

THE MEANING AND STRUCTURE OF CATHOLIC FAITH

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TO BE A BELIEVER today may seem very strange and bizarre, or even fundamentally dishonest. As a result of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, of the development of history and science in the nineteenth century, and of psychology and the social sciences in the twentieth century, the stance of faith appears to be a refuge from both the certainties and the uncertainties of our contemporary world. The cultural heritage of these last centuries in the West has made the educated human mind aware of its capacities and its limitations. It is able to know and affirm the real given in experience, or rigorously deduced from sensible evidence, or carefully garnered through historical research, or meticulously uncovered through introspective analysis, or accurately plotted from statistical surveys. There is no room for a leap into the transcendent that is beyond experience, deduction, research, introspection, and surveys. Sigmund Freud spoke for many moderns when he wrote:

The common man cannot imagine this Providence otherwise than in the figure of an enormously exalted father. Only such a being can understand the needs of the children of men and be softened by their prayers and placated by the signs of their remorse. The whole thing is so patently infantile, so foreign to reality, that to anyone with a friendly attitude to humanity it is painful to think that the great majority of mortals will never be able to rise above this view of life.¹

But it is painful for human beings to be left alone in the universe, to have to work out their own destiny, to be deprived of a ground of ultimate meaning, to have no way of explaining finally the beauty and wonder and complexity that surround us. Thus, we *wish* to believe in God. But at times that seems to us "too good to be true." We find that our desire to believe is in conflict with the desire to be honest. Freud then appears to be right when he described all religion as illusion, as a matter of wish-fulfilment.² Bertrand Russell ascribed belief in God chiefly to childhood training, but added wish-fulfilment as a second powerful reason: "Then I think that the next most powerful reason is the wish for safety, a sort of feeling that there is a big brother who will look after you. This plays a very profound part in influencing people's desire for belief in God."³

¹ *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: Norton, 1961) 21.

² This is the main burden of his book *The Future of an Illusion* (New York: Doubleday, 1957).

³ *Why I Am Not a Christian* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957) 14.

THE MEANING OF CATHOLIC FAITH

But the fact is, theistic, Christian, Catholic faith is simply a concrete, specific form of a universal activity. The whole cultural heritage of the modern world is shot through inescapably with different forms of faith. What the Catholic believer does is adopt a kind of faith that is at variance with a number of current secular faiths. He does not differ from his agnostic, atheistic, or skeptical neighbors in having a faith stance, but in the kind of faith stance that he has. The critical question is not whether one believes, but whether one's particular faith is warranted or not in the actual situation.

Faith

It is simply a fact that all of us live lives based on existential certainties which are neither self-evident nor demonstrable, and yet are somehow grounded in our experience. Such certainties are commonly called "faith."⁴ We can recognize a certainty of this kind most obviously in the faith we have in our friends. We are certain that our friends are concerned about us, that they will not needlessly harm us, that we can rely on their promises, that what they report is true as far as they know, that when we are genuinely in need they will help us. This faith knits together the whole fabric of human society. A person incapable of this faith would be judged a dwarfed and impoverished human being. This certainty is "existential" in the modern sense of being a dimension of human life in the world, something constitutive of the reality of the individual human person. It is "certainty" in that we accept it as true and reliable without any destructive misgivings. We depend on it in our day-to-day decisions, entrust the whole future of our lives to it, although we may at times have some disturbing questions to deal with. It is "not self-evident nor demonstrable," for it is not a reality we can touch or see directly, nor does it follow with rigorous logic from what we directly experience. We are somehow going beyond the evidence, but are convinced that this step is entirely legitimate. And if, for example, a husband ever came to doubt seriously the faithfulness and sincere love of his wife, there would be no way to *prove* this to him; for there would always be the possibility that at some time which he cannot check she was unfaithful, or that in the interior of her heart she really cares only for the security he provides. Particular questions may be answered, but the earlier faith could be

⁴ See *Oxford English Dictionary* 4, 31 for illustrations of this use of the word "faith" in the history of the language. Thomas Aquinas distinguished four basic ways of assenting to a truth: (1) understanding, which grasps self-evident first principles; (2) science or knowledge, which affirms demonstrated conclusions; but when the truth is neither self-evident nor demonstrable, assent will be (3) opinion, if it is accompanied by uncertainty or a fear of error, or (4) faith, if it is certain. See *Sum. theol.* 2-2, q. 1, a. 4.

restored only by simply reaffirming it. The affirmation itself is, however, not mindless or groundless. Many acts of kindness and understanding and availability make this faith altogether warranted, even if it cannot be described as rational, logical, or scientific.

