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# FAITH, BELIEF AND TRADITION

It is an enigma of human thinking that man has always tried to understand himself, yet has given himself up to "faith" rather than to "understanding". Faith is just that which one fails to understand. Yet man often prefers to stand under the spell of that "understood", Understanding, when it really becomes the "standing" under the spell of that which is sought to be understood, turns out to be one's faith.

Faith, therefore, points to a certain "that" in the light of which man hopes to explain himself. It is the very "thatness" (*tathatā*)<sup>1</sup> which in its utter incomprehensibility appears to be Void (*Śunya*)<sup>2</sup> or Unqualifiable (*Nirguṇa*), or in anthropomorphic terms, becomes Qualifiable (*Saguṇa*)<sup>3</sup> or presentable to humanity in a certain form (*Avatāra*)<sup>4</sup> or myth or even becomes part of the real human history

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1. The *Vijñānavādins* of *Mahāyāna* School of Buddhism admitted one Reality independent of human thought. This was called *tathatā* (suchness or thatness). An enlightened *bodhisattva* is expected to know that "the suchness of form is not subject to origination or extinction, that it neither comes nor goes, is neither foul nor clean, neither increases nor diminishes, is constant in its own nature, is never empty, false or changeful, and is therefore called suchness." *Mahāprajñāpārimīta*, Ch. 29.1; Trans. Dr. Arthur Waley, *Buddhists Texts through the Ages*, Ed. by Edward Conze (Oxford, 1954), p. 154.
  2. While the *Vijñānavādins* called the One Absolute *tathatā*, the *Mādhyamika* school, a counter school of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, held that Emptiness or Void (*Śunyata*) is all that truly exists. Therefore they are also called *Śunyavādins*. "The mystic knows what is true reality; and sees all conditioned things as empty and powerless" (*Lalitavistāra*, 13, 177). Cf. also Theodore de Bary, *The Buddhist Tradition in India, China and Japan* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p. 97.
  3. *Nirguṇa* and *Saguṇa*: Distinctions used by the advaitins to denote the absolute and the personal aspects of Brahman. The *saguṇabrahman* is also known as *Īśvara*.
  4. *Avatāra*: Literally the word means "descent" and signifies the "divine descents" in history. Hinduism acknowledge numerous *avatāras* of which ten are said to be more important. For a comparative study of the Hindu *avatāras* in contrast with the Christian doctrine of Incarnation, cf. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970).

where Time and Transcendence become fused into one, single, historical Event as in the case of the Christian claim of Christ. Whatever be the form the "thatness" assumes in the human mind or human history, as far as man is concerned, it is something to be realized in him.

The "that" in relation to which man seeks his own self-explanation may be conceived as totally other than himself (the traditional Judeo-Christian tendency) or as the real self within himself (the general Hindu tendency) or even as his own ultimate identity (the strict advaitic tendency). Whether himself or other than himself, it is always a goal to be achieved, and is worked out either by a union with the other in loving devotion (*bhakti*)<sup>5</sup> or by the realization of the real self through knowledge (*jñāna*). Until that time of the ultimate union/realization takes place, man has to live in faith, hold it as a possibility to which he is called and which guides his life, gives him hope, makes him happy and leads him ahead. Thus faith becomes very central in man's exploration of his own meaning especially in his religious quest.

Even the secular interpretations of man do not stray wholly away from faith, though the self-emanating act of faith may take a new turn. Thus the secular ideologies, the newly envisaged world of scientific achievements and amenities of life or the long-cherished "better-tomorrow" take the place of the unarticulated "that" in search of which man has moved out of himself. Even the denial of all meaning leads us only to a sort of faith by which we have to accept the unacceptable, be it a "useless passion" (Sartre)<sup>6</sup> or a "Sentiment of absurdity".<sup>7</sup> Taking a very different but unhappy

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5. *Jñāna and Bhakti*: *Jñāna* (knowledge) and *bhakti* (devotion) along with *karma* (action) constitute the threefold path of liberation or realization according to the Indian way of thinking. The supremacy of *jñāna* and *bhakti* over the other is a matter of dispute and depends very much on the vision of reality one fosters. In short it could be said that an immanent God is to be realized through *jñāna* while a transcendent God is to be worshipped with *bhakti*. For a detailed analysis of the three *mārgas* (paths) cf. V. F. Vineeth, "A Yoga for Liberation" in *The Journal of Dharma*, Vol. II, No. 1 (1977), pp. 35-52.

6. Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Eng. Trans. by H. E. Barnes, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), pp. 451, 556.

7. Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), pp. 1ff. Cf. also F. H. Heinemann, *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), p. 116.

turn, it is also possible that the "that" in question may present itself as the ruthless and diabolic, and the means of realization now becomes very queer and curious as in the case of black magic and witchcraft. In all these cases faith appears to be a move from within which forces man to give himself up to that which has been envisaged.

Faith is thus a radical movement proceeding from the very inner essence of man. Distorted or well directed, it always remains a happening in man, a movement in search of a cherished goal, a basic event that takes place in the innermost being of man. Faith is the great bridge by which man unites the two shores of his existence: the actual shore of his real existence and the ideal shore of his desired existence. This shore of actuality is characterized by facticity and fragmentation. This is a shore where the sun has not yet shone in his perfect brilliance and hence a shore of darkness and "ignorance" (*avidyā*),<sup>8</sup> a shore of "estranged existence" (Hegel, Marx, Tillich),<sup>9</sup> a shore characterized by "suffering" - *dukkhah* - (Buddha),<sup>10</sup> a shore of "broken order" and "sinful humanity" (Christian faith).<sup>11</sup> The other shore, the aspired ideal, on the other hand, is a place of untold splendour, and perfect rhythm. It is a shore where all genuine aspirations of mankind are realized and thus man discovers himself in his ultimate authenticity and fulfilment. It is a shore of perfect

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8. Hinduism considers that the basic human predicament is *avidya* (ignorance). *Avidyā* is a radical misapprehension of one's own self which is really to be understood as identical with Brahman (advaitic position) or closely similar to Brahman (various other theistic positions).

9. It was Hegel who first used the Word "alienation" to denote the nature which has been estranged from the Spirit. Cf. *The Phenomenology of the Mind*, Eng. Trans. J. B. Baillie (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931), pp. 280, 789. Later the term was used by several authors like Marx, Tillich and others, each one with his own particular connotation. Cf. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II (London: Nisbet, 1957), pp. 51 ff.

10. The basic predicament of man according to Buddhism is *dukkhah* (sorrow). The four noble truths of Buddha are: 1. *saryam dukkham* (everything is sorrow), 2. *dukkha-samudaya* there is cause for sorrow), 3. *dukkhanirodha* (removal of sorrow in possible) and 4. *dukkhanirodha-mārga* (there is a way to the removal of sorrow). Cf. *Samyutta-Nikāya*, 5, 421 ff.

11. The basic predicament of man according to the Christian faith is the "original sin" and is often understood as the state of estrangement from that to which one belongs - God, one's own self, and one's world" (Tillich, *op. cit.*, p. 52).

freedom (*mukti*) and everlasting serenity and peace (*śānti*).<sup>12</sup> Faith is the bridge between these two shores.

### Faith and the Predicament of the Modern Man

Though faith is what it is, the modern man finds himself at the cross-roads of faith. He is far away from the faiths of his ancestors, yet very close to faith in several other respects. The scientific and the positivist attitude of the people at the turn of the century questioned faith from several angles and levelled charges against faith as it was considered to be a foster-mother of superstitions and a stumbling block on the way of progress of science and technology. But the unchecked growth of progress in science along with its by-products of affluence, arms and armaments has now become the greatest threat humanity has ever experienced. Quite naturally, abandoning the earthly heaven of affluence, people began to flow to the Orient in search of a greater freedom, peace and the seal of life. Gurus and neo-leaders, genuine and spurious ones, sprang up everywhere, especially in the East, and more particularly perhaps in India, the land known for *r̥sis* and sages. Far removed from the scientific rigours and the pride of agnosticism a new kind of faith is now making its appearance : a faith in Gurus and visible god-men.

