

Why Conscience Likes Dogmatic Definitions*

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FOR US, the word "theology" implies method and system, analysis and synthesis, Greek terms, all of them. Now it is extremely interesting that Aquinas, who more than any other Christian writer might be expected to value the qualities in question, in fact largely avoids using such terms and others like them, including the word "theology" itself. He prefers the strictly scriptural terms: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, doctrine. The "system" and "-ology" words are our words, modern post-renaissance words, Descartes-Kant-Hegel words. This modern desire to discipline linguistic usage in all fields, including religious experience, is no doubt a fine thing, and we are not wrong to attribute such a desire to Aquinas and his heirs. But what is the unifying principle of theological system, guiding methodical analysis of the mysteries of Christianity? How can we make sure that the system we get into print is in truth the wisdom and spiritual understanding which Paul prayed down on the Colossians?

The unifying principle, the universal font of theological illumination, is simply purity of conscience. The pure of heart *see* God; the unseen world is in a certain manner evident to their faith; the objects of their Christian hope have body and substance. John 8:12 reads: "He that follows me does not walk in darkness." St. Thomas paraphrases: As the gift of love is in all who have the grace that makes men acceptable to God, so too is the gift of understanding (IIa-IIae, 8, 4c). And theology, in this sense of spiritual understanding, is inseparable from the process of Christian salvation. (Let others mean what they will by it, this is what the serious Christian means.) Where matters necessary for our salvation are in question, Thomas writes, quoting 1 John 2:27, all men in a state of justifying grace are sufficiently instructed by the Holy Spirit (*art. cit.*, ad 1m).

"Faith purifying their hearts" is how Peter expresses it in Acts 15:9. Augustine comments: "It is for the sake of the interior eyes whose blindness consists in not understanding, that hearts are purified by faith, that they may be opened and become more and more clear of vision".¹ Thomas in turn uses Peter's phrase to introduce his treatment of understanding as purification. Purification has two phases. First, the heart loses its inclination for anything other than God's true service (involving an evaluation of risks and

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1. Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.* 118, Sermon. 18:3 (CCL, 40, 1724).

rewards); then, second, the mind learns to avoid misunderstanding God, either through using imagery concerning him, or through applying to him predicates that do not hold of him. That is, he explains, only when the mind is free from wrong desire is it free to grasp how God exceeds its grasp (IIa-IIae, 8, 7c). One learns, as John of the Cross was to write (*Dark Night*, 2, 17, 6), "how base and defective, and in some measure inapt, are all the terms and words which are used in this life to treat of divine things." So we enunciate what is called the principle of analogy: that the divine being is not unlike created being, otherwise we should not be able to talk about it at all, but that it is more unlike than like. This "mystical theology," the theology of all whose hearts God has purified, is an imperishable possession, according to St. Thomas, the same in this life and the next.²

Now this assertion of a theology not merely perennial, but eternal, supposes the infallible power of the human conscience to seek out the truth and embrace it when found. And this in turn supposes the power of conscience to prevent custom, habit, passion, from distorting man's grasp of reality. Indeed, we have supposed that conscience is capable of an unshakable grasp of the reality of God. Further, when a man is fully humanized by thus possessing himself in clear conscience before God, this condition orients him, not just in any direction, but in the direction of friendship towards others, of shared enjoyment of the realities grasped. And from the law of friendship springs the law of communication: we are obliged to find or make languages in which we can communicate together, above all in regard to the things of God. Responsibility in the use of language or signs touching religion stands of its very nature at the head of the Commandments, before obedience, chastity, and so on: Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord in vain, nor make to thyself any graven image. Thus conscience theologizes. A series of certitudes emerges spontaneously from the mere fact of purity of conscience—certitudes always there as marks of genuine, as distinct from apparent, theological system.

