FAITH AND MODERN SUBJECTIVE THOUGHT

It is not easy to delimit the vast field of the theology of faith with any secure feeling that the choices being made are the right ones. Let us speak of certain difficulties in believing that many moderns have, not the ones men have had in the past or, by some elusive standard of theology textbooks, should be having in the present.

That means that an extended discussion of the signification of the New Testament *pístis* and *pisteúein* and their correspondence to *aman, he'emīn* and *'emūnā* will probably serve no useful purpose at this late date. We have available to us the studies of Schlatter,[1] Weiser and Bultmann,[2] and more recently Barr.[3] It is universally acknowledged that the notion of absolute confidence or trust in Yahweh who would surely save was paramount in the Israelite understanding, the truthfulness of his Word being a less developed but important part of his utter fidelity. The single Greek noun and verb that did duty for faith in all its nuances (plus *pistós, oligópistos, pisteúein, 'epí, eis 'en*) came to be extended in the New Testament period to assent to the truth of the gospel ("Repent and believe the good tidings," Jesus in Mk 1,15); to acceptance of Christ's word (*rhema*) through hearing (Rom. 10,18); and to that total disposition of self with regard to Jesus, the faith that gives life (Jn 3, 15f and *passim*). In other words, there is no diminution in the New Testament of the Old Testament idea of faith as trust, confidence, commitment of self into God's hands, certitude that God will act to save or that Christ will "save" in the sense of cure and all this may stand for besides; there is at the same time in the NT an extension of the idea whereby it includes accepting as true what is unseen

[1] A. von Schlatter, *Der Glaube im Neuen Testament* (4th ed.; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1927).

[2] A. Weiser and R. Bultmann, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* IV, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1959), pp. 174-230; Eng. tr. *Faith* (London: A. and C. Black, 1961).

[3] James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961). Cf. esp. Ch. VII, "On Faith and Truth."

because God himself has witnessed to it or provided trustworthy witnesses.

It is quite true, in this sense, that there are two types of faith, to use Buber's phrase: trust in God, and belief in a true teaching about him and his saving deeds.[4] It is not true to say, as Buber says that the former, *'emūnā,* is the sole type of faith known to Israel as a believing community, and that *pistis* represents the incursion of a Hellenist idea into late Judaism, namely assent by individuals to the truth of propositions that on the face of them are absurd, even contradictory to the biblical or Jewish mentality. These two types of faith are not mutually exclusive but are two sides of the same coin. Better still, there is faith taken generically—confidence, trust in God—one aspect of which, belief in the truth of God's Word, comes into focus as a special type of the exercise of that trust.

I do not feel competent to discuss the theories on the psychology of the act of faith presented so completely by R. Aubert in his *Le Problème de l'acte de foi: données traditionelles et résultats des controverses récentes.* (3e ed.; Louvain: E. Warny, 1958). Other insights are given by Henri Bars in *The Assent of Faith* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1959) and Ignace Lepp in *Atheism in Our Time* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

Still a third idea that needs to be noticed only to be set aside is the fear that modern Catholic theological writing may be reintroducing the fiduciary faith of the reformers which had as its essence an exclusively volitional or conative emphasis. This simply is not true. Any desire of the Christian to trust God completely when he acts as personal Savior through the blood of his Son on the cross can only please him. What the Catholics found the reformers guilty of was something quite different, namely, trusting in God as Savior on terms he had not promised. Even a theologian like Aquinas, who so largely defined faith in terms of knowledge ("it is proper to the believer to think with assent," *S. Th.*, IIa IIae, 2,1;4,1) posited the necessity of the command of the will if there is to be faith, since

[4] Cf. Martin Buber, *Zwei Glaubensweisen* (Zürich: Manesse Verlag, 1950); Eng. tr. *Two Types of Faith* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951; New York: Macmillan, 1952).

the evidence is insufficient to bring acquiescence. "Faith is a habit of mind whereby eternal life is begun in us making the intellect assent to what is non-apparent" (*Ibid.*, 4,1).

"This act proceeds from the will and the intellect, both of which have a natural aptitude to be perfected in this way. . . . To believe is immediately an act of the intellect, because the object of that act is the *true*, which properly pertains to the intellect" (*Ibid.* 4,2). Aquinas' distinction with respect to believing there is a God (material object of faith), believing God the First Truth when he speaks (formal object of faith), and believing *in* God, namely trusting him by an act of will which moves the intellect in accepting all that he reveals to us, is clear and unequivocal (*S. Th.*, II^{a} II^{ae}, 2,2). As Canon Mouroux has demonstrated in his modest but impressive study *Je Crois en Toi, structure personelle de la foi* (Eng. tr., *I Believe, The Personal Structure of Faith.* New York: Sheed and Ward, 1959), the vocabulary of engagement, commitment, and personal encounter that is coming into common use among Catholic writers is all to be found in germ in St. Thomas's total treatment of faith.