The western philosophy also assumed a form very different from its rationalist, scientific and positivist attitude. The philosophy of existence paved the way for a re-emergence of faith. In Soren Kierkegaard it was explicitly a faith in God, realized through the open option of the opposites, the so-called "leap into the dark."<sup>13</sup> In several others it was not so explicit, yet in their rejection of logical rigourism and the acceptance of a philosophy of nothing,<sup>14</sup> they

12. Peace is the aspired goal in many religions: Christ promised peace to his disciples at his departure (Jn. 20.19 ff.); Indian prayers usually end with the chanting of peace; *Om śānti, śānti śānti* (Om peace, peace, peace). The Buddhist *nirvāṇa* is ultimately a serene state of peace and stillness. *Hesychia* the desired goal in Oriental Christian Tradition is also centred on peace. Cf. V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration* (New York: Crossroad - Continuum, 1981), Ch. 11.

13. Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Problem III.

14. Thus for example Jean Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness: Heidegger's Was ist Metaphysik?* (1929) with its "Nachwort" (1934) and "Einleitung" (1949). The book deals with the problem of ontological Nothing and the need of accepting Nothing in order to encounter being.

touched upon the question of the unconditional acceptance of what is happening, what is being experienced in man. Faith is ultimately saying "yes" to the very radical happenings in man, be it his "yes" to the Absolute uttered in the ultimate situations he encounters, or a "yes" to himself in whose depths he discovers the Absolute. Whether termed as an Absolute Thou<sup>15</sup> or Real Self,<sup>16</sup> the Ultimate is posited and listened to by the empirically finite consciousness in its untiring struggle for realization. And this is simply faith.

### Faith as Basic Listening

The Zen story of the young aspirant approaching his Guru for instruction on meditation is well-known. The disciple was asked to meditate on the sound of clapping of one hand. The clapping of the one hand was obviously not to be heard. Yet it gave a clue to the right manner of meditation. Only when the disciple begins to hear that unheard and unproduced sound does he really start his meditation. India calls this sound the *anāhata-śabda*,<sup>17</sup> the unbeaten or unproduced sound. This is to be "heard." Yet, in reality, this is no sound audible to the human ear. Precisely because of this reason the hearing of this unuttered word is regarded as an act of faith. Yes, faith is a fundamental listening, a listening to the *anāhata śabda*.

Though unuttered, it is heard nevertheless in the depths of one's own being. Faith is thus the listening of the *anāhata śabda* from within. It is listening to one's own inner voice, to the ultimate concern of man. But what is listened to is not man, nor anything man-made. It is that "thatness", a reference to which has already been made at the beginning of this article. It is the *tat-ēkam*<sup>18</sup> of the

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15. From the analysis of interpersonal relationship Gabriel Marcel rises to an Absolute Thou. Cf. *Metaphysical Journal* (London: Rockliff, 1952), pp. 262-265.
  16. The traditional Indian pattern of thinking is that *Brahman* is also *Atman* (the Self), the *antaryāmin* (the divine indweller). The identity of Brahman with the individual self is especially developed in the advaitic philosophy of *Śankara*.
  17. *Anāhata-śabda* is a typical Indian expression of the eternal Word of God. This is symbolized as OM. The *anāhata-śabda* is also known as *ādi-śabda* (the primal utterance or the original Logos), *anānta-śabda* (the infinite Word) and the *brahma-śabda* (the Word of God).
  18. *Rg Veda*, X. 129.2 ff.

*R̥g Veda*, the *Śunya* of the early Buddhism, the *ālayavijñāna*<sup>19</sup> of the Mahayanists, the Om or *praṇava* of yogic concentration,<sup>20</sup> the *ādiśabda* (original utterance) of the *Parabrahman*, or the *Logos*<sup>21</sup> of the Johannine Gospel. In all these cases it is something beyond physical hearing and yet something to be heard; and in fact many do "hear" it. *Śruti* (revelation) is nothing but what has been heard. Only by *śraddhā* can one come to *śruti*.<sup>22</sup> *Śraddhā* is the Indian equivalent of faith.