The great work which, in the canon of Trent, closed the Old Testament, not only gave us the New Testament category of *syneidesis* or conscience³ but also spelled out the propositions of the theology of conscience which I have indicated. "Wisdom is glorious, and never fades away, and is easily seen by them that love her, and is found by them that seek her. . . . To think upon her is perfect understanding: and he that watcheth for her shall quickly be secure" (Wisdom 6:12, 15). For she knows the subtleties of speeches and the solutions of arguments (8:8). Again, "Wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sins" (1:4), for she teaches temperance and prudence and justice and fortitude (8:7). Further, the desire of wisdom bringeth to the everlasting kingdom (7:20), for she is an infinite treasure to men: which they that use become the

2. This point, though I touch it only in passing, is of very great importance, a sure test of whether anyone has really mastered the foundations of Thomas' thinking. It was the occasion of one of the few great emotional crises in Thomas' life. Cf. P.-M.-R. Gagnebet, in *DTC*, 15, 634.

3. Cf. Wisdom 17:11, "pressed by conscience."

friends of God (7:14), because by the greatness of the beauty of creatures their creator may be known by analogy (13:5). The spirit of wisdom is benevolent (1:6), and the multitude of the wise is the welfare of the whole world (6:24), for they learn without deception and communicate without envy (7:13), loving that which is good, gentle, kind, steadfast. Wisdom maketh friends of God and prophets (7:27), for she is privy to the mysteries of the knowledge of God (8:4); and God hath granted me to speak as I would, says the wise man, the Solomon, for in his hand are both we and our words (7:16). To sum up, he that rejecteth this wisdom and discipline is unhappy (3:11); when it is present men imitate it and when it withdraws itself they desire it (4:2). They that trust in him shall understand the truth, and they that are faithful in love shall rest in him; for grace and peace is to his elect (3:9).

The mutual reinforcement of faith, doctrine, and conscience is more explicitly spelled out in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, heavily indebted as this is to the language and argumentation of Wisdom. We who were the slaves of sin have obeyed from the heart unto that form of doctrine into which we have been delivered, keeping true, in all sincerity of conscience, to that faith that has been revealed (Rom. 5:17). As for those without doctrine or torah, Paul says that the obligations of the law are written on their hearts; their conscience utters its own testimony. And this leads them to doctrine. Those without the torah do by nature the things that are of the torah, and in the process are led on to doctrine, one thought accusing or defending another (Rom. 2:14f.).

Now I wish to argue that the word *syneidesis*, conscience, is not used vaguely or carelessly by Paul here. The word, though current in Alexandrian literature, was not used at all in the Gospels or the Epistle of James, which use the earlier terminology of heart, eye, watchfulness. Alone among the major metropolises of the Graeco-Roman world, Alexandria did not contribute directly to the making of the New Testament. Paul, however, writing to the Corinthians after Apollos' entry on the scene, was full of the word conscience, and this may reflect Apollos' Alexandrian thinking, as some surmise. The word does not carry any clear or precise theological meaning in Corinthians, where "weak conscience" (1 Cor. 8:7-12) means something like "confusion of mind," and "another's conscience" (10:25-9) something like his "state of mind." But in 2 Corinthians it is Paul's conscience that testifies that his conduct has proceeded, not from human wisdom, but from simplicity of heart and from the grace of God (2 Cor. 1:12). It is to every human conscience, precisely, that the apostolic preachers commend themselves; and Paul wishes to appear before their conscience as he appears before God. Epistemologically, conscience has to take quite a load! The same transition from a looser to a tighter sense of the word may be observed in 1 Peter (by the tiny minority, in particular, who follow McNabb in assigning an early date to this document).⁴ Paul's discourse to the Sanhedrin

4. Cf. V. McNabb, *Frontiers of Faith and Wisdom* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1937), pp. 225-43.

and to Felix (Acts 23f) would then echo Peter's phrasing when he declares that he conducted himself in good conscience and that he was zealous to have a clear conscience (cf. 1 Pet. 3:16, 21).

