

FAITH, in probably the best-known definition of it, is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Although this definition itself comes from the Christian scriptures, specifically from the anonymous epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament, it can, *mutatis mutandis*, be applied across a broad spectrum of religions and religious traditions. Whether or not the term *faith* appears in those traditions is, at least in part, a matter of how various terms are translated into modern Western languages. More importantly, however, *faith* is used, even in Judaism and Christianity (where it has been the most successfully domesticated), to cover an entire cluster of concepts that are related to one another but are by no means identical. If there is truth in the contention that *faith* is the abstract term with which to describe that attitude of the human mind and spirit of which prayer is the concrete expression, then one or more of these concepts may probably be said to play some part in every religious tradition, and in that sense at least, “faith” may likewise be said to appear there. Hence an enumeration

of these discrete concepts, each of them in some way a synonym for *faith*, may serve to provide, if not a logical definition, then at any rate a cumulative description, of it.

FAITH-AS-FAITHFULNESS. In its most fundamental meaning, faith has been defined as faithfulness, and as such, it has been taken as an attribute both of the divine and of believers in the divine. The Latin adjective *pious*, for example, was used in Vergil's *Aeneid* to describe *pious Aeneas* or *pious Achates*, but it also appeared there in such a phrase as *pia numina* to characterize the reciprocal fidelity that the gods manifested in their dealings with human beings; something of both senses, presumably, attached to the word when it became a standard part of the official title of the Roman emperor, most familiarly in the case of Antoninus Pius (r. 138–161 CE). *Pious* went on having both meanings also in postclassical Latin, as the usage of the “Dies Irae” attests. The reciprocity implied in the concept of faith when predicated of human social relations, where (as in the notion of “keeping faith” with someone) “faith” has become almost synonymous with “loyalty,” has carried over likewise into its use for the divine-human relation. Wherever the gods were said to promise something in that relation, *faith* would seem to be an appropriate term for their keeping or fulfilling the promise. Conversely—and much more customarily—it was the appropriate term for the loyalty or “fealty” (that English word is indeed derived, via medieval French, from the Latin *fidelitas*) that the gods in turn rightly expected of mortals. In those religions in which the initiates received a mark on their body as a sign of their special bond with the divine, these marks have often been seen as a pledge and a reminder to those who wore them that they were expected to remain faithful to the terms of that special bond. The consequences of a breach of faith-as-faithfulness formed the basis for practices of discipline, punishment, and in most traditions possible reinstatement, though only after a period of purgation and testing (see “The Community of Faith,” below). Even where the other connotations of “faith” discussed below have appeared to predominate, this emphasis on faith-as-faithfulness, both divine and human, has never been absent, pertaining as it does to the very concept of adhering to the practices, structures, obligations, or beliefs of any particular way of having faith. When it has been divorced from some or all of those other connotations, however, faith-as-faithfulness could all too easily be reduced to the formalism and external propriety that the prophets and critics in many religious traditions have attacked.

FAITH-AS-OBEDIENCE. Faith as faithfulness has expressed itself not only in loyalty but in obedience, yet obedience has meant even more than faithfulness. The precise content of such obedience has varied enormously with the content of what was perceived to have been the divine will or law. Obedience, therefore, carried both liturgical and moral connotations. An imperative to reenact, periodically or once in a lifetime, the acts of the divine model required the obedient and meticulous observance of the demands that those acts had placed upon the believer. Initiation into the faith involved