But faith as a common human experience is not confined to these close interpersonal relations. Each human being growing toward maturity comes to adopt a fundamental life-stance, a way of viewing the world, human existence, the future, and the meaning of happiness.⁵ Such a fundamental life-stance is an attitude of faith, for it is an existential certainty which is neither self-evident nor demonstrable, and yet is somehow grounded in experience. The person is trying to make some kind of sense out of the multiplicity and complexity of the universe. Jacques Monod, for example, rests his whole explanation of the meaning of life and the structure of the universe on what he calls "the postulate that nature is objective." By this he means that we must finally understand the world without any appeal to purpose or pursued end. He writes:

To be sure, neither reason, nor logic, nor observation, nor even the idea of their systematic confrontation had been ignored by Descartes' predecessors. But science as we understand it today could not have been developed upon those foundations alone. It required the unbending stricture implicitly in the postulate of objectivity—ironclad, pure, forever undemonstrable. For it is obviously impossible to imagine an experiment which could prove the *nonexistence* anywhere in nature of a purpose, of a pursued end.⁶

What had begun as a methodological principle for the construction of a certain kind of science has here been raised to the level of metaphysical statement by an act of faith. Physical science undertook to explain phenomena in terms simply of the observable agents or causes, in terms of mass and energy, without appealing to purpose: one would describe the chemical and physical activities involved in the operation of the eye, for example, without saying that this was for the sake of seeing. The method itself was not concerned to affirm or to deny the purpose of the eye, but only to explain what it did in terms of material activity. Monod goes beyond that by asserting that nowhere in the universe of nature is

⁵ Some years ago, under the inspiration of the radio commentator Edward R. Murrow, a hundred persons published short descriptions of their perspectives on life. These included personalities as different as Andre Kostelanetz, Margaret Mead, and Herbert Hoover, and their contributions were correspondingly diverse. Most of them exhibited a strong religious component in their expressions of faith, but not all. They each offered their own reasons for finding life worth living. There were no simple "scientific" answers. See *This I Believe: The Living Philosophies of One Hundred Thoughtful Men and Women in All Walks of Life*, ed. Edw. P. Morgan (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952).

⁶ *Chance and Necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology* (New York: Knopf, 1971) 21.

there purpose or goal. Such an assertion is a kind of faith. It is grounded in the success of this method in giving a certain kind of explanation. Monod's act of faith is to affirm it as the only kind of explanation, and thus eliminate divine providence or purposeful divine guidance from the universe.

Examples of other faiths of this kind are Marxist communism and idealism. Marxism is a particular expression of dialectical materialism. It believes the entire universe can be understood as matter in motion, in process of development through the progressive overcoming of oppositions which are generated out of previous developments. On the social and historical level this appears as progress through class struggle, moving to the final resolution of social conflict in the classless, communist state. A gathering of historical data makes this a possible way of explaining the universe. By an act of faith, the Marxist makes it his way. Idealism affirms the unique reality of thought, of ideas. Since we contact the universe and know it only as it is given to us in knowledge and ideas, it appears possible to affirm that the only reality is thought. We can know only ideas; ideas are the only constitutive elements of the world. And so on. There are innumerable faiths of this sort, ways of affirming a unity and intelligibility in the multiplicity of experience, ways of affirming the worthwhileness of human life in terms of a future toward which we are moving. All these faiths are by their nature freely chosen options. Evidence does not compel us to accept them—though social pressures or psychological conditioning (“brainwashing”) might. The world of experience offers some ground for affirming each of them, but it does not impose any of them. Because it is a profoundly personal act, a way of constructing a whole universe and of expressing the essential meaning of life, faith of this sort always has a kind of religious tone about it, even when it is explicitly denying the reality of God. Anyone whose life is at all reflective is led to adopt some such stance toward those questions of ultimate unity and value. Having some kind of faith is inseparable from being a mature human being. It is an attitude of certainty, at least when it is fully developed, for it is held without serious fear of being mistaken, and one trusts it enough to act on it and guide one's life by it.

Theistic Faith

Most persons, as the history of philosophy and cultural anthropology make clear, have been led to affirm a divine reality as the basis of the unity of the universe, the source of the unfolding of time and history, the ground of value discovered in truth and beauty and unselfish human love, the ultimate goal of developmental processes and of growth toward maturity. Not every such affirmation is theistic faith, compatible with Christian and Catholic faith. Still, there is always question in these affirmations of a reality that is not simply given to us as another object

of direct experience, i.e., given on the level of other such objects and in the same class as they are. The divine reality always transcends in some way the simply and directly observable. For some, this transcendence is such that God is removed from all direct involvement with the universe and human life. God, for some reason that escapes us entirely, somehow constructed the world, brought some kind of order out of chaos, but is radically unconcerned about the world. This is the God of deism.⁷ For others, the divine transcendence relates simply to our limited powers of observation. Everything that is is somehow part of God, a manifestation of the all-inclusive divine reality, participating in the total life and activity of God as the members of a body share the life and activity of the whole body. There is no divine reality beyond what is in principle directly observable, but we are unable to grasp directly the unified life and intelligent ordering of this whole of directly observable parts. We do this in the faith that affirms the divinity of all things. It is the faith of pantheism.⁸

Theistic faith, which comes to expression in Christianity, as also in Judaism and Islam, differs from both of these. It differs from pantheism in affirming the distinctiveness of the divine reality from the whole universe, no matter how this is conceived. God is not to be identified with any or all of the things that make up the world of our immediate experience. This is enshrined in the doctrine of creation, as over against doctrines of emanationism, or the demiurgic organization of an independent chaos, or the animation of all things by a world soul, or the progressive development of the deity in the process of world evolution.⁹ To all these positions theistic faith replies, God is wholly other. And yet He is not the distant, unrelated, unconcerned, uninvolved God of the deists. God is

⁷ Deism became popular in the eighteenth century at the time of the Enlightenment, when the capability and independence of human intelligence were strongly upheld. Many early American thinkers were deists, e.g., Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. It survives today in certain Masonic formulas and rituals, as in the description of God as "architect of the universe."