But Romans has the final technical precision. It is conscience, precisely conscience, that lays bare that law of nature of which Paul speaks in the second chapter; likewise the Romans are to obey authority, not out of fear, but out of conscience (13:5). This use of the word, to mean both a power to discover the moral imperatives governing life and the motive force impelling us to obey them, thenceforth governed all New Testament, and thus all Christian, usage. That charity which is our supreme goal comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a faith free from deception, those that turn away from such good conscience being shipwrecked (1 Tim. 1:5, 19). The deacons of 1 Timothy 3:9 have the mystery of faith in a pure conscience, whereas error and hypocrisy display a hardened conscience (4:2). The Cretan Judaizers of Titus 1:10ff. are soiled in their very conscience. Hebrews completes this structure with an extremely bold statement of conscience's central role in the Christian life. Whereas the rituals under the former covenant were not in themselves capable of perfecting the worshipper in his conscience (10:2, 22), the blood of Christ can do so; precisely what Christ's blood is there said to cleanse is "our conscience." In such texts, faith, hope, charity, conscience, and doctrine are correlated causally within the scheme of man's redemption by Christ's death. There are, I believe, other instances of doctrinal development within the New Testament corpus, but this is as striking as any of them. And equally striking, I think, is the care of the Latin translations in seeing that one Latin word, not a random group of Latin words, was used for the one Greek word: where the Greek has *syneidesis* the Latin has *conscientia*.⁵

And so the word "conscience" was bequeathed to Latin Christianity and its vernacular heirs. They could no more ignore it than they could ignore words like "justification" and "redemption." Owing originally, perhaps, to a scribal error, the doctrine of conscience developed around the esoteric Greek word *synderesis*, instead of *syneidesis*.⁶ Thus, though St. Thomas has isolated passages which show his awareness of the importance of the concept of conscience in the mind of the New Testament writers, the total architecture of his system does not do it justice; for him, conscience is an *act*,⁷ but we—and, we are confident, the inspired authors—demand that it be a permanent and abiding force within the structure of the personality. Hence, I believe, the prolixity and disorder of the discussions of religious liberty at Vatican II; the doctrine in question had been developed in the vernaculars while Latin thinking slept on the point at issue. No one, consequently, would defend the final *Declaration concerning Religious Liberty* as a convincing

5. Cf. A. Merk, *Novum Testamentum Graece et Latine*, 7th ed. (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1951).

6. Cf. D. Prümmer, *Manuale Theologiae Moralis*, 10th ed. (Barcelona: Herder, 1946), Vol. I, p. 197, n. 10.

7. Cf. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Beatitudo* (St. Louis: Herder, 1956), p. 305: "Conscience is a practical judgment . . . here and now." I might add that, granted the limits of this conception of conscience, his treatment probes deeply.

piece of Latin prose, and the story goes that one bishop voted against it because it was such bad Latin. The interpretation of the title provided a startling example of the communications gap between church Latin and the modern vernaculars. In the older tongue the word *declaratio* means clarification; in the younger tongues, trumpets and flags. The Latin proposed a *clarification concerning* religious liberty, but many North Americans wanted, and thought they got, a *declaration* of religious liberty in the fashion of 1776.

Now of all the New Testament categories, *freedom* and *conscience* were those which chiefly invited philosophical inspection in the modern age. Yet when we search for vernacular antecedents of the doctrine of conscience spelled out by Vatican II, not only in the Declaration but also in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, we encounter a surprising difficulty. The history of French thought from Descartes to Teilhard de Chardin may, I believe, be written without even mentioning the word. (This is surely no mere matter of the ambiguity of the French word *conscience*, since Gilson, for instance, simply does not count Joseph Butler's analysis of conscience as part of the history of philosophy.) And the same must be said, so far as I know, of the German tongue from Kant down. Indeed, in concluding the *Critique of Judgment* Kant fostered a theologically fatal confusion by assigning to freedom, as a concept, the role which, according to Butler, belongs rather to conscience:

Of the three ideas of pure reason, God, freedom, and immortality, that of freedom is the one and only concept of the supersensible which (owing to the causality implied in it) proves its objective reality in nature by its possible effect there. By this means it makes possible the connexion of the other two ideas with nature, and the connexion of all three to form a religion. We are thus in possession of a principle which is capable of determining the idea of the supersensible within us, and, in that way, also of the supersensible without us, so as to constitute knowledge. . . . The conception of freedom . . . can extend reason beyond the bounds to which every natural, or theoretical, conception must remain hopelessly restricted.⁸

Hegel's criticism of this approach, in his *Philosophy of History*, was both profound and (for once) realistic: "Freedom as the *ideal* of that which is original and natural, does not exist *as original and natural*. Rather it must be first sought out and won; and that by an incalculable medial discipline of the intellectual and moral powers."⁹ The fatal weakness of Hegel, in his turn, was his failure to understand that Conscience, and not Society, nor the State, nor Culture, nor History, is the rule of freedom, that perfect law of liberty which enables us to possess the truth that sets us free.

