Even on your account, my dear Professor, there must be some propositional element to faith. Even if we work with the model of faith as acquaintance or as personal relationship, we cannot entirely dispense with reference to propositions. Otherwise faith will lack content.'

At this point the Professor looked a little worried; but it was evident that he still had plenty to say.

'I do not wish to be rude,' he observed, 'but I think you have missed the point that I was making. Let us grant that the man of faith believes certain things. I suppose I can concede that. But you still haven't allowed for the fact that faith is acquaintance. The man of faith is in touch with God; he stands in a personal relationship to God. And that is the important thing.'

St Thomas got up and ambled around the room for a while. Obviously he was very puzzled indeed.

'Faith as acquaintance? Could you elaborate on that, perhaps?'

'Look,' said the Professor. 'Have you by any chance got a copy of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations?* There's something in that which I'd like to show to you.'

'The *Philosophical Investigations?*' St Thomas replied. 'Now that I do have.' And instantly he produced it.

'Now,' said the Professor. 'Look at the section at the end of the book where Wittgenstein discusses the notion of seeing. You have the edition published by Basil Blackwell in 1968, so you had better turn to page 93 and following. Wittgenstein observes here that there are different senses of the word "see". One kind of seeing that interests Wittgenstein is that kind where, having looked at something for a while, a new aspect dawns on us, even though what we have been looking at has not itself changed. The example he cites is the psychologists' picture which, when looked at, sometimes appears to people to be a picture of a rabbit, and sometimes a picture of a duck.'

'I see the passage you refer to,' Aquinas replied. 'I don't wish to be awkward right at the beginning of our discussion, but, personally, the picture doesn't look to me either like that of a rabbit or that of a duck. Do you suppose Wittgenstein had met many rabbits?'

'That's a red herring,' the Professor retorted, 'Let's stay with the fact that a lot of intelligent people agree that there are these pictures which can be seen now in one way and now in another.

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And one of these is the picture of a duck-rabbit. And what it shows is that we can often see things now in one way, now in another, even though what we have been looking at does not really change. What changes is the way we see things *as*. And let me add another point. All perception or seeing or experience of things is really like seeing-as. In other words, perceptions can change and one can experience things differently in every case. What we see, recognize or experience, in short, what is there for us, depends on the way we see-as, the way we experience-as.'

St Thomas was beginning to look baffled again so the Professor quickly jumped in to explain matters further.

'Let me read to you some snippets from my lecture 'Religious Faith as Experience-As'. These should help you to see what I'm driving at and why your account of faith is mistaken.'

And waving a little red book in the air he quoted the following extracts:

> Seeing ... is not a simple straightforward matter of physical objects registering themselves on our retinas and thence in our conscious visual fields ... We speak of seeing-as when that which is objectively there, in the sense of being that which affects the retina, can be consciously perceived in two different ways as having two different characters or natures or meanings or significances ... We perceive and recognize by means of all the relevant senses co-operating as a single complex means of perception ... *all* experiencing is experiencing-as. To recognize or identify is to experience-as in terms of a concept; and our concepts are social products having their life within a particular linguistic environment ... all conscious experiencing involves recognitions which go beyond what is given to the senses and is thus a matter of experiencing-as.

'Now what I'm getting at,' the Professor quickly continued, before St Thomas had time to reply, 'is that the religious believer is seeing in a different way from the non-believer. In fact, he is seeing the world in a different way, seeing it *as* something behind which God stands. For the believer, God is known on the basis of a direct sort of encounter. When I meet you, I could be said to have a knowledge by acquaintance. And this is how things stand with believers and God. Believers see the world as a world where God is present; they experience it as revealing God. And since all experience, all recognitions, perceptions and so forth, are experiences-as or seeings-as, the believer is no worse off than the person who believes in the book-shelf because he is aware of it, because he recognizes it and so forth.'

At this point the Professor went back to his little red book and quoted again.