⁸ Samuel Alexander, in the Gifford Lectures published in 1920 under the title *Space, Time, and Deity*, exhibits a kind of evolutionary pantheism, in which the last emergent quality of mind from the universal matrix of space-time is the deity. Pantheism continues to have a kind of popular appeal, as in the following paragraph from *This I Believe*: "I have never had any difficulty in believing in God. I don't believe in a personal God and I don't quite see how it is possible to believe in a God who knows both good and evil and yet to trust in Him. I believe in God, good, in One Mind, and I believe we are all subject to and part of this oneness" (Joyce Grenfell, "The Art of Bouncing Back," *op. cit.* 63).

⁹ Emanationism considers the world to be a necessary outflow or emanation of the divine substance; it was taught by some Gnostics and Neoplatonists. Plato himself in the *Timaeus* proposed the origin of the world as due to the organizing activity of a demiurge bringing order out of chaos. Stoics thought of God as a universal reason (Logos) or divine fire animating the world; this they identified with providence. Evolutionary pantheism taught the development of God in interaction with the world; Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy of organism maintains something similar.

immediately present in the world He creates and to all that is in it. His knowledge and love and activity reach all things and persons and events. Theistic faith finds that it can affirm the unity and coherence of the universe, the meaning of nature and history, the value of persons and events only by simultaneously affirming a single, ultimate, personal reality: God, as the source and goal of all this.

Some persons may have the ability and the inclination to "prove" the existence of God understood in this way. They endeavor to articulate the spontaneous process that leads from the affirmation of the world given in experience to the affirmation of the divine reality that makes this world possible and actual. But such an ability is rare. Few find the demonstrative process in itself wholly convincing. It is seldom if ever able to justify the full meaning and vigor of the affirmation of God. It certainly does not suffice to explain Christian faith in God.¹⁰

Theistic faith, while it finds in the beauty, order, unity, truth, and goodness of the world grounds for affirming an all-wise, all-good, and omnipotent Creator, is nevertheless continually challenged by the existence of evil, disorder, suffering, and moral depravity.¹¹ These too are data in the world of experience, and the believer must in some way reconcile their presence with the existence and activity of the God he acknowledges. This at least always makes theistic faith questionable and problematic. The stance of faith here calls for an effort to believe in the face of considerable evidence to the contrary. This more than anything else makes theistic faith a free option, grounded in but not coerced by the world of experience, for not all the evidence points unmistakably in one direction. From the standpoint of Christian faith, we should acknowledge here too the assistance of grace, the interior attraction of the Holy Spirit, the personal invitation of God to find wholeness and meaning in the affirmation of His reality.¹²

¹⁰ The First Vatican Council, in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, taught the natural capacity of the human mind to know God as the beginning and end of all things. But it likewise insisted on the need for revelation, both because of the great difficulty in achieving this natural knowledge of God and because of the supernatural destiny to which God calls us in Jesus Christ. See DS 3004-5.

¹¹ The problem of evil has been and remains the greatest single obstacle to belief in God. Books and articles are continually rehearsing ways to deal with this problem. John Hick, in *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), has carefully outlined two basic approaches to this problem: the more common Augustinian view, in which suffering is due to sin, either personal or original, and the Irenaean view, in which some suffering is inseparable from this kind of world and has no necessary connection with sin, but this evil is turned to good by a loving and wise God.

¹² The knowledge we have of God is seldom if ever a merely speculative matter, another piece of information. It engages the whole person and directs him/her toward the meaning of life. Thus this knowledge of God occurs normally as a step on the way to salvation, whose entire progress stems from the inspiration and attraction of grace, as the Church has taught uniformly since the condemnation of Pelagianism in the fifth century.

Before passing on to a consideration of the specific forms of Christian and Catholic faith, wherein belief in God's self-communication is both extended and made more concrete, we might note that atheism itself is a form of faith. As Nietzsche observed, "It is now no longer our reason but our taste that decides against Christianity."¹³ To affirm the nonexistence of God, to deny firmly the reality of the divine, is to read all the evidence as (a) not requiring any further principle of unity and goodness, and (b) incompatible with such a beneficent and supreme power. There is no *proof* that that is the way to read the evidence; in the end, one chooses to do so by an act of faith which finds in evil and disorder some grounds for such a stance. But then, of course, one is left with the "problem of good."