This failure left theology, or that theology which in modern times masquerades as philosophy, to oscillate violently between two extremes: the Kantian autonomy, always tending to antinomianism, and the Hegelian idolatry of history as it is, equally antinomian through forgetting that

8. *Kant's Critique of Teleological Judgement*, translated by J. C. Meredith (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1928), p. 149.

9. I use the translation in *Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 79.

whatever is not of conscience (for so, says Garrigou-Lagrange, "the Fathers commonly interpret this text"¹⁰ [Rom. 14:23]) is sin. It is silly to pretend that the so-called "New Theology," in England seventy years ago or in America today, offers some sort of third choice. In that theology freedom rules and absorbs conscience, and by direct and necessary consequence eats up faith, doctrine, and union with God in charity. Newman, whether as a young Anglican parson or an aging Catholic cardinal, consistently described this theology as Liberalism, precisely because in it Liberty becomes an ultimate, beyond God, Man, and History; "the age is turning its back on dogmas and creeds," wrote the Anglican Liddon in a passage which can be applied without change in America a hundred years later, "and is moving in a negative direction under the banner of 'freedom.'"¹¹

Where is the analysis of conscience which will save us from this terrible freedom which proves itself by scepticism? The *locus classicus* remains, surely, Bishop Butler's *Fifteen Sermons* (1726), confirmed and expanded by Newman. Their analysis of conscience is the key to everything they have to say, including (let us note) what Newman has to say about doctrinal development. And the key to their analysis of conscience is Butler's strict and oft-reiterated identification of conscience with our power of reflection. ("Reflection or conscience," says his preface to the second edition [1729], e.g., paragraphs 14 and 19; "conscience or reflection," says paragraph 24.) Anyone, at any time, anywhere, under any circumstances, can reflect—can ask himself: Are things really the way I say they are? The natural demand for absolute and indefectible intellectual certitude, which is the principal subject-matter of Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, is the prime manifestation of conscience. How this intellectual hunger becomes a moral principle governing physical behaviour I attempted to indicate in an earlier article in *Anglican Dialogue*, and I can do no better now, in the way of clarifying this point, than I did then. *Syneidesis*, I noted,

was an ordinary enough Greek word for consciousness, one's simple self-awareness as a sentient, thinking, choosing being. But no one can be aware of himself, of his total world-picture and his personality-drives as a system, without asking himself some anxious questions. Am I in touch with reality? Is my picture of the world the same as the world really is? Will the achievement of the goals I have set myself make me really happy? Is there some personality-fulfilment proof against death? Thus self-consciousness at any profound level involves guilt and insecurity,—rightly, say Christians, for we *are* guilty, and guilty of building upon sand, of grasping at a happiness that can never, from the nature of the case, be secure. And the same self-awareness tells us of thoughts whose very sweetness yieldeth proof that they were born for immortality. Thus consciousness reveals its character as conscience, a sense of guilt and a sense of drive, the drive that is our very nature, an unwritten or natural law governing all we do.¹²

We can best appreciate the originality and boldness of Butler's identification of conscience with reflection by contrasting a passage from Clérissac,

10. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Beatitude*, p. 294.

11. From the preface to the second edition of his classic, *The Divinity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (London: Rivingtons, 1868), p. xvi.

12. T. L. Suttor, "Immortality," *Anglican Dialogue*, February 1967, 12.

who was for some time Maritain's spiritual director, and who provides an exception to my earlier generalization about the want of French writing on my topic. "One can," he writes, "take conscience in two very [*bien*] different senses, either as the central faculty which registers the various perceptions of the living being, or as the internal possession [*habitude*] of the first principles of morality."¹³ Precisely where Clérissac says either/or, a dichotomy, Butler says both/and, an identification. Butler stands or falls by this as a thinker, and Newman, as I have tried to show elsewhere, stands or falls with him. Yet Butler would agree with the remark Clérissac makes next: "in either case, conscience is characterized by certitude." Conscience is the reality-principle ensconced in the system of human personality. It is precisely that in us which demands the real and nothing but the real, absolute certitude, and this, as Clérissac proceeds to argue, is why it proceeds from faith to dogmatic definitions.