'The analogy to be explored,' he read 'is with two contrasting

ways of experiencing the events of our lives and of human history, on the one hand as purely natural events and on the other as mediating the presence and activity of God. For there is a sense in which the religious man and the atheist both live in the same world and another sense in which they live consciously in different worlds. They inhabit the same physical environment and are confronted by the same changes occurring within it. But in its actual concrete character in their respective "streams of consciousness" it has for each a different nature and quality, a different meaning and significance; for one does and the other does not experience life as a continual interaction with the transcendent God ... This means that ordinary secular perceiving shares a common epistemological character with religious experiencing ... all conscious perceiving goes beyond what the senses report to a significance which has not as such been given to the senses. And the religious experience of life as a sphere in which we have continually to do with God and he with us is likewise an awareness in our experience as a whole of a significance which transcends the scope of the senses ... And so there is thus far in principle no difficulty about the claim that we may learn to use the concept "act of God", as we have learned to use other concepts, and acquire the capacity to recognize exemplifying instances.'

'And so,' the Professor concluded, 'one should be far from anxious, as you, my dear saint are, to draw a contrast between faith and knowledge. For if all that we call knowledge by acquaintance is a case of seeing or experiencing as, and if one can know God by acquaintance because one sees or experiences as in a certain way, then faith is on a level with other kinds of recognitions. Of course, there is some difference. Most of the time we can hardly help seeing things in a certain way but such is not the case with God. Here we have to choose to see things in a certain way. Faith, I mean to say, is free. This is because faith is a personal relationship with God and in a personal relationship there cannot be constraint or compulsion. You think that you can prove God's existence, but allow me to observe that not only can one not prove something like God's existence; if one could prove it then faith would be forced from people and there would be no real possibility of a personal relationship with God. What we actually have is something which I have elsewhere referred to as "cognitive freedom". God does not force himself upon the intellect of men; in order to recognize God one has to make a choice which is a free decision. As I said in my book *God and the Universe of Faiths* (around p. 67 if you have it, which I expect you haven't), "We only become aware of God by an uncoerced response, the interpretative element within which we call faith."

Aquinas was now looking rather bilious. 'Is that it?' he inquired.

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'That's it,' the Professor replied.

'If you don't mind,' Aquinas went on, 'I rather think that I feel in need of a walk. Clears the head, you know. Shall we go together and discuss matters further?' And the Professor having agreed, they set off.

For quite a long time Aquinas was silent, but then they passed an extraordinary creature quietly sitting on the corner of an amazingly broad road and making music.

'What has that creature got in its hand?' St Thomas asked.

'Obviously, it's a harp,' the Professor replied.

'But why do you say that?' asked Aquinas . 'Is it because you see what its holding as a harp?'

'Indeed,' said the Professor. 'I recognize.'

'Would you recognize an albatross?' asked St Thomas, smiling broadly. 'And if you couldn't recognize one do you think that you couldn't see one or experience one?'

'I wouldn't recognize an albatross,' the Professor retorted briskly, irritated at the triviality which the saint seemed to go in for these days. 'And, as I said in your study, that would seem to mean that I couldn't see anything as an albatross; I couldn't actually see or experience an albatross, since all seeing is seeing-as and seeing-as involves recognition.'

'I see,' St Thomas replied. 'By the way, isn't that creature wonderful?'

'Amazing,' returned the Professor. 'What is it?'

'An albatross,' replied Aquinas. 'Are you still inclined to say that all seeing and experiencing involves recognition?'

The Professor was too annoyed to answer, so the two walked on with Aquinas humming a little verse from Lewis Carroll.

> He thought he saw an albatross
> That fluttered round the lamp:
> He looked again, and found it was
> A Penny-Postage-Stamp.
> "You'd best be getting home," he said:
> "The nights are very damp!"

