

## THE SECURITY AND INSECURITY OF FAITH

Since the goal of these sessions is the initiation of a discussion with maximal participation, I should like to strive for it in this paper by raising some questions, reviewing some proposals, and offering some criticisms and opinions rather than by presenting a thesis and arguing for its validity. Since the insecurity of faith today is often lamented, the first question to be raised for discussion is whether faith is in a more precarious situation today than previously. Secondly, I should like to present some contemporary reformulations of the nature of faith and to analyze their presuppositions. Finally and briefly, a practical perspective of the problem will be suggested.

Kierkegaard's story of the clown and the village has recently been given two different interpretations. Each betrays and elucidates a contrasting viewpoint toward the problem of faith. A fire has broken out in the circus. The clown, dressed up for the performance, runs to the village. He seeks help. He shouts for help. The villagers interpret his actions as attempts to attract as many as possible to the performance. They applaud, but do not help; they laugh, but do not take him seriously. Harvey Cox sees in the clown an analogy of the contemporary theologian. Due to his old-fashioned and medieval costume he is not taken seriously. If he wants to be believed, if he wants to awaken faith, he must discard his costume. The change of times demands a change of costumes. Faith has become an acute problem today because the faith is too often presented in the costumes of previous ages.<sup>1</sup>

Joseph Ratzinger presents a contrasting persuasion in his recent book, *Introduction to Christianity*.<sup>2</sup> For him this disturbing analogy oversimplifies the problem. It presupposes that faith essentially involves the communication of what people were previously unaware of and that therefore what is primarily needed is the updating of language. If the theologian would proclaim the faith in a demythologized secular lan-

<sup>1</sup>Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 256.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), pp. 15-21.

guage, then modern man can hear it and will believe. In Ratzinger's opinion such a position overlooks the fact that the problem of faith is not one of form, dress, or interpretation because today's situation is not essentially different from that of previous ages. Faith is equally as difficult today as before "simply because there is an infinite gulf between God and man."<sup>3</sup> God is invisible and intangible. As such he stands outside of the vision and touch of man. Faith involves for men of every age a fundamental leap out of the limits of their existence and an adventurous break with their worldly existence.<sup>4</sup> The threat to faith does not arise from the possibility of doubting one aspect of faith or disputing one doctrine of belief or rejecting one practice of the Church. But rather it stems from the question as to whether the faith is meaningful or not. This uncertainty in moments of temptation prevails throughout all generations and all times. It is the insecurity of faith.

Ratzinger's rendering of the story of the clown touches upon the recent debate between Hans Urs von Balthasar, on the one side, and Karl Rahner and Johann B. Metz, on the other side. Whereas the latter affirm that the crisis of faith today is in no small measure due to the process of secularization,<sup>5</sup> the former asserts that God is not more absent today than previously. Balthasar argues that the ontological difference between God and man is the same now as it ever was. The experience of God, consequently, is not more difficult today. The world remains just as much an epiphany and revelation of God now as it ever was. The only difference that Balthasar will acknowledge is an accidental or secondary one which stems from man's refusal to take a contemplative attitude toward the world.<sup>6</sup>

By denying essential differences between historical situations in reference to the problem of faith, Balthasar has made his own the stance of the early dialectical theology with its protest against the

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Karl Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. 8, (Zürich: Einsiedeln, 1967), pp. 637-66, and Johannes B. Metz, *Theology of the World* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969).

<sup>6</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Meeting God in Today's World," *Concilium* 1, No. 6 (June/July, 1965), 23-39.

historicism of the nineteenth-century liberal theology. In his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans Karl Barth had declared that his purpose was to demonstrate that the differences between the time of Paul and today are "purely trivial."<sup>7</sup> The same unmeasurable import of the relation between God and man confronts both his contemporaries and Paul's. Using Kierkegaard's term, Barth argues that this "infinite qualitative distinction" provides the key to the meaning of the Bible for both then and now.<sup>8</sup> Likewise Rudolf Bultmann has argued in his article, "The Crisis in Belief," that the real crisis of faith does not involve the changing of world-views, but the decision of self-will or radical obedience to God.<sup>9</sup> Even in defending his program of demythologizing Bultmann maintains that the "real *skandalon* was the same in the New Testament times as it is for us to-day."<sup>10</sup>