Reality is the Word (*Vāk*) beyond all utterance. Every utterance only defies the attempt to articulate the unarticulatable. The listeners of the Word,<sup>23</sup> therefore, transcend all forms of human articulations and listen to the Word in silence. Silence thus becomes the medium of listening, a listening in faith. The *anāhata-śabda* is heard, listened to and relished in silence. In the serene stillness of silence the unarticulate *śabda* (*Logos*) speaks without defying its own infinity. And the one who can rise above his own finitude in faith and thus reach the other shore of infinity in faith listens to the Word thus spoken in unpolluted silence. Faith is a fundamental listening in silence.

"I am the silence in mysteries"<sup>24</sup> says Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna. Reality in its ultimate self-communication presents itself as silence. This happens inevitably from the inner nature of reality. Since reality is infinite any intimate and intense communication of reality will necessarily contain the silence of mystery within it. Mystery is reality already communicated, the inner content of which is beyond the pale of

19. The *Mahāyāna* school accepts different transformations of pure consciousness. The first stage of this transformation is known as *ālaya-vijñāna* (abode of consciousness) in which it becomes the store-house of all consciousness. Cf. Theodore de Bary, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-154; 188-89.

20. Patanjali, *Yogasutra*, I,27: *tasya vācakah praṇavaḥ (OM)* = Om is the symbolic sound (*praṇavaḥ*) of Him (God).

21. Jn. 1.1-5.

22. *Śruti* is usually understood as the Indian equivalent for revelation. Literally the word *śruti* means "what has been heard." The Vedas are said to be *śruti*, namely the authoritative texts on revelation in contrast to *smṛti* (what is remembered) which includes many other sacred writings of India.

23. It is interesting to note that Karl Rahner names his treatise on revelation: *Hearers of the Word* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1969).

24. *Bhagavad-Gītā*, 10.38.

human understanding. In his ultimate encounter with reality man feels compelled to accept the "ununderstandable" along with the medium of understandability through which it is communicated. Hence the communication of reality in understandable terms contains within itself the silent reality which is not yet understood and thus leaves room for faith at the receiving end of revelation. In all communication there is the uttered and the unuttered. The uttered is accepted as knowledge, the unuttered is received in faith. Mystery is precisely the not-yet-spoken aspect of reality that has been spoken to man.

Every communication is revealing-concealing. Heidegger develops this thought in his analysis of being which is encountered by thinking. Thinking raises being to Logos, thus providing scope for dialogue between man and being. But being which momentarily appears as Kogos, does not speak of itself out in comprehensive terms. It unveils itself only for a fleeting moment. There is much more to be unveiled. Thus, only against the background of the "unsaid" (*das Ungesagte*) the "said" (*das Gesagte*) will be understood.<sup>25</sup> Naturally the unsaid leads man to mystery, which in due course develops myths and gods.

The revealing-concealing aspect of the infinite Brahman is analysed on similar lines by Śankara. According to him, Brahman's self-communication is always revealing-concealing. He calls it *āvaraṇa-vikṣēpa*.<sup>26</sup> It is the projection of Brahman in certain otherness (*vikṣēpa*). Insofar as it is a projection, it is revelation. But insofar as it is in certain 'otherness', it is concealment (*āvaraṇa*). Thus the cosmos is the *āvaraṇa-vikṣēpa* of Brahman. Man seeing what is revealed in creation, rises to what is concealed in the very same creation. Consequently he becomes a man of faith to the extent to which he tries to understand the hidden mystery of reality.

25. M. Heidegger, "Was heisst Denken?" in *Vorträge und Aussätze* (Tübingen: Neske, 1959), p. 139.

26. *Āvaraṇa-vikṣēpa*: Cf. *Brahma-Sūtra-Śankara-Bhāṣya*, II. 1.27: "Brahman appears to become susceptible of (i.e. appears to be the basis of) all phenomenal behaviour by way of modifications etc. . . while in its truest nature Brahman subsists only in its unmodified aspect . . ." (Trans. V. M. Apte, Bombay Popular Book Depot, 1960), p. 333. Cf. also, Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964), p. 274.