After a while Aquinas began again. 'This business of seeing-as,' he said. 'Now clearly there is some use for this idea. In spite of what I said earlier, I am quite prepared to agree that the examples of psychologists' pictures cited by you show this well enough. In other words, we sometimes find that something which actually undergoes no change first appears to us in one way, and then appears to us in another way. But can we regard all experience as experience-as?'

'I should have thought the answer to that was obvious by now,' the Professor replied. 'All experience is like the phenomenon of seeing-as.'

'But this is clearly false,' Aquinas replied. 'In the case of seeing-as, as this is discussed by Wittgenstein, what is seen does not change, while the way it is seen does. We can, however, first see something in one way and then see it in another way just because some change in what we are looking at has really occured. And when such is the case it seems wrong to suggest that what we see could be seen in different ways. Certainly, someone may say that something appears to him in a certain way. And such a statement may be impossible to deny. My teachers sometimes used to say that I seemed to them dull. But it is one thing to admit that things may seem different to different people and another to allow that things can always be seen as one thing or as something else. A picture may be able to be seen (though not, I fear by me) now as a picture of a rabbit, now as a picture of a duck. And there may be no sense in saying either that the picture is definitely a picture of a rabbit or that it is definitely a picture of a duck. But it is far too premature to conclude from this fact to the suggestion that seeing or experiencing are always the same in the sense that what is seen or experienced can be seen now in one way, now in another.'

The Professor looked vaguely uncomfortable, but Aquinas went on.

'What if I say, for example, that John's act of boiling the baby can be seen either as a good thing or as a bad thing? If what I mean is that, as a matter of fact, some people may approve of John's boiling the baby and some may not approve, I would, perhaps, be right. People seem able to approve of almost anything. The other place is proof enough of that. But this does not mean that statements such as 'John's act of boiling the baby is good' are true. In this sense, it may be that nobody can see John's act as good. If it is good, then possibly it can be seen as good. But if it is bad then it cannot be seen as good.'

The Professor looked about to murmur assent, but again Aquinas continued.

'Look at it from another point of view. Suppose I claim that there is something in front of me—a Professor of Theology, for example. On your account I would here presumably be seeing something as a Professor of Theology. But on your account it would, however, seem equally in order for someone who did not see what I see as a Professor of Theology to say that there is something else there—a penguin, for example. If we opt for the Professor of Theology rather than the penguin, that is just because we happen to see something as a Professor of Theology. As for the man who sees a penguin; well, he just sees something as a penguin. But surely we cannot rest satisfied with such an account. Either "Here is a penguin" is true, or it is not. And either "Here is a Professor of Theology" is true, or it is not. From the fact that

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someone sees something as such and such, it does not follow that they are right in what they say about what is there. So not all claims to see or to experience can be taken as you suggest. What is there may sometimes be ambiguous. But it is quite another thing, my dear Professor of Theology, to say that what is there can always be regarded as ambiguous.

And, in any case, how is experience or seeing to get going in the first place if all seeing or experience is seeing or experience-as? If all seeing or experience is seeing or experience-as, and if I see or experience a picture as a picture of a rabbit, then I must first be seeing something or experiencing something as a picture. And whatever it is I see or experience as a picture must, presumably, be seen or experienced as something which could be seen or experienced as a picture. But this process of regression can go on indefinitely. So how does seeing or experience get going at all? If we follow the logic of your analysis, my dear Professor, it seems in fact that it can never get going. Should we not therefore say instead that some things are simply seen for what they are? And, if I may make so bold as to point the fact out, it at least seems that you are prepared to say that some things can be seen for what they are. You say that all seeing or experience is seeing or experience-as. On your own premisses, however, you can hardly do this. For if all seeing or experience is seeing or experience-as, then your claim that all seeing or experience is seeing or experience-as must be understood as a case of seeing or experience-as. Suppose, now, that I do not see all seeing as seeing-as? On your account I am within my rights in saying that not all seeing or experience is seeing or experience-as. In other words, your claim that all seeing or experience is seeing or experience-as appears to be self-defeating. It seems to undermine the very thesis which you appear to be defending.'