Although this emphasis upon the intrinsic difficulty of faith in God for all men and in all times can serve as a corrective to the too easily accepted and exaggerated opposition between the present and the past, in my opinion it fails to bring adequately into perspective significant aspects of the problem of faith. Firstly, I should like to suggest that an "essentialistic" bias underlies this emphasis upon the unchanged relation—a bias that has been too often characteristic of theological reflection. When Balthasar argues that only what is essential is important and that the accidental is only secondary, he is relapsing into an essentialistic school metaphysic. Only the presuppositions of this type of metaphysical thinking allow him to assert that solely the ontological difference between God and man is of prime importance whereas the historical changes in the life-situation are of merely secondary significance. Consequently, for him nothing essentially has changed for the problem of faith in God. This type of thinking neglects to observe that what differentiates two human persons from one another and thereby consti-

<sup>7</sup>Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *Essays Philosophical and Theological* (London: SCM Press, 1955), pp. 1-21.

<sup>10</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. by Hans Werner Bartsch (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 119.

tutes them in their relation to one another could be labelled from this perspective mere accidental qualities or historical events. A similar presupposition is the basis of Ratzinger's assertion that the content of faith is of prime importance whereas the form of faith is secondary. Against the abstraction of such distinctions Hegel has argued in the preface to his *Phenomenology*, "Precisely because the form is no less essential to the essence than the essence itself, the essence is to be comprehended and spoken of not merely as essence, i.e. as immediate substance or as pure self-contemplation of the divine, but just as much as form—and in the whole wealth of the developed form. Only in that way is it comprehended and spoken of in its actuality."<sup>11</sup> The relation between God and man should not be conceived of as a relation of two substances or essences that stand in a direct and unmediated relation to one another, but rather this relation is always a mediated personal relationship. This mediation is so constituted by history and society that they are not added to the relationship but constitute its very nature and character.

Secondly, when Karl Barth asserts that God's Word is equally immediate to Paul's own contemporaries as it is to his own, he does not sufficiently take into account the socio-historical conditioning of all language. One of Ludwig Wittgenstein's permanent contributions to linguistic philosophy is the insight that the meaning of our language is not constituted by reference to some object outside of language, but is mediated through the context of language and is determined through the use of language. Language about God, consequently, does not receive its meaning by reference to a relationship between God and man that is outside of language, but rather its meaning is constituted by a specific linguistic context or by a "language game." The speaking of a language is not an isolated act, but "part of an activity, or of a form of life."<sup>12</sup> The meaning of Paul's letters, therefore, should not be reduced to some isolated mental act on the part of Paul through which God speaks, but is dependent upon their historical, social, and linguistic

<sup>11</sup>Walter Kaufmann, trans. and ed., *Hegel: Texts and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 30.

<sup>12</sup>Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), No. 23.

context. Nor can or should our understanding of them abstract from either their context or ours.

These considerations lead us to suggest that the historical and societal context of faith should be more closely attended to than the position exemplified by Ratzinger's interpretation of the story of the clown will allow. Moreover, whereas fundamental disagreement exists as to whether faith is more precarious today than previously, a general consensus appears to form as to what constitutes the specific danger or particular risk to faith today. Technological control, historical change, and pluralistic relativisms have been suggested as the contemporary nemeses of faith. Each refer to a distinct challenge to faith; yet together they form a unity.

Our historical situation is characterized by Johann B. Metz as one involving a "transition from a divinized to a hominized world."<sup>13</sup> The world, he alleges, has become secularized; it no longer bears the footprints of God but only the traces of man's activity and the vestiges of his productivity. Its sacral quality has vanished. It is no longer numinous. In a similar vein Avery Dulles portrays our era as one of technology in distinction to the scientific mentality of the seventeenth century and the prescientific attitudes of previous ages.<sup>14</sup> What dominates man's consciousness is not the amassing of information nor the formulating of new laws, but rather the transforming of the environment and the changing of man himself.

These assertions imply that man no longer receives meaning from the world through an act of contemplation, but rather meaning is what is given to the world of nature by man's activity.<sup>15</sup> Man knows what he has made and what he can change. What lies outside of this horizon of experimentation and control is not meaningful to his scientific technological mentality.

The second nemesis referred to is historicism.<sup>16</sup> Man experiences

<sup>13</sup> Metz, *Theology of the World*, pp. 56-77.