learning the specific methods of such ritual observance, with rites of passage frequently serving as the occasion for such learning. Where the divine will was conceived of as having laid down rules not only for ritual actions but for ethics, the obedience of faith meant moral behavior in conformity with divine commands; thus in Hinduism, *dharma* as moral law required righteous conduct. Ordinarily there was no explicit antithesis between ethics and ritual action, which together were the content of authentic obedience, often enjoined in the same gnomic saying or story. But the declaration of the prophet Samuel in the Hebrew scriptures, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (*1 Sm.* 15:22), articulated the awareness, which other religions have shared with Judaism, that faith-as-obedience was above all a compliance with the moral imperative. Presupposed in those words was the belief, central to Judaism, that the moral imperative had been made known in the historical revelation of the word of God to Moses, and through him to the people of Israel. But they have been no less applicable in those religious and philosophical traditions that have emphasized the inner imperative of conscience rather than the outer imperative of law as the norm of ethical action: Here, too, faith has been above all obedience, in Immanuel Kant's formula, “the recognition of all our duties as divine commands.” Even where faith has been defined primarily as trust or as worship or as creed (see below), obedience was inevitably a constitutive element of it.

FAITH AND WORKS. The definition of faith as obedience, and yet as somehow not reducible to obedience, points to the perennial and unavoidable problem of the relation between faith and works. On the one hand, even the most theocentric versions of faith have found themselves obliged to assert, often in self-defense against the charge that they were severing the moral nerve, that they were in fact reinforcing ethics precisely by their emphasis on its vertical dimension: It has been a universal conviction of believers, across religious boundaries, that “faith without works is dead.” On the other hand, those religious systems that have appeared to outsiders, whether critical or friendly, to equate faith and works and to be indifferent to any considerations except the “purely” moral ones prove, upon closer examination, to have been no less sensitive to the dialectic between works and faith. Especially since the Enlightenment, Western critics of traditional supernaturalism have taken Confucianism as the ideal of a religion that eschewed metaphysical subtleties to concentrate on the one thing needful, and they have either criticized traditional Western religions for not conforming to that ideal or reinterpreted them in accordance with it. For in the *Analects* Confucius repeatedly professed ignorance about the mysteries of “Heaven” and avoided discussing the miraculous phenomena in which conventional faith had sought manifestations of supernatural power; even the question of personal immortality did not admit of a clear and definite answer. Rather, he concentrated his attention on works of

piety and of service to others, preferring generosity to greed and virtue to success. All of this Confucius (like many other religious teachers) called “the way,” but it is an unwarranted modern reductionism to see in this attitude a moralistic preoccupation with works alone, at the expense of “faith.” For “Heaven,” which he said had “infused the virtue that is in me,” was the authentic source of the works themselves, as well as the ultimate foundation for the serenity that made the works possible. The faith of Confucius may have been less detailed than that of some teachers in its information about the ontological status of “Heaven” and similar speculative questions, but he knew and expressed a confidence in its providential care as the basis for the works with which he and his disciples were to serve the will of “Heaven.”

FAITH-AS-TRUST. Such a confidence in the providential care of “Heaven” underlies the definition of faith-as-trust. In the classic formulation of Martin Luther, “to ‘have a god’ is nothing else than to trust and believe him with our whole heart,” because “it is the trust and faith of the heart alone that makes both God and an idol” (*Large Catechism*). Many of the conventional metaphors for the divine in various traditions, from “rock” and “mountain” to “mother” or “father,” have served as representations of the conviction that “the trust and faith of the heart” could appropriately be vested in such an object, and that the divine object would prove worthy of human trust. Conventional practices like divination and prayer may likewise be read as expressions of the belief that the divine will—if it could once be known, or perhaps even if it was mysterious and ultimately unknowable—deserved trust. The historic triad of faith, hope, and love (best known from the New Testament, but paralleled elsewhere) has made it necessary for expositors to clarify the distinction between faith and hope as they were both applied to the expectation of future blessings. However, the definition of faith-as-trust has been a way of focusing such expectation on the reliability of divine providence in both prosperity and failure: For good or ill, the ways of the divine will could be counted on, even though the details of their specific intent might not be discernible at any given moment. Such faith-as-trust even in the inscrutable goodness of the divine order presupposed a pattern of divine guidance in the past, which made it safe to conclude that there would be a continuity of such guidance into the future. Historically as well as psychologically, therefore, it is difficult to conceive of faith-as-trust in the absence of such a pattern, be it the outcome of the individual’s own cumulative autobiography or of the history of the community to which the individual has come to belong (or of both). Once established on the basis of this pattern of divine guidance, faith-as-trust has implied that the vicissitudes of the moment could not, or at any rate should not, undermine the confidence that ultimately the object of that trust would be vindicated. As Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said in his autobiography, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, “Faith is a profound sense of security in regard to both the present and the future; and this assurance springs from confidence.” In the choruses of the Greek tragedians or in the re-

