

The Formal Object of Faith

extract from Proposition II § viii

§ viii. The fourth thing which needs to be affirmed is, *that these revelations were the formal object of the saints' faith in ancient times.*

This is easily demonstrated by the definition of faith and considering what its object is. We will not dive into the various curious notions of the scholastics, but stay in the plain and positive words of the apostle Paul, who (Hebrews 11) describes it two ways. "Faith," he says, "is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." As the apostle shows by many examples in the same chapter, this is nothing else but a firm and certain belief of the mind, by which it rests and in a sense possesses the substance of some things it hopes for, through its confidence in the promise of God. In this way the soul has most firm evidence, by its faith, of things not yet seen, things that have not happened yet. The object of this faith is the *promise, word, or testimony of God*, speaking to the mind. For this reason it has been generally affirmed that the object of faith is *Deus loquens*, etc.<sup>1</sup>; that is, God speaking. This is also evident from all the examples the apostle cites in the whole chapter, people whose faith was not founded on any outward testimony, nor on what human beings said or wrote, but rather on the unmediated and direct\* revelation of God's will to them and in them.

This is clear in the example of Noah (verse 7): "By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to save his household, by which he condemned the world and became

---

<sup>1</sup> from Hebrews 1:1 in the Latin Vulgate; a phrase much cited by Protestant theologians.

heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.” What was the object of Noah’s faith in this case, if not God speaking to him? Noah did not have the writings or prophecy of anyone before him, nor did he have the agreement of any church or people to strengthen him; and yet his faith in the Word, by which he went against the whole world, saved him and his house.

Abraham is a notable example of the same thing, and that is why he is called the father of the faithful; it is said that he believed in hope even when there was no hope, because he willingly abandoned his father’s country, not knowing where he was to go; because he believed that Isaac would be born though it was contrary to natural probability; above all because he did not refuse to sacrifice him, having no doubt that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead since it was said of him that “your descendants will be counted through Isaac.”<sup>2</sup> Finally, because he trusted the promise that his descendants would possess the land where he himself was only a pilgrim, a promise which was not fulfilled to them until ages later. In all this the object of Abraham’s faith was nothing other than inward and direct revelation, God telling him his will inwardly through his Spirit without intermediary. . . .

It is truly said, “the Spirit testifies with our spirit” (Romans 8:16) but not to our outward ears. And since the Spirit of God is within us, and not outside of us (verse 9) it speaks to our spiritual, and not to our bodily ear. Therefore since it is so often said in Scripture that the Spirit said, moved, hindered, called someone to do or not to do something, I see no reason anyone should conclude that this was not an inward voice speaking to the ear of the soul, rather than an outward voice speaking to the bodily ear. If anyone thinks differently, let the produce their arguments if they can, so that we may consider them.

---

<sup>2</sup> [Genesis 21:12](#), [Romans 9:7](#), [Hebrews 11:18](#)

Sources: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition II § viii (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 34-37 and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 13-16.