<sup>14</sup> Avery Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), pp. 15-30.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Löwith, *Vicos Grundsatz: verum et factum convertuntur* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1968).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Ernst Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* (Tübingen: J. C.

everything in change, transition, and revolution. Nothing is exempt from this historical change, not even the Church with its dogmas, teachings, and moral prescriptions. History is no longer a process in which a universal principle can be ascertained. No longer is it a movement in which things develop toward a rational goal. But rather history reveals itself as a constantly changing stream of individual tendencies and unique transformations.<sup>17</sup> If the technological mentality reduces all of nature to its control, then historicism dismantles the authority of all tradition and history. Every achievement within man's past appears with the passing of time to be relative, superseded, and transitory. Amidst the sea of change, the plank of faith does not heave too securely. No island of security appears on the horizon. The very historical documents of Christianity which previously had served as the foundation of faith are now the prime object of historical criticism.

The third reason alleged for the insecurity of faith today is relativism. The relativistic perspective is a consequence and a radicalization of the preceding elements. If historicism has thrown into question past cultures and traditional values, then relativism is its consequence and it throws into question present certainties and future goals. The relativistic perspective comprehends them in their transitory particularity. Attentive to the articulation of the systematic consequences of historicism as outlined by Wilhelm Dilthey and Ernst Troeltsch, theologians have been receptive to Karl Mannheim's elucidation of a sociology of knowledge and its influence upon present-day sociology of religion and have put forth the claim that the dominant insight of our epoch is the belief in the socially relative character of all judgments.<sup>18</sup> The academic disciplines of sociology, psychology, and anthropology have pursued this insight and have sought to uncover the extent to which intellectual concepts can be reduced to anthropological projections or explained in

B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1922). Gerhard Krüger, *Grundfragen der Philosophie* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1958), Walter Kasper, *Einführung in den Glauben* (Mainz: Matthias-Grunewald, 1972).

<sup>17</sup>Ernst Troeltsch, *Christian Thought: Its History and Application* (London: University of London Press, 1923).

<sup>18</sup>For an excellent corrective to misunderstandings of relativism see: Gordan Kaufmann, *Relativism, Knowledge and Faith* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 3-23.

their societal functions. Moreover, the pluralism of value-systems, religious beliefs, and cultures allegedly places the individual in a position of a consumer of truth; he can choose what he wants and can reject what he does not. If the unity of truth and reason, which had been so cherished by the Enlightenment, has vanished, no room remains for the unity of faith.

In short, these accounts of the contemporary situation make technological control, historicism, and relativism responsible for the insecurity of faith today. Each has been appealed to for the sake of the same basic thesis. The Christian faith is especially precarious today because the possibility of the experience of the transcendent is much more difficult. The foundations for such a possibility are no longer present. Nature is no longer an object of wonder, but of control; history is no longer the guarantor of a venerable tradition, but the sign of the flux of values and the transit of beliefs; the unity of reason and faith has been replaced by a plurality and relativity of values. With the increased awareness of the anthropological and societal conditioning of all values, the security of faith has increasingly vanished.

Although these analyses of the challenges to faith attend to the changing situation and acknowledge its full significance rather than write it off as accidental and secondary, I should like to suggest that they suffer from a similar overdose of abstraction. Consequently, analogous criticisms can be brought against them. Firstly, when Metz avers that the world has become hominized and when Dulles refers to the technical domination of the world, a twofold presupposition is involved. Implied is not only a definite understanding of what "world" means, but also that man's relation to this world has influenced his relation to God. Despite contrary intentions they understand world as nature and they unconsciously equate increased control over nature with increased domination of the world. However, just as it has been argued against Barth and Balthasar that man's relation to God is not immediate but mediated in and through society, so too must one argue here that man's relation to nature is societally mediated. Since man's control over nature is societally mediated, an increase of technological control does not necessarily involve an increased domination over the world. Very often the reverse is true. Technological mastery often complicates the solution of societal problems and hinders thereby

man's control over his "world." Therefore, it is inadequate to speak of a hominized world. Man's relation to the world in our contemporary situation could be more readily qualified as "frustrated" than as "masterful." The self-understanding of modern man as lord and master or high-priest over creation may be that of the grandiose robed academic. It is certainly not that of the city planner. Consequently, man's inability to achieve his societal goals so dominate our contemporary experience that they can serve as a starting-point for man's need of the transcendence rather than for the opposite.