Christian Faith

Christian faith identifies the Creator of the world with the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It affirms that the actual meaning of history and human life is given to us in the events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is God's Son not simply in a metaphorical or adoptive sense, but in the truth of a personal relationship that constitutes the very reality of who Jesus is. The characteristic Christian confession of faith is "Jesus is Lord."¹⁴ It is grounded in the resurrection event as testified to by the appearances of the Risen One and confirmed by the empty tomb. It affirms that Jesus, the man of Nazareth and son of Mary, the one who lived and preached and suffered and died in faithful obedience to a divine mission, is now precisely the Exalted and Glorified One who shares with God the Father the guidance of history and the salvation of the human race. God has so communicated Himself to us in this man that in Jesus we contact personally and absolutely the saving love and power of God. Jesus is the center of history. His entrance into the world was prepared by the history of Israel, by the promises and covenants, by the patriarchs and prophets, by the law and religious worship of the people of Abraham. The Son of God enters history as a member of this people to transform history from within. He changes human existence from a movement marked by slavery, isolation, selfishness, and death to a life of freedom, communion, love, and eternal joy. He lives now as Lord and shares with us who believe the Holy Spirit as the beginning of this transformed life. He will return at the end of history to complete His saving and transforming work.

But Christian faith, too, has its own "problem of evil," the contrary evidence which makes the confession of faith always a free option. There is the double scandal of particularity and the cross.¹⁵ There is a prima-

¹³ *The Joyful Wisdom* 3 (New York: Ungar, 1960) n. 132, p. 173.

¹⁴ See Acts 2:36; 1 Cor 12:3; Rom 10:9; Phil 2:11; Jn 20:28; 1 Pet 3:15.

¹⁵ The New Testament itself gives evidence of this problem: see, e.g., Mt 11:6; 13:57; Mk 8:38.

facie absurdity in supposing that the particular events of one man's life should have universal power and meaning, reaching to all times and places throughout history and the world. The absurdity is compounded when those events are manifestations not simply of power and glory but of weakness, sorrow, loneliness, rejection, misunderstanding, and death. It is easy to understand the disciples on the way to Emmaus when they manifested their own loss of faith, saying after Jesus' death, "We had hoped that it was he who would redeem Israel."¹⁶ How is it possible to proclaim as Lord the wandering Jewish rabbi who was scorned by his contemporaries, betrayed by a close disciple, rejected by his people, abandoned by all but a handful, and executed by the highest worldly authority? However reliable the evidence is in favor of this faith, it is not compelling. Christian faith is a free option, a way we may choose if we will, not unreasonably but not necessarily.

Catholic Faith

Christian faith has assumed several forms in the history of Christianity, depending primarily upon different ways of viewing the saving power of Christ relative to the Church. Catholic faith is the most widespread of these forms. It would be an oversimplification to identify this faith merely with the acknowledgment of the pope as chief shepherd of the Church, or with the acceptance of some other institutional arrangement. Such a description would mistake some particular characteristic for the heart of the matter. Furthermore, Catholic faith is not confined simply and exclusively to Christian believers in communion with the See of Rome, to "Roman Catholics"; for other Christians, too, in varying degrees exhibit the essential stance of Catholic faith.

The central feature of Catholic faith is to regard the Church as the ongoing effect of the saving power of Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus as Lord gives the Holy Spirit to those who believe in him, but not in isolation from one another as though each were receiving a private gift; rather, through this gift they are bound to one another in the community of the Holy Spirit, to constitute thereby the Body of Christ.

While Christians generally acknowledge the Church to be "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic," Catholic faith gives these words a special meaning directly connected with belief in the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the Christian community. The oneness of the Church is not merely a sociological phenomenon, the unity of a group of people who share the same central religious convictions; it is a unity found in the common possession of the same Spirit as the source of their life as Christians, a Spirit of truth and love and power. The holiness of the

¹⁶ Lk 24:21.

Church is not merely the removal of this people from worldly concerns or their dedication to good works; it is a positive belonging to God, sharing the holiness of His life, being His people, among whom and in whom He dwells as Lord and Giver of Life. The catholicity of the Church is not just the fact of world-wide diffusion; it is the same Spirit-filled reality found everywhere in spite of diversities of culture, place, social status, and size, so that all various local churches are finally only one Church, the one Body of Christ. The apostolicity of the Church is not just a matter of teaching what the apostles taught or having a sense of purpose and mission in the world; it means being continuously and vitally the same Church as the Church of the apostles, led through history by the same Holy Spirit to proclaim the same Good News and to bring the same salvation.

Catholic faith from the beginning manifested itself in an ecclesial structure designed to protect and promote the reality of the Church as the Body of Christ. No doubt, this went through an early development, and continued to change in response to special needs and circumstances. But always some were charged with the proclamation of the Good News, with gathering believers into a community of worship, and with directing their lives according to the commandment of love. Local and regional churches strove to be in communion with one another, "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." This communion was effected through written correspondence, through exchanges of professions of faith, through assemblies of Church leaders to confer under the guidance of the Spirit, and through acknowledgment of the leadership of the Church of Rome as the See of Peter and the Chair of Unity.¹⁷

Other forms of Christian faith neglect or minimize some aspect of the Church as the work of Christ, vivified by the Holy Spirit. For example, Christ may be affirmed as personal savior, but without any significant reference to a community of salvation where Jesus is met and his saving power encountered. Or faith itself is conceived as a private, personal act, occasioned by the reading of Scripture, and not as sharing the faith of the community, the faith the community has expressed in the Scriptures. Or a group may form a community to emphasize what they regard as a