Butler's line of thought naturally has classical roots and precedents. Dante himself, in the *Purgatorio*, XXV, where Statius discourses on embryology, characterises the moment of the hominisation of the embryo precisely in terms of the act or power of reflection: "un' alma sola / che vive e sente, e se in se rigira." Dante is said by his commentators to have found this emphasis, not common among the scholastics, in Averroes. But Butler goes further, to insist that the central power of reflection *essentially* connotes authority; that is to say, you have not understood it at all until you have seen how it enjoys a natural ascendancy and dominion over man's other powers and responses. Here we have a very necessary gloss on the Thomistic formula that will presupposes intellect. Will presupposes, not this or that so-called "act" of intellect—conceiving, judging, reasoning—but the concrete intellect at work, engaged with the real and reflecting on this engagement. Will is simply conscience *qua* authority, and it alone has the power to integrate the human personality. No passion is as powerful as our desire to know how things stand and how we stand in relation to them.

The Canadian Theological Society's Montreal conference of 1967 (which this paper concluded) was candid and uninhibited, and thus quickly laid bare the chief preoccupations of our theologians: the epistemological question, whether we know what is what, and how we know we know; free-will; and whether we can transcend or in any way escape history. For Butler, and of course for me, the New Testament category of conscience is crucial in answering all these questions. By conscience we seek till we find and *know* that the Son of God has come and given us understanding (1 John 5:20); by the cleansing of our consciences in Christ's blood we are freed from the slavery of sin into that form of doctrine into which we have been delivered and that freedom wherewith Christ has made us free; and in conscience, though we do not escape from history (a wicked thought), we are nevertheless not totally contained in history ("to be conscious is not to be *in* time," as a great Christian poet has said). The two main contemporary arguments which submerge knowledge and liberty *within* history are linguistic analysis

13. H. Clérissac, *Le Mystère de l'Église* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1925), p. 52.

and psychoanalysis. The philosophy of conscience answers the philosophy of language by saying that language has not been understood at all until it has been understood as signs chosen in conscience by a mind that through conscience transcends its linguistic instruments. Depth psychology, of course, both enlarges our concept of language, or rather of meaning, and gives conscience many valuable tools with which to test and adjust the equilibrium of forces within our own personality. But the typical systems of psychoanalysis—both Freud's early scheme and its modifications by Jung, Adler, and Freud himself, together with the profound criticisms of men like Prinzhorn, Fromm, and others less insulated against contemporary philosophy than the pioneer psychoanalysts—all fail to take into account the absolute liberty of the personality from all psychic determinism *by reason of its power of reflection*. Yet only Butler, of the writers within my acquaintance, supplies a model enabling us to use psychoanalysis (or, for that matter, language) without dissolving dogmatic faith into imagery and emotion, complex and super-ego. The Freudians, as Prinzhorn said, levelled all values in the face of instinct. When we construct a philosophy of spirit grounded in the simple, concrete, and ineluctable fact of human self-consciousness, we must not rush to an opposite extreme and level all instincts and emotions in the face of reflection. Butler is careful to avoid this, as his sermons on compassion and indignation show; here are passions often mistaken for virtues and always integrated with moral virtue, but reflection rules as will, a very different thing.

It is risky to try to abridge Butler. Fortunately, a footnote to the third sermon appears to me to be a good sample of his argument:

Every man in his physical nature is one individual single agent. He has likewise properties and principles, each of which may be considered separately, and without regard to the respects which they have to each other. Neither of these are the nature we are taking a view of. But it is the inward frame of man considered as a *system* or *constitution*: whose several parts are united, not by a physical principle of individuation, but by the respects they have to each other; the chief of which is the subjection which the appetites, passions and particular affections have to the one supreme principle of reflection or conscience. The system or constitution is formed by and consists in these respects and this subjection. Thus the body is a *system* or *constitution*: so is a tree: so is every machine. Consider all the several parts of a tree without the natural respects they have to each other, and you have not at all the idea of a tree; but add these respects, and this gives you the idea. The body may be impaired by sickness, a tree may decay, a machine may be out of order, and yet the system and constitution of them not totally dissolved. There is plainly somewhat which answers to all this in the moral constitution of man. Whoever will consider his own nature, will see that the several appetites, passions and particular affections have different respects amongst themselves. They are restraints upon, and are in a proportion to each other. This proportion is just and perfect, when all those under principles are perfectly coincident with conscience, so far as their nature permits, and in all cases under its absolute and entire direction. The least excess or defect, the least alteration of the due proportions amongst themselves, or of their coincidence with conscience, though not proceeding into action, is some degree of disorder in the moral constitution. But perfection, though plainly intelligible and supposable, was never attained by any man. If the higher principle

of reflection maintains its place, and as much as it can corrects that disorder, and hinders it from breaking out into action, this is all that can be expected in such a creature as man.¹⁴