### Faith and the Inner Dynamics of Finite Consciousness

Human consciousness is characterized by openness. It is open to itself and to others. Being consciousness, it is simply self-luminosity or self-reflection. Its very nature is to know itself. It sees itself reflexively. Anything endowed with the capacity of self-reflection we call spirit. Reflexively seeing itself in itself, it understands simultaneously what it is and what it is not. It holds itself open to itself insofar as it is being, and open to others insofar as reality is also beyond itself. This bi-polar openness places it in a world of constant and untiring search, a search for the totality of reality.

Human consciousness is a finite consciousness. The capacity of self-reflection also makes it aware of its own finitude. Man may very well live in a world of oblivion of his real being, happy with the beings of this world. In this state of unauthentic existence, he has discovered neither himself nor the real nature of the other being he is surrounded by. In Kierkegaardian terms he is the aesthetical man<sup>27</sup> living on the spur of the moment. According to Gabriel Marcel, he is the man in the "First Reflection"<sup>28</sup> who has not yet discovered the mystery of being. In Heideggerian terminology, he is a man "Fallen"<sup>29</sup> to this "world" and not a Being-in-the-world. In Biblical terms, he is the Prodigal son before his conversion.<sup>30</sup> But the threat of the falsity of his fancy world can confront him at any moment, mercilessly exposing him to the devastating experience of anxiety and nothingness. In that "privileged" moment of the experienced nothingness his self-reflexivity leads him to the actual awareness of his finitude which necessarily demands an Infinity for its stable foundation and meaningfulness.

Meaning is found in totality. Wholeness is what consciousness is always seeking. Unless and until the wholeness is discovered, the finite consciousness will dynamically tend further and further. We call this inherent tendency of finite consciousness "transcendence". Transcendence is the innate power of the finite consciousness to rise

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27. Soren Kierkegaard, *Either Or*, Vols. I and II.

28. Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery Of Being*, Vol. I, "*Reflection and Mystery*" (London: The Havill, 1950), pp. 77-102.

29. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1963), pp. 175ff.

30. Lk. 15.11-20.

above all finitude by virtue of its basic openness to the totality of being. Therefore, authentic self-discovery is always characterized by transcendence. Transcendence is, as we have seen above, the capacity to rise above all forms of finitude in search of the ultimate meaning of being. Since the ultimate is experienced as the Beyond and the Boundless, man's basic transcendence to the ultimate takes the form of faith. Faith is, therefore, the act of transcendence emerging from the inner dynamics of the finite consciousness which is in search of total truth or complete meaning of existence.

It is this transcendence that keeps man really free. Faith and freedom are thus intimately related. Man is free because he is open to himself and to what is beyond himself. His openness to the beyond is expressed in faith. In short, faith is transcendence; transcendence is freedom; freedom is the silent acknowledgement of that by virtue of which man transcends and refuses to be bound by anything else.

This power of self-transcendence is rooted in the very nature of man, because he partakes in the Divine within him. The ultimate reality is of the nature of consciousness (*cinmātra* or *jñānaswarupa*). Man as finite consciousness is an embodied reflection of it. It is only natural that the reflection looks back to its own original for the sake of its well-being. The original is the ultimate norm, of which the reflection is innately conscious. Internally and spontaneously, it listens to the unuttered voice of the original which it carries within itself, in spite of its finitude and distorted orientation. Real faith is, therefore, the awakening of the Divine that is within man. In the final analysis, it is the Divine itself that is operative in the most profound act of faith. Yet it is at the same time totally human, because it is the human consciousness containing the Divine that is at work in a genuine act of faith. Faith is at the same time an opening of the finite consciousness to its own inner content, which ultimately is the Spirit, the Divine, and the factual out-pouring of this Spirit to actual awareness of man's finite consciousness. As St. Paul says, "The Spirit himself and our Spirit bear united witness that we are children of God."<sup>31</sup>