At this point, the Professor seemed to get very annoyed.

'It is clear to me that you haven't really understood what I am driving at. But let us leave this topic of seeing and experience. Surely you must now allow my point about freedom. If God's existence were, shall we say, demonstrable, then man's response to God would be forced. Faith must be regarded as free if it is to issue in a genuine personal relationship with God.'

'You are right,' replied Aquinas, 'to say that faith is free. I argued as much myself. As for the question of demonstration, however; there, it seems to me, you are going about things the wrong way. If you recall, I offered what I took to be demonstrative arguments for the existence of God. But you say that there can be no demonstration. Yet on what do you base your claim? Is it by showing that my demonstrations failed? Or is it by ignoring the arguments I advanced and beginning with a theory about personal

relationships? For if it is the latter then it seems open to me to reply that a demonstration is a demonstration and that its cogency must be allowed to override any conclusions which might be brought against its possibility from another quarter.'

Here the Professor began to look confident. 'The answer to your question is simple,' he replied. 'In the first place I contest your view about God's existence because I find that your arguments for the existence of God are bad ones. Here I agree with someone like Anthony Kenny. But let us leave that particular hornet's nest aside for the moment. If we start to discuss your proofs for God we will be here for ever.'

Aquinas smiled, but said nothing. The Professor quickly continued.

'Leaving aside the issue of whether your proofs establish the existence of God with certainty, unless there was cognitive freedom and an ambiguous universe there could be no genuine, personal relationship with God. Explain that one away, if you can.'

'Perhaps,' replied Aquinas, 'I can put my case like this—though whether my view amounts to an explanation is something I shall not comment on. It is, I should say, by no means clear that certainty regarding God's existence entails the impossibility of a personal relationship with God, a free decision to love him and so forth. From the fact that one is aware of someone, it by no means follows that one cannot have a personal relationship with that person. Would you be able to have a better personal relationship with me if I constantly kept playing hide and seek with you? Do not personal relationships depend on the participants being certain that there are persons with whom they can relate? Why should the free acceptance of God be incompatible with a clear knowledge that he exists? Or look at it from a philosopher's point of view. Can you honestly tell me that you regard yourself as less free when you have seen that a conclusion follows from premisses? In the same way, the certainty that God exists frees me; it liberates me.'

'No,' remarked the Professor. 'If God is certainly there for me then I am constrained to believe in him, constrained to acknowledge him.'

'Then evidently we must agree to differ,' replied Aquinas. 'But it is at least worth pointing out that you seem to be caught in a kind of inconsistency. For would you say that the man of faith is reasonable to believe in God? How would you defend his responsibility?'

'I don't quite see where you're leading,' the Professor murmured. 'But, just for the record, I am happy to quote from *Faith and Knowledge*. As I say on p. 210 of the Fontana edition, "It seems that a sufficiently vivid religious experience would entitle a man to

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claim to know that God is real ... He is sure that God exists, and in his own experience of the presence of God he has a good and compelling reason to be sure of it".'

'Compelling?' said Aquinas raising a puzzled eyebrow. 'The presence of God can seem compelling? There comes the rub. Presumably you mean that the man of faith can find himself hardly able not to believe. It is reasonable to believe in God because it can come about that a man is as certain of God as he is of the earth beneath him. But, in that case, what becomes of cognitive freedom? On your own admission, is it not now true that the believer cannot have what you call a free, personal relationship with God? On the one hand you want to make faith a matter of choice. But on the other hand you want to allow that the believer can have a good and compelling reason which leads him to say that he knows that his faith is true.'

At this point in the conversation, the Professor was about to answer when something occured to interrupt him. All of a sudden there was a wild, piercing shriek followed by a falling noise, a heavy thud and then another shriek. A moment later came another shriek and a thud; then another and another. Before long the air was full of cries and the Professor began to see people leaping and falling about all over the place.