Faith is what "gives substance to our hopes," the author of Hebrews wrote, "and makes us certain of realities we do not see." (Heb 11,1) Now the *Hypóstasis* he speaks of, or underlying actuality corresponding to our expectations, the *eléngchos* (*argumentum*) or proof for the unseen has as we have indicated God as revealer for its formal object and God himself and all he does for us as material object.

The root difficulty for modern man in New Testament terms, is that increasingly he cannot be made to care about realities he does not see. He does not have faith because of all that he has sight of. He tends to say with Laplace in the apocryphal tale, speaking of God: "We have no need of that hypothesis."

The primitives and the ancients needed explanations of natural phenomena, largely because so many of these forces were hostile to them but in any case because they could not readily interpret them. Less and less man is enveloped by this ignorance. He still is not immortal, but he is on the trail of every other secret of the universe.

He has less and less to believe because he knows more and more with *scientia*. But does not his mortality through which he will lose all he knows and has impress on him the need for faith? It seems that, by and large, his thorough conditioning to a phenomenological world has killed in him all curiosity concerning a world of any other kind. Normally he does not have to seek a blessed release as a means to improved existence. (I speak of modern technological man). He wants more and better of what he already has, that is all. An immortal life fills him with a faint disgust as too much of a good thing.

What is to be said of the gnawing unhappiness that accompanies much of contemporary man's satifactions in work and play and acquisition? He tends to feel he can overcome this unhappiness: another job, another woman, another "deal." He'll get by. He is not without his lively hope with respect to worldly benefits that lie in future.

Hedonism, mitigated or total, which philosophically viewed is satisfaction with a closed system of contingent realities, is one danger to faith. The other is magic, that is the attempt to manipulate natural forces or the will of the gods through signs and talismans. It is a cheap and easy substitute for faith, and it normally wears a religious mask. Simon Magus and the modern faith-healer or purgatorial society peddler have been with the Church from the beginning. The trappings of religion are always potentially deeply inimical to faith.

Those who profess religion, the "churched" and especially the clergy, need to be men of faith above all. They must flee any tidy arrangements with God which attempt to subordinate his infinite will to theirs. If there is one thing sure about faith it is that it begins and ends with the submission of the human will to the sovereign will of God. The substitution of religious forms and institutions for the faith of Abraham or of Mary of Nazareth is presumably what men like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and J. Langmead Casserly, and at another level Tillich, are deploring when they speak of "religion" as the great threat to Christianity. Basically, they mean by religion the sum total of man's quest for God, and by Christianity or faith God's initiation and continued pursuit of man to endow him with

liberty, i.e., the fullness of creaturehood. Barth says: "Religion is unbelief . . . it is concern, indeed we must say it is the one great concern, of godless man."[5]

Theologians such as Daniélou and de Lubac,[6] in their analysis of the appeal of atheist humanism, are prone to say that modern man lacks faith because he actively resists the claims of another who is *totaliter aliter*, but by analogy person and free like himself. God must die if I am to be free, says Sartre. In every exercise of my liberty I create myself anew. If there were a God he would be master and I would be slave, therefore he must die, for I mean to live. From Nietzsche onward, men have experienced a kind of jealousy of God. The tragic hero absolutely requires to be tragic, to be unfulfilled, as in the novels of André Malraux.

If he were happy he would owe his happiness to another, a thought he cannot abide. His wretchedness at least is his own—the sign that he is beholden to no one.

We have in the subjectivist stream of thought of the last one hundred years both the supreme threat to true religious faith and its potential renewal on better terms than ever before. Faith has no automatic element for the Christian. It is an intensely personal act, and it is free. At base it is the Infinite knowing himself in us, for there is no *adequatio* between the finite knower and the Infinite known. God must enter into us, become the ground or fundament of our mind and will, if we are to know him in any true sense. Our "faith is not built on human wisdom but on the power of God" (1 Cor 2,5). It this work of God in us which we call faith destructive of human autonomy or liberty? It is destructive of neither. It is the working together of a creature, whose highest attribute is that he is free, with the supremely Free, ensuring not the enslavement of the creature but his fullest liberty.

> For all who are moved by the Spirit of God are Sons of God. The spirit you have received is not a spirit of slavery, leading

[5] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2 (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1955), 199f.; cf. J. Langmead Casserley, *The Retreat from Christianity in the Modern World* (London: Longmans, Green, 1952), pp. 42-68.

[6] Cf. J. Daniélou, *The Scandal of Truth* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1962); H. de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1949).

> you back into a life of fear, but a Spirit that makes us sons, enabling us to cry, 'Abba! Father! (Rom 8, 14ff.)