Rightly did the Indians call human consciousness *jivātman* (the individual self) and Brahman *paramātman* (the Absolute self). Both

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31. Rom. 8.17.

belong to the same reality of spirit endowed with self-consciousness. One is the Absolute, the other is just a reflection of the same. The reflection has no existence apart from the original. Hence it is always understood and interpreted in terms of the original. The awakened orientation of the reflection to its original is faith. But, when it is awakened, since it happens in an embodied consciousness, it always tends to become definite, articulate and particular. Here, faith turns out to be belief, and that too belief in a particular form of the Absolute.

### **Articulated Faith and the Transition of Faith to Belief**

The Absolute defies all articulations. But the human being requires articulated definiteness for his faith. The articulated Absolute assumes anthropomorphic structures and patterns of existence. The first and foremost expression of this is seen in myth. Myths are human attempts to articulate the Absolute in human terms that man may relate himself with God. Thus, myth supplies God with a history of his own, in many ways similar to human history, yet transcending the ordinary sense of time and history of human experience. In and through myths the Absolute gets particularized, gets split up into gods. Myths also contain mysteries, because they speak of what happened in the beginning which no man has witnessed but is nevertheless the primordial event on which the whole human history is based. Faith in the Absolute now becomes faith in the mystery of the myth, which we call belief. By belief we mean committed faith itself, but directed to an already particularized form of Absolute, whether real or imaginary. Man is constantly engaged in making faith his belief. Man as a conscious existence in temporal concreteness needs particular expression of the Divine that he may relate himself to it all the more naturally and spontaneously. Yet he is, and should be, aware of the fact that the Absolute in its real absoluteness transcends all forms of particularities.

This distinction will be maintained only by sophisticated minds. The general tendency will be to identify the Absolute with the visible form of its expression, generally elaborated through myths and mystery cults, giving room for popular beliefs and festivals. The difference between faith and belief, therefore, appears to be a bit artificial, because the concrete form of faith will always be a belief, a *credo*. Yet this distinction is well-founded because in all expressions of *credo*

the Absolute is acknowledged in terms of the human and conditional. In belief there is a meaningful synthesis of the Absolute with its visible or imaginary expression, at the same time accepting and transcending the visible.

Never is belief understandable without the necessary background of faith. Faith in its purity points to the un-understandable, the unsaid, while belief points to the articulate, the said. Faith takes us to the Abyss in Godhead, while belief takes us to the "Ground, the Logos, the Word, through whom everything was made" (Tillich); faith takes us to the *neti, neti* (not this, not this) aspect of reality, while belief elevates us to the "One who is everywhere" (Upanishads). Faith takes us to the *nirguṇa Brahman* while belief takes us to the *sagūṇa Brahman* who is *Iśwara* and the "Lord of the universe" (Śankara). Faith takes us to the inexhaustible Godhead, while belief takes us to a personal God communicated to us through a certain form (Eckhart). Faith takes us to the *Śunya* of reality while belief lifts us up to the same reality conceived as the abode of consciousness (Buddhism: *Hīnayāna* and *Mahāyāna*). Faith takes us to the Allah, the one and only God beyond all articulation, while belief ties Him down to the message of Nabi through whom He was communicated (Islam). Faith takes us to the eternal silence of the Father, while belief helps us see Him in the Son who is manifested in flesh (Christianity). It is this fundamental faith that underlies the movements of the so-called negative theologies, the "apophatic theologies" of the oriental Fathers, whereas it is its transformation into belief that made them say all that they spoke about Christ and his decisive role in salvation history.