¹⁷ St. Cyprian in the third century sees a special connection between the unity of the Catholic Church and the Chair of Peter, although he does not teach a doctrine of papal supremacy. See *The Unity of the Catholic Church*, tr. Maurice Bévenot, S.J. (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1957) chaps. 3-5. The relevant notes by Bévenot are especially helpful, pp. 101-5. For a balanced treatment of some special problems, see James F. McCue, "The Roman Primacy in the Second Century and the Problem of the Development of Dogma," *TS* 25 (1964) 161-96. Newman's treatment of the development of papal supremacy as it emerged in the fourth century remains one of the clearest and most illuminating theological discussions of this matter; see *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, chap. 4, sect. 3.

neglected aspect of faith, but they are not concerned that this new community be linked in any real way with the historical Christian Church of the past or with other Christian communities in the world today. A Christian faith that is not Catholic is manifested in the work of a theologian who is unconcerned to show that his opinions and explanations are somehow an outgrowth of the continuous life of faith of the Christian Church in history, or are at least not inconsistent with that life. We should also recognize that a basically Catholic faith is sometimes only imperfectly expressed in the ecclesial structure of a communion that is somehow separated from the historical and universal Church.

Catholic faith encounters also its own peculiar "problem of evil." The problem here is to reconcile the many manifestations of selfishness, arrogance, pride, and injustice to be found in the Church with its reality as the Body of Christ and with its vocation to be the Spouse of Christ without blemish or wrinkle. We cannot say that the Church itself is sinless and all sins are simply to be attributed to the individual members. The corporate reality of the Church in the course of history has time and again fallen short of its call to be the sacrament of God's loving and forgiving presence in the world, a sign of unity and light and unselfish concern. It has indulged in compromise, fostered ignorance, flattered the powerful, neglected the oppressed simply to keep its organizational machinery running smoothly. Of course, there is enormous evidence which points in exactly the opposite direction. But the problem of evil is there, and hence the attitude of Catholic faith toward the Church remains a free option.

From this flows an important consideration for the way in which Catholic faith deals with this problem of evil in the Church. No matter how much the Church stands in need of reformation (and it always will be to some extent), separation from the body of the Church is never an acceptable means of reform. Reformation must always take place within the Body of the Church; one must suffer the injustice, the pride, the narrow-mindedness, while expending every effort to make the Church be truly a community of love. Even if the Church should excommunicate a reformer for his efforts, his faith, if it is Catholic, will not allow him to acquiesce in that situation. He will do everything he can, accepting injustice and misunderstanding if necessary, to be restored to visible unity with the Body of Christ. He will consider this a redemptive price for the healing of the Church, and will trust to the power of the Holy Spirit for ultimate vindication. If some reason makes this restoration a personal impossibility in a particular situation, the reformer will not seek to create another "purified" Church, separated from the Church of sinners. It would seem that at this point the original, historical Protestant

faiths differed from Catholic faith.¹⁸ But it must be noted that today, especially, many who are the heirs of the Reformation are profoundly Catholic in their faith, and their efforts in the ecumenical movement to move toward a new visible unity in the Church are evidence of this faith. The history of the continuous splintering of Protestant groups, as individuals and their followers applied the principle of reform through separation, seems to have reached a termination for the main body of Protestant Churches. The effort to give a united witness to the saving power of Christ is leading them to discover the interior unity which is the Spirit's gift to all of us, and to seek a new exterior manifestation of that unity in the visible communion of all Christians.

Catholics in communion with the bishop of Rome, being the largest single Christian body, bear an enormous responsibility at this period of the Church's history. The Apostolic See of Rome is a symbol of the unity, universality, and historical continuity of the Christian Church. As recent ecumenical conversations have made clear, there is a place in a future united Christian Church for the papacy.¹⁹ But the gift of the papacy must be given without arrogance or self-righteousness, with a desire to serve and not to dominate, and with a recognition that it is the function of the papal Church not to suppress the episcopal, presbyteral, and congregational elements in the organization of the visible Church, but to strengthen, support, and unify them. As Christians through prayer and discussion discover their inner unity in Catholic faith, in recognizing all baptized believers as members of the one Body of Christ, they will endeavor to give appropriate external manifestation and support to that unity in the visible form of a renewed Church.²⁰

THE STRUCTURE OF CATHOLIC FAITH

Catholic faith, then, at its base is theistic, affirming the reality of an ultimate personal ground of being of the universe, of the human person, and of the future into which we are moving. It is Christian in affirming

¹⁸ The initial intention of the Protestant Reformers was certainly not to divide the Church but to purify it. When their efforts actually led to division, they accepted this as the road they had to travel, not only as individuals but as leaders of others.

¹⁹ Cf. *A Pope for All Christians? An Inquiry into the Role of Peter in the Modern Church*, ed. Peter J. McCord (New York: Paulist, 1976).

