

CATHOLIC FAITH

“[R]evelation means that the Supreme Truth has spoken to man and revealed to him truths which are not in themselves evident to the human mind.”

Fr Hugh Pope O.P.

The Catholic faith is not simply a different species of that belief, founded in a compound of opinion and emotion, that Protestants call ‘faith’. Nor is it to be compared with the faith of the Jew, the Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist. It is not to be treated, as many secular journalists and commentators like to treat it, as different only in kind to that Muslim fanaticism which justifies the serial murder of the innocent. The word ‘faith’ can signify a number of different realities. In the language of the science of *Logic*, ‘faith’ is not necessarily a univocal term. In one case, at least, it is *analogous*. What does that mean?

Predicability

Any predicate (something said about a subject as, for instance, ‘good’, in the sentence “This man is good”) falls into one of three different categories. It may signify in the subjects of which it is attributed (called in *Logic*, its ‘inferiors’), a character or reason which is simply the same. For example, the term ‘horse’ when said of *War Admiral*, *Phar Lap* and *Seabiscuit*, signifies a character which is simply the same in each, ‘gramnivorous, hooped, quadruped, animal’. Alternatively, a predicate may signify a character or reason in its subjects which is simply *unsame*. Thus the term ‘tick’ when said of the parasite, and when said of a slight, sharp noise, signifies a character in each which is *unsame*. The term ‘board’ when said of a dressed piece of timber, and when said of a committee of men, signifies a character in each which is *unsame*. The first of these categories of predicate is called *univocal*, from the Latin meaning ‘one voice’. The second is called *equivocal*, from the Latin *aequivocus*, meaning ambiguous.

There is a third, and somewhat more subtle, category. A predicate may signify in its inferiors (the subjects to which it is applied) a character which is both same and *unsame*. The term ‘angry’, when said of an animal and when said of the sea in a particular mood signifies something in each which is at the same time similar, yet dissimilar. In the animal it signifies ‘affected by animal passion inclining its subject to harm an aggressor’. When said of the sea it signifies ‘productive of effects similar to those produced by animal anger’. In the one case it signifies the *essence* of the thing; in the other, its *effects*. The term ‘healthy’ may be said of ‘normally functioning organic constitution’ (ie, the *essence* of health), of the child Peter (a *subject* of health), or of good food (a *cause* of health). There is similarity here, but also dissimilarity, and a moment’s thought will show that the *dissimilarity* in each case is greater than the *similarity*. For in each set only one is the *essence* of the thing denominated. The others borrow the predicate, as it were, metaphorically. And where there are a number of metaphorical users of the term (as in ‘healthy’), each may differ from the other essentially. (The ‘child Peter’ is something *essentially* different from ‘good

food'.) This category of predication is called *analogical* from the Latin *analogus*, derived from Greek *analogos*, both of which mean 'proportionate'.

Now 'faith', when said of the different religions to which men hold allegiance, save one, is a *univocal* term. That is, the word signifies in each of them (save that one) a reason or character which is simply the same, 'human belief, or opinion, based on promises contained in a system of teachings'. When said of the Catholic faith, however, the term signifies a character which, while similar is also dissimilar, where the *dissimilarity is greater than the similarity*. In other words, 'faith' is said then, not univocally, but *analogically*. For in Catholicism, 'faith' signifies something essentially different from that term when used of any other religion. The faith of every religion but Catholicism is something of man: the Catholic faith is not of man; it is of God.

Catholic Faith

The Catholic Church insists that there is a twofold order of knowledge available to man. In the one we know by natural reason; in the other by Divine faith. In the one the object is truths attainable by natural reason; in the other truths hidden from us according to our natural abilities are revealed to us by God. The Catholic faith is the means God gives His chosen ones to know these 'super' natural things.¹

This sense of faith as an intellectual thing, is hidden from other religions whose adherents do not know God as he is because God has not revealed himself in other religions, only in that religion which he himself established. This sense is hidden, too, from the world at large which conceives of faith as always denominating something blind, belief based not on proof, but mere assertion.²

The Catholic faith can only be understood, then, according to its own analysis. Taken *objectively*, faith stands for the sum of the truths revealed by God in sacred scripture and tradition presented by the Church in brief form in the creeds. Taken *subjectively*, faith stands for the habit or virtue by which Catholics assent to those truths.