flections of the Muslim mystics or in the discourses of Job, the ambiguities and difficulties of such confidence in the face of concrete reality have served to deepen the understanding of trust and to transform Pollyanna-like optimism into mature faith-as-trust.

FAITH-AS-DEPENDENCE. This combination of mystery and reliability in the divine will, even after that will has made itself known, has introduced into the definition of faith the element of dependence and submission. For if obedience to the divine will was the completion of the circle of faith in the moral realm, dependence on the divine will was the way faith-as-trust affirmed the relation of human weakness to divine power. In those traditions in which the divine has been seen as creator and/or preserver, faith-as-dependence has been, in the first instance, an affirmation of the origin and derivation of humanity and of its world; in those traditions that have tended not to distinguish as sharply between “being” as applied to the divine and as applied to human beings, dependence has been the basis for identifying the locations of both the divine and the human within the “great chain of Being”; in those traditions that have emphasized the recurrence of patterns known to be embedded within the very structure of the cosmos, dependence has made it possible for the community and its individual members to participate, through myth and ritual, in such patterns; and in those traditions that have interpreted human history as the arena in which the will and way of the divine could above all be discerned, dependence has employed the recitation of the decisive events in that history to reinforce the sovereignty of God as the one who was active and knowable within, but always transcendent over, such saving and revelatory events. Thus in Islam (a term that is commonly translated into English as “submission,” but that might perhaps as well be translated as “dependence”), the saying of the Qur’ān, “God causes whom he wills to err, and whom he wills he guides; and you shall assuredly be called to account for your doings,” gave voice to the Prophet’s conviction that the believer must depend on the divine will regardless of circumstances, but that such dependence did not preclude human accountability. In Islam, the Five Pillars of Faith were the specific moral and cultic duties for which every Muslim believer would be held accountable, yet the first two Pillars (the recitation of faith in the oneness of God and the daily prayers) were declarations of the paradoxical affirmation that God was not dependent on creatures or their performance of these duties but would be sovereign regardless. That paradox has been central to the definition of faith-as-dependence in many religious traditions, with theories ranging all the way from thoroughgoing determinism to apparent moralism (for example, to use the terms familiar to the Western tradition, all the way from Calvinism to Pelagianism) as efforts to come to terms with both poles of a dialectical truth.

FAITH-AS-EXPERIENCE. In one way or another, each of these definitions of faith has been derived from faith-as-experience. For even the most transcendent notions of the mystery of the divine will have, by their very act of affirming

the mysteriousness of that mystery, laid claim to an experience in which the individual believer or the community tradition has caught a glimpse of just how mysterious the divine could be. Although mystics and prophets—and, following their lead, historians and philosophers of religion—have often spoken of such experiences in isolation from the continuum of human consciousness, that is not, of course, how they have actually occurred. From the biographies of seers and saints it is obvious that these experiences often came in response and in reaction to specific moments of exaltation or depression, in feverish intensity or in the excitement and release of love and death. That inseparability of faith-as-experience from all the other experiences of life has persuaded some observers of the phenomenon to see it as in fact the sublimation and “supernatural” reinterpretation of an essentially “natural” event. Ludwig Feuerbach, both as historian and as philosopher, penetrated deeply into this aspect of faith-as-experience; and Freudian psychology has been especially successful in explaining religious experience in its relation to the totality and complexity of how the human mind has attempted to cope with all the data of its experience. But in opposition to the reductionism that has frequently been represented as the only acceptable conclusion from this quality of faith-as-experience, the philosophical interpretation of religion, systematized perhaps most effectively by Rudolf Otto, has sought to identify what was distinct about this experience even if it was not separate from other experience. Otto’s formulation, which has since become all but canonical, is “the experience of the Holy.” He called it “a category of interpretation and valuation peculiar to the sphere of religion,” and declared that “there is no religion in which it does not live as the real innermost core, and without it no religion would be worthy of the name.” Yet precisely because faith’s experience of the holy has upon further reflection come to include the recognition of its inherent ineffability, the language of faith has drawn upon other experience—aesthetic, moral, intellectual—to be able to speak about the unspeakable at all.

THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH. In the sacred literatures of religious faith, faith-as-experience has often been described in highly individualistic terms: How the poet or prophet has come to know the holy in personal experience has dominated how he or she has described that experience for others, so that they in turn, one at a time, might also come to share in such an experience and duplicate it for themselves. Individualism of that kind underlay, for example, the recurring definition of religion as “what one does with one’s solitariness.” Except for passing moments of intense mystical rapture, however, such individualism has been shown to be illusory. And except for occasional glossolalia, the very language in which the individual has spoken about faith-as-experience has been derived from the history of the community, even when that language has been aimed against the present corruption of the community or when it has been directed toward the founding of a new and purer community. When examined in its total context, moreover, it becomes apparent

that the individualized experience of faith has repeatedly taken place during or after corporate worship: The setting of the private vision has often been the temple itself; or when the vision has come in the solitude of the desert or in the privacy of the soul, it has come as a consequence of participation in the ritual of the temple or as a response to instruction in the lore of the community’s tradition. Just as the distinction between the experience of faith and general human experience has engaged the interest of psychologists of religion, so sociologists of religion have probed the connection (in the formulas of Joachim Wach) between “religion and natural groups,” as well as then the “specifically religious organization of society.” The community of faith, as coextensive with the family or tribe, has conferred its authority on that social organization in marriage, war, and commerce, and has derived its sanctions from it in turn. Then exclusion from the believing community was identical with ostracism from the natural community. But with the more sophisticated identification of the specific nature of faith has come a distinction between the two, often through the emergence of an *ecclesiola in ecclesia* as a more precisely delineated community of faith or (using a pejorative word in a nonpejorative sense) a “sect.”

FAITH AND WORSHIP. The community of faith has always been a community of worship; in fact, worship has been far more explicitly a part of its definition than has faith. Western observers of “primitive” societies have sometimes been prevented from recognizing this, either (as in the case of some Christian missionaries) by too particularistic an understanding of worship or (as in the case of some modern anthropologists) by too reductionistic an understanding of ritual. One of the most important scholarly sources for the new and deeper recognition of faith-as-worship has been the investigation of the interrelation between myth and ritual: Myth came to be read as the validation, in the deeds of the ancients or of the gods, of what the ritual now enjoined upon believers; and ritual acquired a new dimension by being understood as not merely outward ceremonial performed *ex opere operato* but as the repetition in the believers’ actions of what the myth recited in words about the divine actions that had made the world and founded the community. Amid an infinite variety of ritual forms and liturgical prescriptions, therefore, worship has defined “faith.” For example, the fourth and last of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism as formulated by Gautama Buddha himself was the recognition of the methods by which the believer could overcome the inner yearning for pleasure out of which the misery of *dukkha* sprang. Similarly, the eighth and last part of the Eightfold Path of Buddhism consisted in proper meditation, which was inseparable from the first seven. Methodologically, the task of discovering the specifics of the faith expressing itself in a particular worship ritual continues to challenge the ingenuity of historians of religion, as is manifested by their disputes over the meaning of (to cite an example present in several traditions) the ritual of circumcision. Even the widely shared assumption that the ritual antedated the myth, which in turn antedated the theological explanation of both, must be mod-

ified by the repeatedly attested rise of new rituals out of the composition of the myth or after the adoption of the theological doctrine. Yet in the absence of any verifiable statistical data it does seem a safe generalization to suggest that, even more than faith-as-obedience to a moral imperative or commandment, faith-as-worship has defined faith for most of the human race through most of its history. Even the term *orthodoxy*, which has acquired the meaning "right doctrine" in most of the languages where it appears and which carries that meaning also when it is used in a secular sense for political or literary theories, really means "right worship," as the Russian translation of the word, *pravoslavie* ("the right way to celebrate"), demonstrates.