Belief is rightly understood only against the background of faith. Faith, as a radical openness of the finite towards the Infinite, is the universal horizon against which the belief takes its shape and finds its ultimate meaning.<sup>32</sup> If belief is deprived of its faith-dimension,

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32. Karl Jaspers speaks about a similar dialectics in his analysis of cypher and corporeality of faith. The dialectics between philosophical faith and revelation is in fact a dialectics between cypher and concreteness of the divine expression which can be understood as a dialectics between faith and belief. But Jasper's idea of subordinating revelation to the philosophical faith has the inherent danger of missing faith altogether as it tends to reduce faith to reason. Cf. Jaspers, *Philosophical Faith and Revelation* (London: Collins, 1967), especially pp. 111 ff; 356 ff.

it easily becomes religious fanaticism, bigotry. Belief devoid of faith gives rise to religious warfare, unfriendly discrimination and communalism, because it misses its power of ultimate transcendence and consequently the source of its real freedom. On the other hand, if belief is combined with faith, the claims of one's own particular religion will be moderate, though sincere and earnest. Sticking to his own particular belief system, by virtue of his fundamental faith, he will see the possibility of the same God-head operating elsewhere.

The Christian claim of Christ as the singular manifestation of the Absolute in history does not actually mean that it wishes to do away with this possibility. This is clear from the documents of Vatican II<sup>33</sup>. The unconditional assertion of this particular containing the universal is not a contradiction. It depends on a transempirical fact whether the universal actually became a particular. If at all it really became so, it is not a matter of philosophical speculation to accept it as decisive. It is just the power of the presence of the universal now appearing in the particular and compelling man to believe. Confronted by this power, which summons man to yield to its fascinating presence, man's faith becomes immediately belief in the One that is "here and now" manifested. Christianity finds the humanity of Christ, which is historically real, as a medium of such manifestation. The saying "Yes" to this manifestation is the very essence of the faith of a Christian, the true claim of which is ultimately understood only by committing oneself to it. Yet, lest the Christian belief in the person of Christ should become closed to truths elsewhere, the belief in Christ should at the same time be balanced by his faith in the Father of whom Christ is the visible expression. The Word who is the consciousness of the Father remains the universal Logos in spite of the particularity it assumes to itself in the form of human flesh. Belief in Christ is at the same time the commitment to the fact of Christ and the transcendence over Christ's humanity to the Word who is the real person in Christ, and is universal and operative everywhere and

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33. Thus for example in the article 2 of the *Declaration on the Relationship to Non-Christian Religions* the Catholic Church says: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of That Truth which enlightens all men." Cf. also Vat. II. *Constitution of the Church*, art. 16.

in all religions. The transcendental openness of man is led by the Word further until it rests in the unfathomable abyss of the Father. Because Son is the manifestation of the Father first as Logos in trinitarian dynamism then as Christ in human history, Christian faith is at the same time faith in the Father, faith in the Logos and belief in Jesus Christ.

The One *credo* in Jesus Christ may give rise to several subordinated beliefs, each of them explicating or rearticulating one or the other aspect of the main content of the basic faith-commitment. We may call these explicitated belief-contents dogmas or articles of faith. These beliefs emerge from one basic belief because of the human need for clarified expressions of one's own faith-content. Though this may be legitimately done to clear up one's believing mind and to enlighten the simple minds, it should always be remembered that no clarification or articulation can ever claim to have properly articulated the ineffable. No dogma of any religion can, therefore, be the final word for the expression of the truth-content of one's own faith; but they can very well be valid expressions of the same, and therefore, be accepted as true, and are meant to lead us to further explorations and experience.

The faith and belief of any religion along with its dogmas give rise to manifold theologies and forms of spirituality. Surviving over for a considerable period of time they collectively constitute what we call tradition.

### From Belief to Tradition

Tradition in its widest sense is co-extensive with faith. It is one's own faith that has survived from generation to generation. But it can never be handed over unless articulated in some way. Hence tradition always implies articulation. Articulation can be in oral or written form, in worship patterns and in ways of spirituality. Tradition in a narrower sense would mean the solidified life style that is now carried on, which, though originally inspired by faith, has now lost much of its relevance in the present circumstances. That is why time and again tradition needs renovation.

Tradition is understandable without a community. The very word *tradere* from which the word tradition has been derived means

to "hand over". It is handed over to someone else, to the one whom one encounters, and generally to one's own progeny. Thus man's basic openness to the other now lays the foundation for what we call tradition.

