

Faith is the graced but free human acceptance of God's self-communication in Christ as mediated by the Christian community. Grace and freedom, God's free initiative and the free human response of acceptance, comprise the mystery of faith. Christian faith assumes and transforms the universal experience of human faith and the diverse and varied experience of religious faith. Human faith is the simple capacity to trust another person. As such, it is not peripheral to, but constitutes, the human condition. It assumes that there are reasonable grounds for such trust. When two people meet, they go through a process of getting to know one another by sharing names, background, interests, and so forth. But if the relationship is to move beyond mere acquaintance to a deeper level of friendship, there comes a moment of self-transcendence, which carries with it the risk of deception or betrayal. This is the moment when each person entrusts him- or herself to the other. There are reasonable grounds for such trust in that each knows the other through a shared history, but there is no way to prove with absolute certainty that the other is fully trustworthy. There is always risk, but the risk is credible, not foolish. Without the capacity for self-transcendence in trust and the actual experience of trust in a particular relationship, people cannot grow as mature human beings. Faith in this sense is what makes people human. This human experience is analogous to religious and Christian faith but is the experiential ground that must be subsumed into, and transformed by, a human relationship of friendship with God.

The religious understanding of faith is central to the Judeo-Christian experience as well as to Islam. All three religions claim Abraham as their common father in faith. Faith is central to these religions because they have a historical understanding of world process. Abraham had a personal experience of God who called him forth from the comfort of his ancestral home and promised him a new future for countless generations to come. Faith is precisely trust in the one who promises this future and who is understood to accompany the people on their journey. In this personal and historical sense faith is unique to the Judeo-Christian heritage. It is the appropriate and indeed necessary stance in a world that has not yet arrived at its final consummation. Other religious traditions that have a more cyclical notion of world process and a more impersonal understanding of the divine do not use faith in this sense. However, all religions, insofar as they seek knowledge of the divine and some sort of relationship with the divine that affects human life, can be said to be religious "faiths" or "beliefs." What follows is a further explanation of Christian faith.

A GRACED ACCEPTANCE

Christian tradition has always recognized that faith is a gift of God that depends totally on God's initiative. Individuals cannot enter into a personal, trusting relationship with God unless God invites them into the divine life. While God seeks human friendship, the mutuality that friendship implies can never be that of equals. Jesus said, "I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father" (John 15:15), yet the initiative for such self-revelation is completely from the bosom of the Father (John 1:18). John gives a particularly rich description of the life of faith, which he equates with eternal life, as consisting primarily of the triune God (Father, Son, and Spirit) dwelling in the one who believes and the believer dwelling within the triune God. At its most fundamental, faith is an invitation from God to live the divine life. It is the firm conviction of Christian and Catholic faith that God wills the salvation of all people (1 Tim 2:3-7). Therefore, all people receive this invitation from God (Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, nn. 2, 13-16) but experience it differently within the concrete conditions that constitute their particular life situation. The invitation offered through creation and covenant comes to its deepest and fullest expression in the incarnation of God's only Son (John 1:14-18). One can understand this as the progressive deepening of God's personal self-involvement in the creative process. It is God's own breath (Spirit) that humans breathe to become living creatures (Gen 2:7). It is God's compassionate love for the children of Abraham that frees them from slavery, makes them a people, and brings them to the land of promise (Exod 2:23-4:17). It is God's continuing fidelity in love that has given the world the ultimate gift of grace, his only Son (John 1:17; 3:16; Rom 5:1-11; 8:1-4). Thus, the whole of creation is the expression in ever-deepening ways of God's gracious love.

The certainty of faith, as a gift from God, can be called absolute because it comes from God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived. The inward illumination of grace enables one to entrust oneself to God who is worthy of absolute and total trust. This excludes doubt with regard to the object of faith, because the object of belief is God. But, since faith is neither self-evident nor based on apodictic or empirical "proof" (in a scientific sense), the certainty of faith cannot exclude the possibility of serious questioning and even doubt from the perspective of one's personal, subjective apprehension of the gift. This is normally where the question of certitude arises. As in the case of Abraham, faith gives persons the kind of certainty that allows them to trust in a promised future and to act on that trust. Were apodictic or empirical proof possible, talk would no longer be of faith but of vision (1 Cor 13:12; 1 John 3:2; Heb 11:1).