²⁰ P. de Letter, S.J. discusses the internal unity already present in all those who believe in Christ and are baptized; see "Our Unity in Faith," *TS* 38 (1977) 526-37. He raises questions about what needs to be done to make this unity visible. See also Avery Dulles, S.J., "The Church, the Churches, and the Catholic Church," *TS* 33 (1972) 199-234. And for a careful analysis on changing church structures from a pastoral perspective with a view to the eventual union of all Christians, see Michael A. Fahey, S.J., "Continuity in the Church amid Structural Changes," *TS* 35 (1974) 415-46.

that Jesus is Lord, and that all of history and human destiny finds its meaning in the events of his life, death, and resurrection. It is Catholic in affirming the unity and historical continuity of the Church as the Body of Christ, vivified by the Holy Spirit, a sign and instrument for the unity of the whole of humanity.

To describe the genesis of authentic faith, the constitutive affirmation of this faith, and its intrinsic drive toward the future calls for a kind of structural analysis. What will be said here about openness, acceptance, and commitment in this regard applies to every kind of authentic faith.

Openness

At the root of any faith that strives to be authentic lies an attitude of openness: the willingness to weigh all the evidence, to consider all the facts, to raise all the questions, to take account of all the values.²¹ Faith, because it seeks to be a stance unifying the complexity and multiplicity of the reality encountered in experience, can perform this function authentically and truly only if it is open to all that is. There must be what existentialists have described as the willingness to "let being be."²² Unwillingness to look through Galileo's telescope automatically made the geocentric faith of his contemporaries inauthentic. The authentic believer refuses to dismiss any evidence, no matter how difficult it may seem to reconcile it with the faith stance he has adopted. The materialist who fails to treat the phenomena of consciousness seriously and dismisses understanding and judgment as merely incidental by-products of an essentially material process is inauthentic in his faith.

The openness that underlies authentic Catholic faith gives full weight to the problem of evil as it challenges this freely chosen certainty at each stage. The believer does not minimize or disregard the pain of the world, the corruption of human wickedness, or the natural disasters that recklessly destroy human life and property while he affirms the presence and activity of an all-good, all-loving, and all-powerful God. He recognizes the lowliness, weakness, and human limitations of Jesus in his earthly life, yet he is not scandalized by this, and he confidently affirms that Jesus is the Lord. He does not attempt to falsify the history of Christianity, to explain away the many failures of its leaders, to excuse their narrowness of vision and selfishness of purpose, and yet he affirms this as the Body of Christ.

²¹ The attitude of openness at the root of authentic faith constitutes a major theme in Michael J. Buckley's article in this issue. Jeffrey Sobosan shows how these same ideas grow out of a consideration of Polanyi's epistemology; see "The Tacit Dimension of Faith: A Reflection on Michael Polanyi," *Philosophy Today* 19 (1975) 269-79.

²² Heidegger in his description of phenomenology wrote: "Thus 'phenomenology' means to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way it shows itself from itself. . ." (*Being and Time* [New York: Harper & Row, 1963] 58).

An attitude of closedness, of unwillingness to look and consider, a deliberate blindness or deafness points to a radical lack of confidence in the ability of this faith stance to integrate and illumine these areas of reality. Far from being loyalty to faith, this obscurantist viewpoint is a betrayal of faith. Suppressing a question, refusing to look intently at a doubt, glossing over an apparent incoherence is tacit admission of the unreliability of one's faith. Some evidence of a lack of this openness may be noted in an earlier type of controversial apologetics, which represented adversaries' positions weakly and unfairly, and in those historical accounts which suppressed anything that might tell against the perfect virtue of Church leaders. Not all charges and objections, of course, need be treated with the same seriousness, any more than one listens with equal readiness to all stories about the unfaithfulness of one's friends. But if one has complete trust in these friends, one can fearlessly investigate whatever is said about them, confident that the real truth will support that trust.

Acceptance

Openness is more a presupposition and underlying condition of faith than an element in faith itself. However, it already betokens a trust and commitment concerning the whole truth, and as a perduring attitude it is essential to authenticity of faith. Faith itself is more properly found in acceptance, as the fruit of a process of conversion. Through this acceptance I achieve a certain measure of wholeness or integration, uniting me with the reality I accept and affirm, uniting me thus with others who are drawn to make the same acceptance, and uniting me within myself in the discovery of my own personality.

There is in the human person an inescapable drive toward meaning, truth, goodness, and wholeness. A person is continually drawn to search for what makes sense, what the real situation is, what is finally worthwhile, what can be affirmed unconditionally. One may decide that the whole enterprise is futile, but this will not end the search. The process that goes on can well be termed a conversion, a turning toward, and it comes to rest finally in an acceptance of something or someone as the source of the meaning and truth and goodness and wholeness that is sought. A communist accepts the vision of Karl Marx or Lenin, and finds in the dialectical unfolding of history and the affirmation of human values the sought-after principle. He will feel himself simultaneously drawn to unite himself with others who share the same vision; indeed, some of the attractive power of the vision may well be found in the persons who claim it as their own. This acceptance produces then within the person a sense of wholeness derived from a sense of meaning and worthwhileness, and from a sense of belonging.

The conversion that leads to the acceptance which is Catholic faith is experienced as a divine attraction, as a personal invitation to enter into communion with God, who communicates Himself in nature through the beauty and grandeur of the universe, in history through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and in human society through the Body of Christ animated by the Holy Spirit. Every phase and aspect of meaning, truth, goodness, and wholeness to be found anywhere in human experience is seen as grounded in this God who communicates himself and is accepted by faith.

