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# FROM THE HOUSETOPS



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# A PRELUDE TO FAITH

LEONARD FEENEY

THERE is a certain definite behaviour of the human mind in reference to the Divine Mind constituting a function which Catholic Theology calls Faith. I am concerned with a critical analysis of that function. It were therefore a clear begging of the question if I were to assume on faith the principles I shall use in criticizing it. I must examine by the light of human reason the meaning and validity of the act which the Catholic mind supposes itself to be eliciting when it subscribes to an Article of Faith. And if the criticism is faulty, I and not my religion am to blame.

It is not pleasant to analyze the functions of one's mind. It is like destroying a beautiful tapestry in order to assure oneself of the substantiality of the threads that go to make it. One could say with truth of Faith what à Kempis has said of compunction, "I would rather have it than know its definition."

It will be impossible for me to examine here the validity of one's belief in a body of doctrine as complex as the Catholic deposit of Faith. This question could never be resolved in a single article, nor could all the reasons and judgments of the mind leading up to it be recaptured and enumerated. Asking one why he believes in the truths of the Catholic Church is like asking a child why he loves his parent. For ten thousand reasons, not for one. A welter of all one has thought of, reasoned about, and prayed for is involved in the motive of any individual act of Faith, concretely. It is my business to analyze the function of Faith in its general aspect, in reference to religion itself rather than to my own religion in particular. And much as one hates to dissect and tear to pieces this most beautiful operation of the mind in order to see what it is made of, still a ruthless logical examination of some kind is necessary if we are to protect ourselves against those who are undermining the value of all religion, who have faith only in faithlessness, and know only their own doubts.

I do not suppose for a moment that each mind goes laboriously through the process as I shall describe it. The human mind is natu-