'Leap! Leap!' cried a foreign sounding voice.

'Erlösung! Erlösung!' shouted another.

Thud, thud, came the noise afterwards.

'Oh dear; I'm sorry,' muttered Aquinas. 'I hadn't realized we had travelled so far. I'm afraid we've reached the existentialists' quarters. Follow me quickly and we can be getting home. It's almost time for tea.'

The two of them therefore returned to Aquinas's study and, as soon as he had settled himself down again, the Professor reopened the conversation.

'I feel sorry for those existentialists,' he began. 'They used to get a terrible knocking in the British Universities, and they don't look really happy even here. They have, however, reminded me of something I wanted to raise with you.'

'Raise away,' replied Aquinas.

'It's a question of reason, isn't it?' said the Professor. 'These existentialists. Aren't they supposed to believe without evidence or grounds? Don't they admit that faith finally lacks rational justification? And isn't that what you are really saying yourself? You know, that wouldn't cut much ice in the philosophy department. What would you say to defend yourself? People regard your account of faith as obscurantist? Wouldn't you admit that they have a point?'

'If I thought they had a point, I would change my view of

faith,' Aquinas replied. 'But why should I be forced to do so? Certainly, we can often raise the question "How do you know?" And here we come to the notion of grounds for belief. Suppose I announce that there is water on Venus. In that case I can reasonably be expected to produce my evidence. I will need to show that my telescope has been properly functioning and that it has sighted water. Or maybe I will need to present the data gathered by my space probe. To take another example, if I say that Jones is a bad man I will need to show that he really does beat his wife, despite appearances; or I will need to show that he has been blackmailing Smith or something. But do I always need to provide grounds for belief? Can I, for example, be justified in believing without grounds?'

'Some people would say "No" to the last question,' replied the Professor.

'Then some people would be wrong,' returned Aquinas. 'In day to day life we were certainly justified in believing a host of things without being able to offer totally convincing reasons for our beliefs. Do you remember radios? After my time, of course, but I heard all about them. Well, when you turned the switch of a radio you could reasonably expect a sound to come out (assuming that you had the plug in and so forth). But you may well have been quite at a loss to explain how a radio worked and how the motion of the switch was related to the noise produced by the machine. You can put this point by saying that your belief about the behaviour of the radio was not fully justified. Still, it could have been rational or reasonable. To take another example, a modern mathematician may not, if pressed, be able to offer a totally watertight defence of the mathematical thesis that an even number greater than 2 must be the sum of two prime numbers. Goldbach's conjecture, I think. Nor might someone be able to offer a demonstration to show that doctors are right to say that smoking causes lung cancer. But it would hardly be unreasonable for a mathematician to believe that an even number greater than 2 is the sum of two prime numbers. And a totally non-scientific individual would hardly be unreasonable in believing that smoking does indeed cause cancer. Beliefs may be justifiably or reasonably held even in the absence of evidence.'

The Professor seemed inclined to agree, and after having offered his guest a chocolate duck-rabbit Aquinas continued.

'You may still say, however, that evidence must be available for beliefs. If I can reasonably believe that the switch on the radio can be turned so as to make the radio emit sound, then surely this can only be because I have some kind of evidence. Perhaps I might appeal to past experience, to what has always happened, to the engineer who made the radio, and then, maybe, list his qualifica-

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tions which give me, so I might argue, grounds for trusting his assurance that the radio switch will help me to get a sound from the radio. And all these suggestions are acceptable. But it is also important to press beyond them; for it has to be accepted that it is not always in order to talk of grounds for reasonable belief. There will always be some beliefs which just cannot be demonstrated since they are themselves the means by which we construct demonstrations. In other words, in any argument one will reach a point where something is just accepted.