This natural order in the human person, however, is an open order: it (and it only) is open to the friendship of others; but much more, it (and it only) is open to the friendship of Almighty God. Here is Butler's account, in his fourteenth sermon, of this all-important moment:

Consider wherein that presence of a friend consists, which has often so strong an effect, as wholly to possess the mind, and entirely suspend all other affections and regards; and which itself affords the highest satisfaction and enjoyment. He is within reach of the senses. Now, as our capacities of perception improve, we shall have, perhaps by some faculty entirely new, a perception of God's presence with us in a nearer and stricter way. . . . The Scripture represents the happiness of that state under the notions of *seeing God, seeing him as he is, knowing as we are known, and seeing face to face*. These words are not general and undetermined. . . . And I will be bold to say, that nothing can account for, or come up to these expressions, but only this, that God himself will be an object to our faculties, that he himself will be our happiness.¹⁵

In such wise conscience, spontaneously but laboriously, establishes that body of wisdom about wisdom which we found in the Book of Wisdom, and I need hardly say that—notwithstanding the Thirty-nine Articles—Butler makes extensive use of both Ecclesiasticus and Wisdom. But how conscience has, itself, with respect to the revealed doctrines of Christianity was the subject of Butler's second classic study, *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (1736).

From analogical reasoning [Butler wrote], Origen has with singular sagacity observed, that *he who believes the Scripture to have proceeded from him who is the Author of nature, may well expect to find the same sort of difficulties in it as are found in the constitution of nature*. . . . The design then of the following Treatise will be to show, that the several parts principally objected against in this moral and Christian dispensation, including its scheme, its publication, and the proof which God had afforded us of its truth; . . . are analogous to what is experienced in the constitution and course of nature; . . . and that this argument from analogy is in general unanswerable. . . .¹⁶

Thus, part two, chapter five, for instance, shows how “the whole analogy of nature removes all imagined presumption against the general notion of a Mediator between God and man.” But for our purpose the important thing is to grasp how analogy is conscience at work in relation to revealed religion, just as ordinary virtue is conscience at work in relation to natural religion. To the question: How is conscience sure a given proposition represents divine revelation? the answer is: by analogy. But, “Christianity being supposed either true or credible, it is unspeakable irreverence, and really the most presumptuous rashness, to treat it as a light matter. It can never justly be esteemed of little consequence, till it be positively supposed false.”¹⁷ By

14. J. Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*, ed. W. R. Matthews (London: G. Bell, 1949), p. 62n.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 227f.

16. *The Works of Joseph Butler*, ed. W. E. Gladstone (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), Vol. I, pp. 8, 15f.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 207, 167.

Christianity, here, as his context explains (part two, chapter one), Butler means the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and Redemption as expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene creeds. In relation to this whole, and to each of its parts, each man is in a permanent state of intellectual trial; what heritage a man is born to matters little, what matters is the direction he takes.

Though the evidence of religion which is afforded to some men should be little more than that they are given to see, the system of Christianity, or religion in general, to be supposable and credible; this ought in all reason to beget a serious practical apprehension that it may be true. . . . Considering the infinite importance of religion, revealed as well as natural, . . . there is not near so much difference, as is commonly imagined, between what ought in reason to be the rule of life, to those persons who are fully convinced of its truth, and to those who have only a serious doubting apprehension that it may be true. . . . Temptations render our state a more improving state of discipline. . . . Now speculative difficulties are, in this respect, of the very same nature with these external temptations. . . . Supposed doubtfulness in the evidence of religion calls for a more careful and attentive exercise of the virtuous principle, in fairly yielding themselves up to the proper influence of any real evidence. . . . Nor does there appear any absurdity in supposing that the speculative difficulties, in which the evidence of religion is involved, may make even the principal part of some persons' trial.¹⁸