Secondly, when historicity and relativity are proposed as the most significant threats to faith, it is often overlooked that they are also conditioned by their social matrix and limited to specific social subjects within a definite cultural context. Large segments of the population within a pluralistic society still live within a specific cultural framework and are primarily socialized in its values and goals. They do not transcend the limits of their primary socialization and do not reflectively question it or become critically aware of its relativity. The encounter with other values often does not lead to relativism because such an encounter frequently remains superficial due to the force of the primary socialization and the influence of primary associations. To characterize the individual's relation to religion in our society as one of "consumer orientation"<sup>19</sup> not only overemphasizes the autonomy of the individual, but also presupposes that a greater heterogeneity of religious values exists in our society than actually does. The paucity of genuine religious conversions points out the limited arena of personal religious autonomy; the pervasive dominance of the American civil religion speaks more for homogeneity than for heterogeneity of religious options. While relativism and historicism may be the dominant academic insights of our epoch, they do not explain the virulence of fundamentalism and evangelicism in our society. The hearers of Billy Graham and the readers of Thomas Altizer live in the same country but do they present viable options to one another? Perhaps our situation could better be described as a conglomerate of religious ghettos than as a smorgasbord of various beliefs. Yet the individual who moves from one

<sup>19</sup>Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 98.

ghetto to another, from one life-situation to another, is faced with the problem of integration. For him the relativistic insight presents itself as an option superior to the faith of his primary socialization. For this reason the meaningfulness of faith is deservedly a central issue today.

The above challenges to the faith and their diverse interpretations have led to various responses and contrasting proposals of a new understanding of faith. Three proposals deserve closer attention. The first stresses the insecurity of faith, the second underlines the correlativity of faith, and the third demonstrates the totality and independence of faith.

*The Insecurity of Faith.* The emphasis upon the insecurity of faith characterizes the proposal of Johann B. Metz<sup>20</sup> and Gerhard Ebeling. Metz begins his analysis of faith by standing Karl Rahner's thesis of anonymous Christianity on its head. Whereas Rahner maintains that the non-believer is implicitly and anonymously a believer, Metz asserts that the believer experiences unbelief not so much as the attitude of the other, namely, the non-believer, but as the very possibility of unbelief within himself, as the very danger of his own faith. Unbelief has been treated too long as a theological problem of apologetics or as a practical concern of missionary activity. The time has come, Metz claims, for unbelief to be an essential object of the analysis of the faith. The freedom of faith, the obscurity of the act of faith, the inability of ascertaining the validity of one's own faith, the consequences of concupiscence in each individual, and the impossibility of visualizing and categorizing the objects of faith have made the faith more precarious and have disclosed the possibility of unbelief within each believer. But this possibility receives a positive evaluation from Metz because it expresses the freedom of faith. Faith would not be faith unless it were free. The possibility of unbelief is rooted in the very possibility of belief: in freedom.

Ebeling provides us with a similar interpretation of faith. Precisely because faith is called into question does it endure. Faith must be called into question. Indeed the threat to faith as well as the temptation of faith belong to the very nature of faith.<sup>21</sup> Whereas in the prevalent

<sup>20</sup>Johannes Metz, "Unbelief as a Theological Problem," *Concilium* 1, No. 6 (June/July, 1965), 32-42.

conception of faith, faith is more alive the more it is above all insecurity and uncertainty, Ebeling argues for the reverse. Faith would no longer be faith unless it were insecure and uncertain.

Both proposals presuppose that the world has become secularized. In Metz's opinion, the secularization of the world has made increasingly difficult the visualization, categorization, and conceptualization of the objects of faith. But this difficulty, which arises from secularization, enables the virtue of faith to be exercised in its full freedom and autonomy. Likewise Ebeling asserts that only where God is radically denied can he be radically believed. Characterizing our era with its scientific objectivity as an age of atheism, Ebeling maintains that this atheism not only results partially from the Christian proclamation of God's transcendence, but also allows the Christian faith to be faith in its fullest sense.<sup>22</sup>

Insofar as this proposal articulates the freedom of faith as emphatically as possible, it contributes to a better understanding of the personal character of faith. It illuminates the uncertainty and doubt within the act of faith as essential elements of faith. However, such a proposal also appears as a confirmation of the precarious situation today rather than as an attempt to make the faith specifically meaningful, significant, or relevant to it. The world that lacks the traces of God because of man's freedom is given a corresponding faith: a faith radically free and including the possibility of temptation and insecurity within its subject. Such an exposition might be consoling to the believer who is confronted with the possibility of his unbelief, but how does it make clear the responsibility of faith for the world? What role does faith serve in such a world? The next response attempts to answer these questions.