Suppose I say that the wine in the bottle is white. You ask me how I know. I take the bottle and pour out the wine. Presumably, I have now shown that the wine is indeed white, assuming that white wine comes out. But suppose you say "Yes, the wine looks white all right, but how do you know that it really is white? Could your eyes not be affected by the light?" Well, possibly I might entertain the possibility of my eyes being affected. So I take the wine outside and look at it again. And I get other people to look at it, and they agree that it is white. Then I get a wine specialist along, and he agrees that it is white. And so does the chemist who examines drops of the wine under a microscope. But suppose you still doubt. Suppose you ask whether anybody can trust their senses, whether anybody can count as a wine specialist, whether any chemical analysis can show that wine is white. What can I say then? Clearly, I can say nothing. I have, so to speak, reached bedrock beyond which point there is no possibility of argument. Justification and reason giving, the appeal to grounds, come to an end somewhere. This is the way language works.'

At this point a look of recognition came over the Professor's face. 'Justification coming to an end?' he said. 'Now that rings a bell, I'm sure. Where have I come across that sort of thing?'

'You might,' Aquinas replied, 'have come across it in your friend Wittgenstein. Look up paragraphs 164, 166 and 167 of his last notes *On Certainty*. I happen to have a copy here. "Doesn't testing come to an end?" Wittgenstein asks rhetorically. "The difficulty", he continues, "is to realize the groundlessness of our believing," By way of example, Wittgenstein cites the case of the chemist. "Think of chemical investigations", he says. "Lavoisier makes experiments with substances in his laboratory and now he concludes that this and that takes place when there is burning. He does not say that it might happen otherwise another time. He has got hold of a definite world picture—not of course one that he invented: he learned it as a child. I say world-picture and not hypothesis, because it is the matter-of-course foundation for his research and as such also goes unquestioned".'

'As Wittgenstein concludes, ' "At the foundation of well-founded belief lies belief that is not founded".'

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'Yes,' said the Professor. 'He does say that. And there are also some interesting observations in the *Philosophical Investigations.* Look at paragraphs 485 and 217. There he says that "Justification by experience comes to an end. If it did not it would not be justification ... If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do'."

'And so,' Aquinas rounded off, 'it is simply misguided to maintain that all beliefs must be grounded or that they must be based on evidence or on justification. If such were the case there could be no reasoning at all. Belief, we may say, is always in a sense prior to knowledge. As Wittgenstein rhetorically asks in *On Certainty* 242, 160: "Musn't we say at every turn: 'I *believe* this with certainty ... The child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes *after* belief".'

The Professor began to look interested. But clearly he had his reservations. 'There might,' he remarked, 'be something in all this. But I can still imagine a typical objection and I wonder how you respond to it. Let us agree, as it seems we must, that argument, evidence and so forth come to an end sometimes. It is still true that there are occasions where argument and evidence are relevant. Go back to the water on Venus. A person who claims that there is water on Venus can reasonably be expected to say how he knows. Because of the kinds of belief that they are, therefore, there are some beliefs for which it is appropriate to ask for evidence, justification or whatever. Could it not therefore be suggested that Christian belief is like this? Are not the claims of Christian faith of such a kind that we must ask for the reasons for holding them? And is not your account an attempt to avoid this question? Couldn't somebody still urge that your account of faith is in fact committed to irrationalism?'

'Quite simply,' Aquinas replied, 'I think that the answer to these questions is no. My account is not irrationalist. Actually, it is very consistent. Remember that for me, the propositions of faith are propositions which attempt to say something about God. But what can be said about God? If you have read my *Prima Pars,* you will recall that I take a rather agnostic line here. We can certainly know that God is and we can also know what God is not. But we cannot know what God is; we cannot understand his nature. We cannot, if you like, describe God. But consider, now, what follows from such a suggestion.'

The Professor locked his eyebrows in concentration, and Aquinas continued.