Catholic faith as acceptance of God's self-communication in Christ is the basic life of the Christian community which is the Body of Christ. The attraction of grace which leads a person to the acceptance of faith is most often experienced as an attraction to share the life of this community. The values reflected in the lives of these individuals, both singly and as a group, seem to provide the answer to the restless search within. As this hypothesis is tested and the enquiry proceeds, the attraction of grace grows, suspicion becomes opinion, and opinion becomes unreserved acceptance. Thereafter, as a member of the faith community, one's personal faith is both confirmed by and confirms the faith of the others, as God continues to communicate Himself to the Body in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Several special aspects of Catholic faith as acceptance of God within the community of faith deserve particular attention. This faith is, first of all, the praise and worship of God.²³ It acknowledges and joyfully proclaims the great deeds of God in nature and history and the lives of the people of this community. It looks forward in hope to the fulfilment of God's deeds and promises. Through praise the community of faith becomes a radiant center of God's ongoing revelation to the world, and at the same time the community deepens its own grasp and appreciation of this revelation. Out of the praise and worship of the community in the very earliest days of its existence came the sacred writings, the Scriptures which recount the originating action of God and the initial response of the original faith community. Catholic faith accepts these writings as the word of God, spoken to this community through its members under the guiding inspiration of the Holy Spirit vivifying and forming the community.²⁴ The Scriptures remain an abiding source of divine disclosure, a living word continually spoken to the believers. The Holy Spirit simultaneously confirms the Body as a whole in the right understanding and faithful acceptance of this word. Those charged with the teaching office

²³ See the symposium by twenty-two Christians on the theme "How Do I Celebrate My Faith?" *New Catholic World* 221 (1978) 4-45.

²⁴ For an extended exposition of this approach to biblical inspiration, see Karl Rahner, S.J., *Inspiration in the Bible* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961).

in the Church are called upon to focus this universally diffused light of the Holy Spirit and in this way to make more readily available the guidance He gives to the whole Church. In the exercise of their office they are empowered by the Holy Spirit to declare unerringly (in certain cases) that a particular formula does or does not embody the teaching of the gospel, the truth revealed by God. If this were not so, the Church could not abide unfailingly in the faith acceptance of God's self-communication.

Several movements within the Church in recent years are vivid expressions of this acceptance dimension of faith. We may note in particular the biblical movement, the liturgical movement, and the charismatic movement. The light and praise and joy which belong to this faith are reflected in these movements. Furthermore, this is the enduring heart of the contemplative life in the Church, whether in the contemplative dimension of every Christian's life or in those great communities of persons dedicated to the contemplative life which have flourished with greater or less vitality in every age of the Church, for the upbuilding of the whole Body in faith and the praise of God.

Faith as acceptance comes to its moment of final perfection as the believer accepts the coming of God in his own personal experience of death. All of the prior acceptances are recapitulated in the face of the evil of personal dissolution.²⁵ In accepting death as a moment filled with the consummating presence of God's love, the believer moves from the state of those who "walk by faith, not by sight" to being finally "at home with the Lord."²⁶

The summary statement which expresses the heart of the divine mystery which faith has accepted is the confession of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is not a puzzle to challenge our willingness to believe the unintelligible, but the articulation of the Christian experience of God's self-communication. The God who communicates Himself to us in nature, history, and the Church is the unoriginated source of all that is, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the One from whom the divine gift of the Spirit ultimately comes. But Jesus Christ comes to us not simply as one of us but as the personal revelation of the unconditioned saving and forgiving love of God, as one whose radical personal reality is constituted by his relation to the Father, as one who is ultimately and personally divine. He confers upon us the Holy Spirit, who is not a created participation in the divine holiness but a bond of union with the Father and the Son, bound inseparably to Them in the

²⁵ Teilhard de Chardin has a moving exposition of faith accepting death in *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957) Part 2, "The Divinization of Our Passivities," sect. 3, "The Passivities of Diminishment" 80-83.

²⁶ Cf. 2 Cor 5:7, 8.

unity of divine life, and uniting us one to another in the Body of Christ, divine in His personal reality as the Gift of the Father and the Son. God Himself comes to us as Trinity; hence, that is what God is.²⁷

Commitment

Faith has a contemplative moment, which is acceptance. It also has an active moment, and this is commitment. For the stance of faith seeks to integrate the total experience of human life, including the movement into the future. It seeks to affirm what is ultimately worthwhile, and thus to indicate what is deserving of all one's efforts and energies. Acceptance of some ultimately unifying reality enables the person of faith to achieve some measure of internal unity and self-possession; but this self-possession by its nature is the prelude to self-donation, to self-dedication, to commitment. Even the faith stance of nihilism, while denying all objective truth and moral goodness, develops by a curious logic into an enormously active enterprise. St. Paul assured the Church in Galatia that the one thing that really counted in life was "faith that works through love."²⁸

God in theistic faith is not just the solution to a puzzle. He is the wise and loving Creator, who calls us into being to share with us His life and bring us to personal maturity. He does not stand simply as originating principle at some inconceivably distant time in the remote past, or as enduring source of the being of the universe, but as absolute future toward whom the whole movement of human history is tending.²⁹ St. Paul expressed this understanding of theistic faith when he said of God: "From Him, and through Him, and unto Him are all things."³⁰ Theistic faith, then, means a total commitment to the divine purpose, to God Himself as the supreme good. It identifies the deepest dynamism of the human spirit as the thrust toward God and recognizes the need to embody this thrust in concrete human decisions. The real meaning of moral obligation is found in the claim that God's will can make on mine, not just as a matter of superior or compelling force, but as the authentic guide to what is supremely worthy of all love and devotion.