No one can obtain the Catholic faith for himself: God alone can give it. Our Lord Jesus Christ revealed this Divine donation when he said:

"I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little ones. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father; or who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."³

St John was referring to the same thing when he wrote:

¹ Vatican Council, Session III, Chapter 4 (24.4.1870); cf. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05752c.htm>

² Cf. the article *Faith* in the on line Catholic Encyclopaedia written by Fr Hugh Pope O.P., <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05752c.htm>

³ *Luke* 10: 21-2

“Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us by letting us be called God’s children—and that is what we are.”⁴

No one can obtain the Catholic faith for himself. A man cannot do so simply by developing an interest in Catholic things, as by an historical examination of the Gospel and the miracles that confirm it—though he may thereby dispose himself for its reception. Because it is a gift of God, a man can obtain the Catholic faith only by asking God for it with humility: and then the petitioner must wait upon the Divine Will. Here is the great French Dominican, Fr Henri Lacordaire, on the subject:

“What takes place in us when we believe is a phenomenon of intimate and superhuman light. I do not say that exterior things do not act on us as rational motives of certitude; but the very act of this supreme certitude which I speak of, affects us directly like a luminous phenomenon (infused light of faith); I would even add, like a transluminous phenomenon... Otherwise how could there be proportion between our adherence, which would be natural and rational, and an object that surpasses nature and reason? ...

“A convert will tell you: ‘I read, I reasoned, I wished, and yet I did not arrive. Then one day, I don’t know how, on the street corner or at my fireside, I don’t know, but I was no longer the same: I believed... What took place in me at the moment of final conviction is of a totally different nature from what preceded. Remember the two disciples who were going to Emmaus!’”⁵

The conversion to the faith of the young French poet, Paul Claudel, after a boyhood of infidelity illustrates this well. Having attended High Mass on Christmas Day, 1886, at *Notre Dame* in Paris with little enthusiasm, the 18 year old returned to the church in the afternoon for Vespers, hoping the Church’s liturgy might provide him with inspiration for his poetry.

“I was standing next to the second pillar on the right close to the sacristy. The schoolchildren were singing what I later learned was the *Magnificat*. In an instant my heart was moved, and *I believed*. I believed intensely, with such an upheaval of all my being, with such powerful conviction, with a certitude removing any scope for doubt that all the books, all the reasonings, all the hazards of a troubled life, have not been able to shake my faith, nor to speak truly, to affect it ever since.”⁶

The beginning of Catholic faith in a man signifies the beginning in his soul of the life of Grace—the created participation of the Divine Life. Hence, with the beginning of faith, eternal life is begun in him. And so the Church speaks of its believers as ‘living the life of faith’. A recognition of the value of the thing he has been given is transmitted to every Catholic. He knows his faith can be compromised. He knows it

⁴ 1 *John* 3: 1

⁵ H. Lacordaire, *Conférences à Notre-Dame de Paris*, 17^{ième} conférence, quoted in R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, Herder, London, 1948, Vol. One, pp. 54-5.

⁶ Claudel’s fuller account of his conversion is set forth in the appendix. It is worthy of note that Claudel illustrated perfectly the teaching of Lacordaire cited above in the very place the great preacher had delivered it, *Notre Dame de Paris*. Claudel summarised the effects upon him of the revelation elsewhere in his writings in the expression, “Et voicé vous êtes Quelqu’un tout à coup!” - “Suddenly, you were Someone!”.

can be lost. At first, this realisation may be vague and indeterminate. But, as his faith develops, the value of the gift he has been given becomes apparent. He realises its value as consonant with the worth Christ has accorded the kingdom of heaven in his parables. It is like—

- “a mustard seed a man sowed in his field. It is the smallest of the seeds but when grown is the biggest shrub of all and becomes a tree and the birds of the air come and shelter in its branches.”⁷
- “the yeast a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through.”⁸
- “a treasure hidden in a field which a man finds: he hides it again, goes off joyful, sells everything he owns and goes and buys the field.”
- “a merchant looking for fine pearls: when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it.”⁹
- “a dragnet cast into the sea that brings in a haul of all kinds. When it is full, the fisherman... sitting down... collect the good things... and throw away those that are of no use...”¹⁰

Protestant Antipathy

The lack of perception that the true faith is not from man but from God sheds light upon the antipathy of the early Protestants towards Catholics. Those who *had resiled from* their Catholicism, such as Martin Luther and Henry Tudor, lost the perception that God gives those who believe in him with this Divine faith, and lost, moreover, the recollection of what they had lost. For loss of memory of the faith is part of the penalty one suffers in its abjuration.

Those, such as Henry’s legitimate son, Edward (Edward VI), or Lady Jane Grey, or Henry’s illegitimate daughter, Elizabeth (Elizabeth I), *had never had* this perception. For the faith had never been passed to them in the normal course intended by God, through their parents or those *in loco parentum*. So they judged of the faithful Catholic according to their own blinkered perception of ‘faith’—as a human thing whose parameters were determined by the opinions of Protestant divines grounded (as they asserted) on ‘the true understanding’ of sacred scripture¹¹.

Upon the death of Catholic Queen Mary Tudor on 17th November 1558, her half-sister, Elizabeth ascended the throne. At Mass on the Christmas Day following, 25th December, Elizabeth directed Bishop Owen Oglethorpe, Bishop of Carlisle, not to elevate the Host after the Consecration. He refused, rightly putting his duty to God before that to his Queen. Elizabeth walked out of the church. Elizabeth’s Coronation took place on 15th January 1559. Bishop Oglethorpe offered the Mass after the Coronation. The newly anointed Queen absented herself from the body of the church for the Consecration, nor did she receive Communion.¹²

⁷ *Matthew* 13: 31-2

⁸ *Matthew* 13: 33

⁹ *Matthew* 13: 44-46

¹⁰ *Matthew* 13: 47 et seq.