*Faith as Correlative.* In *Toward an American Theology*<sup>23</sup> Herbert

<sup>21</sup>Gerhard Ebeling, *The Nature of Faith* (London: Fontana, 1961), pp. 162-71.

<sup>22</sup>Gerhard Ebeling, "Die Botschaft von Gott an das Zeitalter des Atheismus," in *Wort und Glaube*, vol. 2 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1969), pp. 372-95. For a historical evaluation of this position, cf. Francis P. Fiorenza, "Dialectical Theology and Hope, I," *Heythrop Journal* 9 (1968), 143-63.

<sup>23</sup>Herbert Richardson, *Toward an American Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 30-49.

Richardson offers an essay, "Five Kinds of Faith," in which he argues that in each cultural age the Christian faith has not opposed the cultural intellectus, but rather has accepted it by modifying it. The Christian faith has correlated an appropriate conception of faith with the cultural intellectus in order to redeem its anti-human tendencies. For example: in the patristic and early scholastic period, mystical rationalism, the dominant intellectus, seeks the truth, but it fails to achieve its goal due to pride and a consequent inability to perceive the role of the will in understanding. This mystical rationalist intellectus needs the correction of humility if it is to achieve its goal of union with the truth. "Hence, in the phrase *fides quaerens intellectum*, the term *fides* means that *humility* which is the only appropriate attitude for seeking mystical union with Truth."<sup>24</sup> In the scholastic period, the dominant intellectus, Averroistic scientific naturalism, limits knowledge of nature to a closed system and excludes the possibility of the human soul's fulfillment through eternal beatitude. The correlative understanding of faith is supplied by Thomas's redefinition of faith as belief in supernatural reality. This correlative faith completes and perfects scientific knowledge by adding the assent to supernatural realities which this understanding does not know. Likewise the sceptical criticism of the Renaissance is given a correlative understanding of faith by Pascal and Jonathan Edwards. Faith is understood as the work of the heart that gives reason the desire to know. It transforms scepticism by giving it depth and direction. Richardson sees a gnostic intellectus operative among Paul's opponents and in German Nazism. Paul and the theologians of the confessing Church provide a faith that is correlative insofar as it contradicts this gnosticism by proclaiming the foolishness of the gospel.

But what understanding of faith is correlative to our present cultural epoch? Richardson proposes that a *fides reconcilians intellectum* be the correlative understanding of faith in the face of relativism, the prevailing intellectus of our time. Relativism as understood by Richardson is a form of gnostic knowledge because it postulates a dualism insofar as it affirms that ideological conflicts are not only inevitable but also necessary and valuable. Relativism professes that ideological

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 37.

conflicts create rather than destroy value. It has consequently ritualized and institutionalized ideological conflicts which it claims not only encourages diversity and pluralism, but also reinforces the values of justice and equality. But this relativism has a demonic aspect. Because it justifies not only cultural pluralism but also ideological conflict, its institutionalization of this ideological conflict leads to a destruction of values. Examples of this institutionalization of ideological conflict are war, revolution, segregation, and scientific specialization. What is needed is a faith that can reconcile the conflicts that have become institutionalized. Examples of such a faith are Bernard Lonergan's theology and Martin Luther King's principles.

Relativism comprehends the social character of all human thought. Its emphasis upon the conditioning influence of particular social factors prevent it from discovering the universalism necessary so that man as a social being can find his end in society. "In order to maintain the relativistic insight regarding the social nature of man, some way must be found to universalize it and thereby establish the basis for reconciling every conflict of interest."<sup>25</sup> Since this universalization transcends the relativistic perspective, it can be integrated into the relativistic intellectus only by what transcends it, namely, faith in the universal unity of reality, faith in the possibility of reconciliation. This faith enables the dominant cultural intellectus, relativism, to more perfectly realize its insights and goals by transcending it.