In this conception of the liberty of faith, the word "submission" must be understood correctly. The Christian in faith submits himself freely to the Infinite whom he cannot comprehend. This inevitably gives the appearance of a loss of freedom, because man cannot in fact foresee exactly where this submission will lead him. He is no longer consciously master of himself in knowing Another whom he knows *not* more than he knows. He must trust that this Other wills his own good more than he himself knows how to will it. Our being as freedom-for-God becomes vocal (Rom 8, 14ff.), and we, as sons not slaves, respond with this being of ours to God as Father. God is both the object and the end of faith, in scholastic terminology; "end" in the sense of the highest good of man, to be achieved, once known, through an act of will.

Modern man has been conditioned to see his own liberty as his highest characteristic.[7] He can only come to faith if he sees in God someone who, above all, stands ready to promote his liberty and not negate it.

The roots of modern subjectivity are found in Schleiermacher who taught that God transcends both nature and spirit, but is found in religious feeling. Kantian philosophy with its autonomous ego, its pre-eminence of the Subject, and the Hegelian variant on it, brought on this response of men like Schleiermacher, who meant to be Christian and was at least religious, and Kierkegaard, who *was* Christian, in the realm of deepest sentiment. Both rejected the compact "system" of Hegel that had an answer for everything in heaven and on earth; even though Kierkegaard found Schleiermacher wanting, he is not far separated from him religiously. Schleier-

[7] [For] medieval man . . . the real was what is, was, and has always been. I might say with regard to modern man that for him the real is what is yet to be, what will come into being through him, through man. . . . For modern man *progress* is *the* reality. And history for him is this progress. God always serves man in history, no matter how man may conceive it. If contemporary history has a greater forward dimension than backward, we who are custodians of faith must know this. Fr. Gogarten, *The Reality of Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 53.

macher posited the transcendent, the beyond ("Religion is the intuition of the infinite, the feeling of absolute dependence") while Kierkegaard declared that man was to be saved by his passion for the Infinite—the form his concern for ultimacy might take once he had been faced with the scandal of the cross. There is undoubtedly an Object for Kierkegaard, and it is the paradox of a God-man who died for us. His famous dictum (1846) was: "The passion of the infinite is precisely subjectivity and thus subjectivity becomes the truth."[8] Subjective thinking is infinitely absorbed thinking; man's task is to "become a subject," to re-create himself over and over again, to bring the truth to pass *in him* as a quality of his own being or existence.

Friedrich Gogarten says that faith will save man only after he has come to reflect on his thoroughgoing impotence before God: from God he has his entire being (1 Cor 4,7), which is not integrated into the cosmos as part of it but is called by God as a whole self over against the cosmos, and which will not achieve authentic selfhood until man sees himself as one who has no other being than the *being in responsibility* to which the call of God calls him.[9] From the standpoint of faith he may not avoid this responsibility. He must be himself before God. This work, of course, unlike other works, he cannot complete by his own power.

"Adapt yourselves no longer to the pattern of this present world, but let your minds be remade and your whole nature thus transformed" (Rom 12, 2). This advice of Paul to the Romans is capable of fulfilment through the gift that God in his grace has given; though we work out our salvation, it is a suffering, a *páthos*, some thing that happens to us and in us: "It is God who works in you, inspiring both the will and the deed, for his own chosen purpose" (Phil 2,13).

There are familiar echoes in Gogarten's statement, not Lutheran so much—except for the implied duality of man and world—but in his "authentic selfhood," of Heidegger's authentic existence (*ei-*

[8] S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* Sevenson & Lowrie tr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 181.

[9] Gogarten, *ibid.,* 37f.

gentlich Dasein); Gogarten's "being in responsibility" has resonances in any number of concepts ranging from Heidegger's "resolvedness" (*Entschlossenheit*) to the "decision" (*Entscheidung*) of Bultmann, the "choice of the Pour-soi itself" of Sartre, the "creativity" of Marcel or growth toward open community, and the state of "ultimate concern" of Tillich. We shall not stop to examine the complex thought edifices of these men, even supposing we could do so adequately. It should suffice to list some of the characteristics of modern subjectivity as expressed by them, whether its metaphysical presuppositions are atheist, agnostic, Jewish or Christian, to see what in it can contribute to Catholic faith.

First of all these is its concern with the openness of person to person or person to thing, whether this be described as mutuality, the I-Thou relation, intersubjectivity, or love responding to the divine condescension. The position is taken that man cannot know himself as person, much less be a person, except he does so through admitting others to a lived relation with himself. If he is merely an essence and knows essences, or deals with men and things as objects using them for his enjoyment, confronts realities set over against him, or believes teachings, he has not made the first step toward realizing himself. His task is to make himself, to come to be, and no affirmation that he ontologically *is* and the world *is* or God *is* has any meaning until he begins to give himself, and to admit others so as to find himself.