¹¹ Which was nothing but their own unguided, and therefore *misguided*, assessment of what sacred scripture meant; cf. *Acts* 8: 26 et seq.

¹² Needless to relate, the Bishop was deprived of his see later the same year. He died soon after.

So was the faith introduced into the realm of England 900 years before by Augustine of Canterbury—that principle of the legal and educational structure of the English peoples; the abiding spiritual influence in the lives of countless generations of her forbears—formally abandoned in favour of that merely human thing, the faith of Protestantism.

But Elizabeth was only the instrument of its abandonment. The principal cause had been her frightful father.

Michael Baker

4th November 2007—31st *Sunday in Ordinary Time*

PAUL CLAUDEL'S ACCOUNT OF HIS CONVERSION.

[*Contacts et circonstances*, Oeuvres en Prose, cf. <http://www.paul-claudel.net/homme/foi.html>.]

(1913)

“J'avais complètement oublié la religion et j'étais à son égard d'une ignorance de sauvage. La première lueur de vérité me fut donnée par la rencontre des livres d'un grand poète, à qui je dois une éternelle reconnaissance, et qui a eu dans la formation de ma pensée une part prépondérante, Arthur Rimbaud. La lecture des *Illuminations*, puis, quelques mois après, d' *Une saison en enfer* , fut pour moi un événement capital. Pour la première fois, ces livres ouvraient une fissure dans mon baigne matérialiste et me donnaient l'impression vivante et presque physique du surnaturel. Mais mon état habituel d'asphyxie et de désespoir restait le même.

“Tel était le malheureux enfant qui, le 25 décembre 1886, se rendit à Notre-Dame de Paris pour y suivre les offices de Noël. Je commençais alors à écrire et il me semblait que dans les cérémonies catholiques, considérées avec un dilettantisme supérieur, je trouverais un excitant approprié et la matière de quelques exercices décadents. C'est dans ces dispositions que, coudoyé et bousculé par la foule, j'assistai, avec un plaisir médiocre, à la grand'messe. Puis, n'ayant rien de mieux à faire, je revins aux vêpres. Les enfants de la maîtrise en robes blanches et les élèves du petit séminaire de Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet qui les assistaient, étaient en train de chanter ce que je sus plus tard être le *Magnificat* . J'étais moi-même debout dans la foule, près du second pilier à l'entrée du chœur à droite du côté de la sacristie. Et c'est alors que se produisit l'événement qui domine toute ma vie. En un instant mon cœur fut touché et *je crus*. Je crus, d'une telle force d'adhésion, d'un tel soulèvement de tout mon être, d'une conviction si puissante, d'une telle certitude ne laissant place à aucune espèce de doute, que, depuis, tous les livres, tous les raisonnements, tous les hasards d'une vie agitée, n'ont pu ébranler ma foi, ni, à vrai dire, la toucher. J'avais eu tout à coup le sentiment déchirant de l'innocence, l'éternelle enfance de Dieu, une révélation ineffable.”

“I had completely forgotten religion and had the ignorant attitude of the savage. The first glimmer of truth was given me when I encountered the books of a great poet to whom I owe eternal gratitude, one who has had a major influence on my thought, Arthur Rimbaud. The reading of his *Illuminations* and, a few months later, *A Season in Hell*, was for me a major event. These books opened, for the first time, a crack in my materialist prison giving me a vivid impression, almost physical, of the supernatural. But my habitual state of suffocation and despair remained the same.

“Such, then, was the state of the unhappy adolescent who, on 25th December 1886, betook himself to Notre Dame de Paris to observe the Christmas liturgy. So I began to write, and it seemed to me that in these Catholic ceremonies, viewed from my position of dilettantish superiority, I saw suitable stimulation and material for certain decadent works. With sentiments such as these, shouldered and jostled by the crowd, I assisted indifferently at High Mass. Later, having nothing better to do, I returned to the church for Vespers. The schoolchildren in white dresses and the pupils of the junior seminary of St Nicholas du Chardonnet were singing what I learned later was the *Magnificat*. I was standing in the crowd near the second pillar from the choir entrance close to the sacristy. And so it was that the event occurred which has dominated the whole of my life. In an instant my heart was moved, and *I believed*. I believed intensely, with such an upheaval of my being, with such powerful conviction, with a certitude removing any scope for doubt that, all the books, all the reasonings, all the hazards of a troubled life, have not been able to shake my faith, nor to speak truly, to affect it since. Suddenly, I experienced the heartrending blow of innocence, the eternal childhood of God, an unspeakable revelation.”