A FREE HUMAN ACCEPTANCE

Faith in the fullest and deepest sense is not just the intellectual assent of the mind to the truths that God reveals, although that dimension is inte-

gral. It is not a question of the mind's grasping something so much as it is of the whole self's being "grasped" by the presence and power of God's Spirit who illumines the mind and draws a person into a life of intimacy and friendship with God. Thus, faith is not reducible to a particular act; it is a whole way of life, a basic orientation of the whole person that includes intellect, will, emotions—in a word, one's deepest desires. Faith is a kind of knowledge, but knowledge in the biblical sense of an intimate and personal involvement of oneself in the life of another. Its primary exemplification in human experience is the total gift of two persons one to another in sexual union. God as portrayed in the Bible is repeatedly characterized as "faithful love" (through the joining of the terms for "merciful love" and "fidelity in truth" in the Hebrew Scriptures, which is then translated as "grace and truth" in John 1:14, 17). One believes God and trusts God because God is faithful to the divine promises (Gen 15:1-6; Rom 4:1-3, 13-25; Heb 11:1-3, 8-12, 17-19) which are fulfilled in Jesus who is "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 12:2).

Faith, then, is a call from God to be faithful in love as God is faithful. In this sense, as with Martin Luther's view of faith, faith is something to be lived and so includes the virtues of love and hope, the experience of union with God, and the desire to live forever in that union. Faith and hope will be subsumed into and transformed by love when we see God "face to face" (1 Cor 13:12-13). Faith and hope are appropriate and necessary in this life, but faith without works is dead. For Paul, "works" mean "works of the law" (Gal 3:2-5, 10-12), so he prefers to speak of "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22-23, 25). What is finally effective is a faith that works through love (Gal 5:6). The Letter of James, on the other hand, which Luther called an "epistle of straw," exhorts believers to be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers" (Jas 1:22). The reason is that "faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (2:17). For Luther, one is justified by "faith alone," but he understood faith in the full Pauline sense to include the effective power of love and hope. When James says "a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (2:24), he is distinguishing faith and works but he is also saying that justification requires their inseparable unity. The distinction allowed the Council of Trent (1545-63) to maintain, against Luther, that faith can coexist with sin. However, all Christians—Lutherans and Catholics alike—agree that the faith necessary for justification and salvation must include endurance, character, hope, and love (Rom 5:1-5).

GOD'S SELF-COMMUNICATION IN CHRIST

The term "mystery" in the Christian Scriptures refers to the eternal plan or intention of God, i.e., God's will, hidden in God through the centuries, fully and finally revealed in Christ, and proclaimed by the Christian community (Rom 16:25-26; Col 1:24-28; 2:2-3; Eph 1:9-10; 3:2-12). Christian faith is centered in Christ, but to speak of God's self-communication in Christ is to speak of Jesus' personal relation to the Father in the power of the Spirit, i.e., the inner triune life of God. Equally

important is the Christian community, which is the sacramental embodiment of God's own inner life to the degree that humans are enabled to receive and express visibly the mystery. The only and unique mediator between God and humans who makes this possible is the fully human Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2:4-6). Cardinal John Henry Newman (d. 1890) said that no people has been denied a revelation from God. It is true that God reveals the divine Self through experiences of nature, of consciousness and conscience (moral exigence), of self-transcending relationships with other persons, especially in love, and of personal and communal histories. Vatican II affirms the constant tradition that God can be known with certainty from created reality by using human reason and reflection (Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, nn. 3, 6), but the council is more concerned to emphasize that in Christ is the fullness of revelation (nn. 2, 4, 6). This revelation is final in that humanity awaits no new public revelation before the final coming and it is full because it communicates the divine mystery, which totally transcends the capacities of the human mind. The mystery hidden in God and revealed in Christ is the fullness of the triune life of God.