Religious tradition, therefore, presupposes faith and a world-vision based on the original faith. Values are gradually shaped out of that original vision; ways of life are developed out of those envisaged values. Faith now becomes a way of life a *sanātana dharma*, a pattern of behaviour with a definite system of beliefs and prescribed norms of action. The faith gets more and more solidified. It assumes more and more matter to express itself in flesh and thus gets particularized in time and history. Here there is the great danger of missing the original transcendence of the spirit expressed in faith and falling into the dead customs of tradition. If prophetic men of genuine faith are in the community, tradition will preserve within itself the dynamics of growth and transcendence. If not, a religion will be lacking in inner vitality and inevitably moving towards its death, though externally the addiction to tradition will be extolled. Devoid of internal life, tradition here will be understood only in its narrower sense as rigorous observances of externalities and mechanical recitation or repetition of dogmas. Legalism and pharisaism are typical symptoms of such a tradition. Religious communities have often been suppressed under the dead weight of such lifeless traditions. The Jewish community at the time of Christ is said to be one such community. But from within the community itself there generally arise reformers as well. A religious reformer is one who revives the original faith experience that lies dead in the tradition and prepares his people to face the new challenge. Consequently a new enlightenment, a new life-style may give the tradition a new vitality. This is not destroying one's tradition and opting for another. It is only an awakening to actual consciousness what was lying hidden under such a dead way of life.

Since tradition implies the articulated expression of faith, it follows that a re-articulation of the same faith is also possible, especially when it faces a new challenge. If this principle of basic freedom, which is ultimately founded on real faith and its inherent transcendence is denied, a tradition is bound to lose its inner vigour and vitality. As a socio-historical being man is born into a living or dead tradition and is very much influenced by it. He has to understand the signs, symbols

and language of his people, assimilate them into himself in order to operate in that given society. As Karl-Heinz Weger rightly puts it, "In his free growth towards definitive self-hood man can only be and become himself as one who is inwardly stamped by tradition."<sup>34</sup> Though he cannot entirely free himself from the tradition that has made him what he is, he grows up accepting or rejecting several aspects of his own tradition. Though tradition has a character of givenness, man also sees his tradition as a product of human freedom and, therefore, not necessarily compelled to be what it is now. He either accepts it as natural, or with a newly awakened consciousness challenges it. If the society is responsive to his challenge he wins it over and the tradition, under his leadership, takes a new turn. If the society does not accept his views, either he succumbs to its pressure (a weak challenger) or divides it into two or rejects it totally and founds another (a strong challenger).

Society often irrationally sticking to the existing tradition, does not willingly welcome challengers and reformers. A society in its refusal to change, prefers to silence the reformer instead of giving heed to his proposal. It persecutes him and even puts him to death. The prophets were stoned to death, Christ was crucified, Lincoln was assassinated, Marx was expelled, Gandhi was shot dead, and Russell was imprisoned. All of them wanted to change the existing tradition, though, obviously, they stood for different ideologies. The reformers on the other hand, dedicated as they are, are prepared to face death for the cause they represent, because their self-dedication arises from their deep faith, faith in their respective ideologies which in a religious man will be rooted in his faith in God. Faith equips man with courage as it gives him freedom. The deeper the faith the greater will be the sense of courage that accompanies faith. Freedom and courage are ultimately founded on the same principle in man: his indestructible openness to reality as such.

Tradition is derived from faith; but the same faith may undo tradition when it ceases to be the transparency of the faith it contains. Man by nature is one who lives by faith. In faith he transcends all finitude and tends to the Absolute. In belief he commits himself to

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34. *Sacramentum Mundi* (Ed. by Karl Rahner), Vol. 6, p. 269.

the Absolute who has come down to assume particularity. In tradition he lives the Absolute he has encountered. But when tradition fails to live, by virtue of his very faith he again transcends tradition, rediscovers the absolute in the roots of his own tradition and thus lays the foundation for a new tradition or a new life in his own tradition. Faith, belief and tradition are thus three phases or aspects of one basic movement in man : his religious realization.