Although issue can be taken with Richardson's schemata of the historical correlation between faith and the cultural intellectus and the question can be raised whether his analysis of relativism and its institutionalization of ideological conflicts is an accurate understanding of relativism,<sup>26</sup> his proposal does remain provocative and interesting. In this understanding many difficulties of faith and many criticisms against faith arise from an "irrelevant" faith, a faith not correlative to the intellectus of its day. Not only is this faith unrelated, but it may even support the demonic character of that intellectus. However, it is not quite clear just what the content of this correlative faith is. Is this faith a faith in the universal humanity of men or is it a faith in Jesus

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>26</sup>Kaufmann, trans. and ed., *Hegel: Texts and Commentary*, p. 30.

Christ? The faith of Marxism as well as the faith of Christianity could serve this role in the face of relativism. Moreover, to assert that only that faith is appropriate which is correlative to the cultural intellect which it perfects by modifying it does not explain how such a faith is possible or where its source of strength lies. What makes it possible for that faith to transcend the cultural ethos?

*The Independence of Faith.* Richard Niebuhr, known for his investigations on Schleiermacher, has outlined in *Experiential Religion* an understanding of faith that draws heavily in its inspiration from Schleiermacher and Jonathan Edwards.<sup>27</sup> The move, which Schleiermacher made to defend religion against the criticisms of the Enlightenment, with its destruction of metaphysics and reduction of religion to a universal ethic, was to underline the specific nature of religion. Distinct but not separate from man's theoretical faculty (metaphysics) and from his practical activity (ethics) religion is constituted as an elemental form of experience. Man's self-conscious experience of his radical dependency is his religious experience. God is the whence (*woher*) of man's existence.<sup>28</sup>

Following a similar approach Richard Niebuhr divides the labyrinth of theological definitions of faith into two strands: one emphasizing faith as a virtue of reason, the other faith as a virtue of willing. Both acknowledge faith as an intellectual virtue. In the first, faith is conceived of as analogous to a rational virtue or to an intellectual assent that is either inferior or on a par with knowledge. In the second, the action of willing rather than of knowing is the paradigm. Here man's trust in God is emphasized. Thus Coleridge underlines the aspect of loyalty;<sup>29</sup> Bultmann sees faith as radical obedience to God; and H. R.

<sup>27</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, *Experiential Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

<sup>28</sup>Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. by John Oman (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), pp. 26-87; *The Christian Faith*, translation of 2nd ed. by H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), Nos. 3 to 5. In a similar fashion Karl Rahner speaks of God as the *worauf* of man's existence.

<sup>29</sup>Samuel Coleridge, "Essay on Faith," in *The Collected Works of S. T. Coleridge*, vol. 5 (New York: Harper and Row, 1854).

Niebuhr accents the fidelity of faith.<sup>30</sup>

Niebuhr insists that both strands do not adequately comprehend man as a faithful being in our world. Both do not realize that the reality of faithfulness contains more than can be gleaned from the analogy of willing and knowing. Both run into the danger of conceiving of faith as changeless—an assent to something or a choice of something. Instead faith should be understood as changing and mutable just as man and his world changes and alters. Rather than compare faith to just one faculty of man, his intellect or will, faith should be compared to man's whole way of behaving, of going out of himself and returning. Faith embraces man's manner of taking hold of himself, of the known and unknown in an intellectual, moral, and aesthetic way. In classical terms, man's faith is his person, his character. "If religion in experience is the feeling of being totally affected of being set upon behind and before, within and without, and the striving for orientation in the agent-world as a whole; then human faithfulness presents itself as the great personal act or course of actions in which a man, or some family of man, commits and aligns himself to the one coercive and persuasive power in the world that is the recapitulating expression of the meaning of the whole."<sup>31</sup> This faith and faithfulness is present whenever men give themselves for that which is greater than themselves. Described by Niebuhr as an affection, this faith involves an awakening (conversion), suffering (penance), and a unifying tone.<sup>32</sup>

Although this short precis does not do adequate justice to the richness and depth of Niebuhr's development and actualization of an understanding of faith that draws heavily upon Schleiermacher, it does point to the direction that he has taken. Niebuhr does present one of the more viable options for an understanding of faith, but perhaps two reservations should be made here. Although Niebuhr refuses to conceive of faith according to the analogy of either knowing or willing, but seeks to transcend this alternative, he does tend to underplay the cognitional dimension. He avoids thereby a direct conflict with the problems raised

<sup>30</sup>H. R. Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1943).