Christian faith, precisely because it acknowledges that Jesus is the Lord, means a complete commitment to him. Faith in Jesus means not only believing in him as Son of God, accepting as true the words he spoke and the promises he made, but undertaking to follow him. St. Matthew

²⁷ Karl Rahner, S.J., in *The Trinity* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), has an excellent exposition of the Trinity from the perspective of God's self-communication to man.

²⁸ Gal 5:6.

²⁹ This is a central theme developed in recent theologies of hope. See, in particular, the collection of essays by Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., *God, the Future of Man* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968).

³⁰ Rom 11:36.

presents Jesus as precisely reprehending those who say to him "Lord! Lord!" but fail to do the will of his heavenly Father, as he has proclaimed it. They shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.³¹ St. John expresses the matter clearly: "He who says 'I know him' but disobeys his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him . . . He who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."³²

Catholic faith is not just believing that the Church preserves the deposit of revelation³³ and professing the faith once delivered to the saints.³⁴ It means also doing the truth in love, building up the Body of Christ.³⁵ Faith involves a commitment to active obedience, to bearing witness to the faith in words and deeds, to proclaiming the gospel as need requires and opportunity offers. Faith means very particularly in our day a commitment to justice for all.³⁶ Believers cannot accept their brothers and sisters as children of God, those for whom Christ died, called to be members of His Body and temples of the Holy Spirit, and casually observe them exploited, deprived of human dignity, ground to poverty and despair by economic and social institutions geared primarily to benefit the wealthy and the powerful. Believers cannot see them locked into positions of inferiority by prejudice, social usage, or unfair discrimination. It is faith as commitment that has inspired the emphasis we see in theologies of liberation. More universally, it is faith as commitment that lies at the heart of the "active life."

Renewal of Faith

The renewal and deepening of faith, whether in the individual or in the Church as a whole, requires that each of the elements we have noted be purified and increased. We need to return again and again to the prior condition for all authentic faith: openness. There is a perpetual tendency in human nature to wish to dominate the truth rather than surrender to it. This means that I do not wish to rethink my position or reconstruct my system. Evidence that does not fit neatly into these tends to be overlooked or distorted. Any blindness or deafness that I consent to by that very fact renders my faith inauthentic. Faith that is not fearlessly open to every manifestation of reality harbors doubt and weakness in its timidity.

We need also to deepen acceptance, to affirm the truth wherever we see it. No doubt, faith is a gift, a consequence of the loving attraction of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, drawing us into their life. We do not

³¹ Cf. Mt 7:21.

³² 1 Jn 2:4, 6.

³³ Cf. 1 Tim 6:20; Vat. I, Sess. 3, *Dei Filius*, chap. 4 (DS 3018).

³⁴ Cf. Jude 3.

³⁵ Cf. Eph 3:15, 16.

³⁶ See *The Faith That Does Justice: Examining the Christian Sources for Change*, ed. John C. Haughey, S.J. (New York: Paulist, 1977).

make ourselves believers, men and women of faith, simply by deciding to be such or by following the light our own minds can cast on the situation. As we must be open to light that comes from beyond every created source, so we must affirm gladly and gratefully whatever is made known and given to us in that light. Faith as acceptance is rooted in the Hebrew notion of reliability, utter trustworthiness.³⁷ To accept God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit in the Church, is to rely completely upon them, to acknowledge not just theoretical truths about them, but the complete dependability, in life and in death, of their concrete reality.

Finally, faith as commitment must be strong and pure. Kierkegaard observes, in one of his best known writings, that purity of heart is to will one thing, and that one thing is finally God.³⁸ This is the commitment of faith. When we fail to do the truth in love, our grasp of that truth itself becomes feeble. When our commitment to justice learns to compromise with expediency, our vision of the truth is dimmed. But here we need also to test ourselves; for our apparent commitment to justice may be the expression of human anger rather than divine faith, and St. James reminds us: "the anger of man does not work the righteousness (justice) of God."³⁹

All these elements need to be simultaneously nourished. Faith without openness becomes inauthentic. Acceptance without commitment is hardly more than mere theorizing. Commitment not rooted in acceptance of the divine present and at work in all things rapidly becomes a work of pride and a new form of tyranny.

³⁷ See Rudolf Bultmann's treatment of *pisteuō* and related words in the New Testament, *TDNT* 7, 203-28, esp. 206, 212.

³⁸ Cf. *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing* (New York: Harper & Row, 1948).

³⁹ Jas 1:20.