'If I say that there is water on Venus, you can ask for evidence or grounds. But you can only do this because you have some idea of what water is, how it can be detected and described, how it can

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be analyzed and so on. If, however, one cannot answer the question "What is God?", then when it is said that God is such and such it will make no sense to reply by asking for evidence. You would not understand what you were asking evidence for.

Consider now a fundamental Christian claim which I clearly regard as part of the deposit of faith. Consider the claim "God is three persons in one substance". If you grant that it is impossible to know what God is, you cannot regard this statement as a wholly successful attempt to banish our ignorance concerning what God is. In terms of my thinking, therefore, statements like "God is three persons in one substance" are not to be regarded as giving us knowledge of what God is. But in that case, it would seem that they cannot be regarded as statements for which evidence or reasons of a conclusive nature are appropriate. When I claim that there is water on Venus, you can ask for decisive evidence because you know what water is. If I claim that God is three persons in one substance, however, you cannot ask for decisive evidence because you do not know what the word "God" means to begin with. Thus, as I said in the *Prima Pars* question 32, article 1: "It is impossible to come to the knowledge of the Trinity of divine persons through natural reason. For it has been shown already that through natural reason man can know God only from creatures; and they lead to a knowledge of him as effects do to their cause. Therefore we can know of God only what characterizes him necessarily as the source of all beings; this was the basis of our thinking about God earlier on. Now the creative power of God is shared by the wbole Trinity; hence it goes with the unity of nature, not with the distinction of persons. Therefore through natural reason we can know what has to do with the unity of nature, but not with the distinction of persons".'

'As far as I can see,' Aquinas concluded, 'and granting my view of God, this position is entirely reasonable and intelligible. If one could know what God is (in which case of course he would not be God) then it might make sense to ask whether statements about him could be conclusively supported by evidence. But if one cannot know what God is, this conclusion cannot follow. I maintain that one cannot know what God is. Given this position, it is perfectly in order for me to say that the propositions of faith are not known either.'

At this point the Professor looked near to breaking point.

'Why should I accept your claim that we cannot know what God is? All that is based on this dreadful discussion in the early questions of the *Summa Theologiae*. Essence and existence, causality and necessity, act and potency. It's all just a muddle.'

He was about to go on when suddenly the door burst open and

an angel appeared leading in tow yet another philosopher.

'Hic est Heidegger,' the angel announced. *'Ubi est Thomas?'*

'Thomas est hic,' replied the saint.

And at that point the Professor retired in confusion.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Readers who might hope to join the above recorded debate at some later date might find it helpful to consult the following works. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2a2ae 1-7 (Blackfriars edition Vol 31); John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge,* Fontana, 1974; 'Religious Faith as Experience-As' in *Talk of God,* Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures, Vol 2 1967-1968, Macmillan, 1969; *God and the Universe of Faiths,* Macmillan, 1973; *The Centre of Christianity,* SCM 1977.

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Vatican I And The Papacy

3: The Attitude Of The English Bishops

Fergus Kerr O. P.

The idea of holding a general council may be traced to a suggestion made to Pope Pius IX by a curial cardinal as early as 1849. The immediate background may be outlined as follows. In 1799 Pope Pius VI died in exile, a prisoner of the French. In 1813 his successor, Pius VII, a prisoner at Fontainebleau, was forced by Napoleon into signing documents which gave the emperor virtual control over the Church. With the collapse of Napoleon the pope was able to return to Rome to begin to restore his authority. When he died in 1823 the main issue at the long conclave that followed was whether a man could be found who would stand up for the independence of the Church over against the great Catholic princes. The man who was found, Leo XII, set about reorganising the Vatican with great vigour, but his reign lasted little more than five years. His successor, an old sick man who had once been among Napoleon's prisoners, died within two years. It was only in 1831, then, that, with the election of Gregory XVI after a conclave lasting seven weeks (the Spanish government intervened to veto the election of another candidate), the modern ascendancy of the papacy really began. Significantly enough, in the dark days of

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