Second, there is the idea of investing experienced phenomena with value, or holding that nothing has meaning unless by an act of will I declare that it has meaning for me. For Kierkegaard this means coming to terms with—admitting into our lives—an Object, which is God's Deed to save us in Christ; for Sartre it is imposing meaning or value on brute fact (*En-soi*), any meaning we choose to give it so long as we take the responsibility for the act of choice. I cut down my aged parent with an axe; it is a bloody and repulsive deed, but it is my deed. I am other and more than I was before doing it. Though they guillotine me for it I shall go to my absurd and inevitable death a little less nauseous, less vertiginous, than I was before I stood on the brink of the abyss of my possible free choices, for at least I had the courage to reduce them by one.

Note in all this two things: that my liberty is the supreme good, and that neither system (if Kierkegaard will forgive me the term) is to be thought of as an immanentism. This is an important observation, especially as regards Kierkegaard. "Subjectivity becomes the truth," for him in the sense that nothing is true for the subject, least of all Christianity, until he appropriates it, that is takes in by faith the Christian message of life and salvation which God reveals. There is no truth until I have made it my truth, in other words.

Similarly, neither Sartre, Marcel, nor any of the others is an immanentist as Socrates for example was, in whom all truth lay in a fetal state, to be made his conscious possession maieutically. All modern subjective thinkers posit a real world of fact "out there." Their point is that it stays "out there" until subjectivity comes along to relieve it of its meaninglessness as mere object. Now all this bears some relation to the part of the will in the act of divine faith, by which a man chooses to participate in the life of God once the intellect has identified it as a good for him. He comes to belief because he knows something of God and salvation, and in willing to believe he comes to know God even further as *his* good.

Third and last, it takes courage (Tillich), a "leap" (Kierkegaard), evangelical decision (Barth), a revolt (Camus) to lay hold either of the paradox of God's love or the liberty that delivers from absurdity until that last and fatal absurdity, death, closes in. Kierkegaard and Barth express themselves as Christians here by saying that only the Holy Spirit can achieve in us the transition from being faced by the gospel or by other Christian witness, "evidences" as we call them, to faith. The data do not exact faith. They may even point in the opposite direction. What we stress here, however, is that besides (1) an openness to others and (2) a dominance of the subject, there is for modern subjectivity (3) a motivating force in man which acts to achieve in him his self-realization, or salvation, or freedom. Those are some characteristics of contemporary thought patterns often lumped together as existential, because of its concern for the concrete man who is, in his response to his life situation.

Let us conclude by confining ourselves to the faith situation of the Catholics whom we serve in our ministry as theologians, priestly or other. What is their condition vis-à-vis the modern spirit? How are they affected by contemporary challenges to the virtue of faith? First, I would say, their faith is considerably weakened by the widespread failure of the Catholic community to commit itself to human liberty as a great Christian good. This is especially true in seminaries. We are not raising up great men of faith, among other reasons, because we do not consult each other's freedom as God consults ours. Hence it becomes nearly impossible for seminary students to gain an adequate idea of the God who is. They will not commit their destinies to him fully and freely unless they have some splendid analogues of trust, and trustworthiness and truth in their human brothers. The same is true of the parishioners, college students, and others whom the priest—man of faith *kat'exokēn*—serves.

Second, since the man in grace is the highest work of God in all visible creation, he in whom the Spirit dwells is not only the chief external motive for faith, but in our day rapidly becomes the only motive. Confrontation with the gospel incarnate in a man will achieve what cannot otherwise be achieved, since avenue after avenue effective in other times and cultures is being sealed off. Increased technology is undoubtedly dimming metaphysical concern, except in a small group of scientists—the great minority—whose new insights into approximation and indeterminacy in nature is robbing them of false certainties and putting them in search of an ontological ground for the teleology cum flux which they observe.

Third, there must be full and conscious accord on the part of believers with all progress in the control of the phenomenal world through empirical and social science. Unless *scientia* is given free play, its possible confusions with *fides* which are manifold cannot be reduced to the zero point, as they must be.

Fourth and last, since man must be confronted with the saving deed of God in his life, here and now, if he is to have faith—setting aside completely the doubts cast on sacred history in our time as a true record of any such deed in Jesus Christ—the same man who is prepared for new faith, or growth in faith, by the experience of

charity must be confronted frequently by God as his Savior. The Church does this in but a single way: she proclaims the gospel in the context of the sacraments celebrated, chiefly the eucharist, which are the work of our salvation accomplished now. This is genuine confrontation. Immediate response is required. It is an *experience* of God as Savior. That is why I do not hesitate to name as the chief reason for weakness of faith in Catholic life, whether in parish or college or seminary, the low estate of sacramental celebration and of presentation of the *kērygma* in all its strength in its midst. I mean, quite clearly, that the way we celebrate the liturgy, or more often do not celebrate it, is the key not to all but to much in modern man's search for faith.

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