<sup>31</sup>Niebuhr, *Experiential Religion*, p. 39.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 41-48.

by historicism and by relativism. The unfortunate consequence is an insufficient attention to the dimension of meaning in faith. Moreover, more emphasis could have been given to the intersubjective or the ecclesial dimension of faith, a dimension in which the meaning of faith would have its context and subject.

It is this emphasis that I should like to suggest can offer a practical perspective for the problem of faith. In this concluding section, I proffer a few observations in the hope that they might serve as a basis for a discussion.

The descriptions of the precariousness of faith today and the analyses of faith as insecure, correlative, independent did not accentuate the role of the Christian community. In fact, they largely overlooked it. But the ecclesial dimension of faith, I would suggest, can help to explain the security as well as the insecurity of faith. The theological tradition has understood faith as an intellectual assent to the truth of specific propositions, as a personal trust and faithful reliance upon someone, and as a total affection of man's person and experience. Yet the meaning and significance of each can be achieved within an ecclesial framework.

Firstly, although a significant relation exists between individual subjectivity and meaning, intelligibility is primarily intersubjective and not private. Our individual pre-understanding specifies our approach to truth, our intentional judgments color our appropriation of the truth, and our personal response defines our realization of the truth. But our intersubjective relations determine the use of our language and consequently its meaning. Our social context determines not only the individual's horizon, but also meaning and verifiability of his truth. The truth of faith, therefore, can become intelligible and meaningful only to the extent that it is spoken and lived within the social context of an ecclesial community. The Church is consequently not merely extrinsically important to an individual intellectual assent, but intrinsically so.

Secondly, faith as trust and fidelity cannot exist independently of a communal experience of loyalty and fidelity. The possibility of man's fidelity to God and trust upon him is deeply rooted in the experience of the fidelity of his fellow man even though it transcends it. The Christian's faith in the resurrection of Jesus is based upon the fidelity of the first witnesses to their encounter with Jesus and to the commu-

nities to whom they preached. The extent to which this fidelity is experienced determines the extent to which this preaching is trusted and believed. The Christian's faith is often more determined by the fidelity of other Christians to him and to their beliefs in practice than by doctrinal or catechetical instruction.

Thirdly, the ecclesial dimension of faith alone explains the nature of faith as a total affection. The individual can take hold of himself intellectually, morally, aesthetically, and practically only insofar as he relates to others in community. The extent to which a person totally takes hold of himself and becomes himself a faithful person within a social and communal framework determines the extent to which he is affected, is a believer, is faithful.

This emphasis upon the social and ecclesial dimension of faith provides an avenue for avoiding the alternative between asserting that faith is more precarious today and rejecting that assertion. The ecclesial dimension of faith offers the key to unlocking the riddle of whether faith is more insecure today and provides the solution to the puzzle of how this insecurity is to be explained.

If an individual's faith is necessarily mediated through an ecclesial community or a social community, then faith is not a question of a direct relation between the individual and God, but a question of a relation in and through a specific historical community. Hence the faith does not constitute a transcultural meaning for the believer, but a culturally determined meaning within a culturally determined community. These determinations explain the differences in the problem of faith for distinct times. But insofar as the historically conditioned community is intersubjectively constituted out of individuals, it is faced with a constancy, with anthropological problems that are structurally similar.

The precariousness of faith today is consequently due less to technological control, less to historicism, and less to relativism than it is due to the inability of the Christian community to intersubjectively mediate these threats in a meaningful way to all individuals of the community. In this sense technological control, historicism, and relativism have a disruptive influence upon the communal basis of faith today in a similar but perhaps more accentuated fashion than previous historical changes have had within the Church.

In conclusion: the security and insecurity of faith are to no small

extent rooted in the Church. Insofar as the Church is a community of intersubjective meaning, fidelity, and affection, it provides a buttress for faith. Insofar as this intersubjective meaning is disrupted, this fidelity broken, this affection splintered, then faith becomes insecure. Luther and Kierkegaard have allegedly claimed that faith is similar to death: just as every man dies alone, so too does he make his own decision of faith. I suggest that each man can believe only in solidarity and can be a man of faith only in community. Faith is not death but life.

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