It is helpful to distinguish two ways in which this revelation is received in faith. First, *fides qua* (Lat., "faith by which") refers to the self-involving act of trust in the personal God who reveals the inner divine life to individuals and calls them into a promised future. The Hebrew Scriptures understand faith primarily in these concrete and personal terms as fidelity (or obedience) to God's word. The Hebrew word *'emet* refers to something solid or firm, something that can be relied upon to be true in the sense of trustworthy or faithful. Faith, in effect, says "I believe you." Signs, e.g., miracles that might provide motives for belief, are secondary to the personal relationship as such. The Christian Scriptures continue this understanding, but the Greek word *pisteuein* means not only to trust or show confidence, but also to accept as true. Thus, Paul speaks of "the obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5; 16:26), which includes not only fidelity but also acceptance of "the word of faith that we proclaim" (Rom 10:8). This involves both believing in the heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and confessing with the lips that Jesus is Lord (Rom 10:9-10; 4:24-25). In other words, the experience of faith also includes doctrinal content. This is the second way in which the revelation is received in faith, *fides quae* (Lat., "faith which"). This refers to the knowledge and acceptance of revealed truth, the content of teaching (doctrine). Concern for this becomes more evident in the Christian Scriptures as Church structure and organization develop. For example, the term "mystery" takes on a clear doctrinal meaning in 1 Timothy, where the emphasis is on correct teaching and right Church order (1:3-7; 3:9, 16; 4:1-3, 6; 6:20-21). Likewise, the Gospel of John, with its strong emphasis on personal relationship with God, concludes with the affirmation that these things were written "so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (20:31). It should be emphasized, however, that the ecclesial concern for correct doctrine, which involves intellectual assent to propositions

("I believe that something is true"), while integral and necessary for a complete understanding of faith, is secondary and subordinate. It can never displace the primary and essential commitment of one person to another ("I believe you").

MEDIATED BY THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Faith is personal not only in an individual sense but also in a social sense. Through Baptism persons are incorporated into a community of believers/disciples that is the matrix of growth into mature faith. Each individual, through his or her particular gifts of the Spirit, builds up the whole body into an integrated and harmonious unity. "For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another" (Rom 12:4-5; cf. 1 Cor 12:4-11, 12-31; Col 3:14-15; Eph 4:11-16). As Ephesians so beautifully puts it: "Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (4:15). However, communal faith must not be confined to the building up and maintenance of the Church as such (which is the concern of Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church). Such faith must serve the primary mission of the Church by going outside it, by proclaiming the gospel to all nations and building the kingdom of God on earth as in heaven (which is the concern of Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World). It is increasingly recognized today that the service of faith includes the promotion of justice as an absolute requirement. Thus, Christian faith as the following of Jesus can never be adequately understood as an asocial, individualistic reality. A true believer is one who reaches out to all of God's children, both within and outside the Church, and indeed to the whole of creation, which is to be cared for as the expression of God's creative love (Gen 2:15; 1:26-27). In a word, living faith includes not only the love of God whom one does not see, but inseparably the love of all those whom one does see (1 John 4:20).

OFFICIAL CATHOLIC TEACHINGS

The Second Council of Orange (529), following the teaching of Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), condemned all forms of Pelagianism or semi-Pelagianism, which sought to displace the priority and continuance of divine grace with purely human efforts. The Council of Trent (1545-63), following the teaching of Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), maintained the distinction between faith, hope, and love. Faith is caused by the internal movement of the Holy Spirit, to which the intellect assents by a movement of the will. Thus, the process is one of graced, but free human acceptance. Faith is not simply a matter of trust (as Luther was understood at the council), but includes assent to revealed truths. As distinct from love and hope, faith can coexist with sin, but as the free gift of God that involves the whole person it is necessary for salvation. The First Vat-

ican Council
displaces f
expense of
and so the
ence of re
Council (1
standing c
true faith,
not just ir
gious Fre
matters of
self-comm
accorded :

See also f

Bibliogra

Haight, Roger
Hellwig, Mon
McBrien, Ricl

ican Council (1869–70), against the excesses of both rationalism (which displaces faith with reason alone) and fideism (which exalts faith at the expense of reason), emphasized both the authority of God who reveals, and so the need for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, and the coherence of reason with the obedience of faith. Finally, the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) remained in continuity with the traditional understanding of faith while recognizing in the Decree on Ecumenism that true faith, which justifies and sanctifies, exists in all Christian churches, not just in the Catholic Church. Likewise, in the Declaration on Religious Freedom the council recognized the priority of conscience in matters of faith. Faith as the graced but free human acceptance of God's self-communication cannot be forced, and so a certain legitimacy is accorded religious pluralism.

See also faith and reason; grace; revelation.

Bibliography

Haight, Roger. *Dynamics of Theology*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990.
 Hellwig, Monika K. *Understanding Catholicism*. New York: Paulist Press, 1981.
 McBrien, Richard P. *Catholicism*. Rev. ed. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994.

MICHAEL L. COOK