Thus conscience is a principle of intellectual, of theological order, as well as moral order. But a final point is of the utmost importance: this theology which is discovered in conscience is not the domain and monopoly of theological experts. "The Son of God loved us, and gave himself for us," remarks Butler, "with a love which he himself compares to that of human friendship; though, in this case, all comparisons must fall infinitely short." One does not come to such theology through reading difficult books like Bishop Butler's *Analogy*. As he says there:

The general proof of natural religion and of Christianity does, I think, lie level to common men; even those, the greatest part of whose time, from childhood to old age, is taken up with providing for themselves and their families. . . . Common men, were they as much in earnest about religion, as about their temporal affairs, are capable of being convinced upon real evidence, that there is a God who governs the world: and they feel themselves to be of a moral nature, and accountable creatures. And as Christianity entirely falls in with this their natural sense of things, so they are capable not only of being persuaded, but of being made to see, that there is evidence of miracles wrought in attestation of it, and many appearing completions of prophecy. But though this proof is real and conclusive, yet it is liable to objections, and may be run up into difficulties, which, however, persons who are capable not only of talking of, but of really seeing, are capable also of seeing through: i.e. not of clearing up and answering them, so as to satisfy their curiosity . . . ; but capable of seeing that the proof is not lost in these difficulties. . . .¹⁹

18. Here I have tried to summarize in Butler's own words the argument of part two, chapter six, entitled "Of the want of universality in revelation; and of the supposed deficiency in the proof of it." Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 235-40.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

There is a serene self-possession implicit in any judgment, any assertion that something is quite certainly the case. This is conscience. We have not asserted that conscience may not fail. It may fail, not only to explore the mysteries of revelation, but even to attempt to integrate the personality; such failure is sin. Sin, the failure of conscience to press on to authentic certitude, is a mystery; and so is the repair of conscience once it has failed, the divine work we describe as justification. All we say is, that purity of heart, or of conscience, is, as the New Testament says, something that, by the grace of God, happens. Tireless concern with the mystery of God's love for sinful men is a sign of its presence and activity, and true theology, that theology which is part and parcel of God's saving work in each heart, draws ceaselessly from this common store, the experience of an upright conscience, whether the setting be Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome, Moscow, Peking, or the Land of Hus. Historically, this alone, under the Holy Spirit, resolves the great theological disputes, such as whether Christ's invisible government of his church involves a papal monarchy; whether the Mother of Christ was at the same time a sample and model of his power to transform human personality; whether there is some sort of penalization after death with a finite term to it (purgatory) and whether such punishment can be remitted in whole or in part by God's free grace (pardons); whether the Great High Priest established seven sacraments or two; whether Old Testament prophetic inspiration extended right down through the Greek period, with Ecclesiasticus and Wisdom and the Maccabean martyrologies; transubstantiation; whether justification necessarily gives a man love of God above self; the *Filioque* clause in the Creed. All such disputes are decided, not by experts, but by purity of conscience exploring prophecy in fear and trembling according to the analogy of faith. Men of sincere conscience know that they cannot risk being wrong on such matters, and they can come to unity only through an unrelenting fear of rendering a false account of the hope that is in them; yet the more they are thus sanctified in the truth and so made one, "the more they must agree to disagree, each insisting on what God wills him to do,"²⁰ at the level of practical arrangements.

But if there are any persons, whether experts or common men, "who never set themselves heartily and in earnest to be informed in religion," whether the whole, or any particular doctrine of religion; "if there be any who secretly wish it may not prove true; and are less attentive to evidence than to difficulties, and more to objections than to what is said in answer to them: these persons will scarce be thought in a likely way of seeing the evidence of religion, though it were most certainly true, and capable of being ever so fully proved." He that hath ears to hear, he alone may hear. Butler quotes Grotius to the effect that "the word of the Gospel should be like the Lydian touchstone, a means by which the health of our minds should be tested."²¹

20. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Beatitude*, pp. 296f.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 241f. Cf. also R. Bayne's note in J. Butler, *Analogy* (Everyman's Library ed. London: J. M. Dent, 1906), p. 279.