FAITH-AS-CREDO. Yet *orthodoxy* does mean primarily "right doctrine" now, and one of the definitions of "faith" is "credo" (which is the Latin for "I believe"). Because so much of the history and interpretation of world religions has been the work of Christian thinkers trained in the doctrinal theology of the several Christian churches, early scholarship in "comparative religion" regularly consisted of a review, doctrine by doctrine, of what the various religions were perceived as having taught. As often as not, such reviews were organized according to the schema of categories devised by Thomistic or orthodox Lutheran and Reformed systematic theologians, even, for example, in so sensitive a treatment as Karl Friedrich Nägelsbach's *Homeric Theology* (1840) and *Post-Homeric Theology* (1857). The artificiality and arbitrariness of imposing these categories from the outside on literary and religious traditions having an integrity of their own led later generations of scholars to employ greater caution in claiming to have discovered "doctrinal" meanings (in the sense in which Christian theology spoke of "doctrines") in non-Christian religions, even sometimes in postbiblical Judaism. Significantly, however, one outcome of the tensions that have arisen between various of those religions and modern thought (see "Faith and Knowledge" below) has been the development, within the traditions themselves and at the hands of their own faithful devotees, of something very like systematic doctrinal theology, which has included comparative judgments about their relation to other traditions and their "doctrines." As already suggested, nevertheless, the definition of faith-as-credo has been especially prominent in Western and Christian thought.

In medieval usage, for example, the Latin word *fides* must commonly be translated as "the faith" rather than simply as "faith," because it referred in the first instance to the content of what was believed (*fides quae creditur*) rather than to the act of believing (*fides qua creditur*), and specifically to one of the orthodox creeds of the church, generally the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed; once defined, orthodox doctrines were binding *de fide*, by the authority of the faith. To "have faith," then, meant first of all to "hold the faith" as this had been laid down in the apostolic "deposit of faith" and legislated by church fathers, councils, and popes. And even the repudiation of the medieval system by the Protestant Reformation, a major plank of which was Luther's elevation of

faith-as-trust over the Roman Catholic faith-as-credo, still retained, and in some ways even intensified, the insistence on right doctrine, a knowledge of which and an assent to which were the necessary presupposition for a correct faith-as-trust.

FAITH AND TRADITION. Acceptance of a "deposit of faith" has implied some notion of tradition as that which has been *traditum*, first "handed down" and then "handed on." Although the thinkers of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment drew a sharp distinction between "traditionary religion" and "natural religion," vastly preferring the latter to the former, it was in fact only the former that was to be found in the history of religion; eventually even the "natural religion" of the Enlightenment acquired a certain traditional content and was transmitted from one generation to the next by way of an intellectual tradition. "Traditionary religion," therefore, has defined itself and its faith on the basis of received tradition. The myth of how holy things have happened; the ritual of how holy acts were to be performed; the rules of conduct by which the faithful were expected to guide their lives; the structure through which the holy community was founded and governed; the doctrine by which the community gave an account of the myth and ritual—all these expressions of faith have been the subject and the content of the holy tradition. In all those religions that have ascribed normative status to a holy book, the question of faith-as-tradition has taken a special form, as they have sought to deal with the question of the relation between the revelation in the book, as given once and for all, and the continuing revelation in the tradition. Reformers in each of those groups have drawn an antithesis between the purity of the original scripture and the accretions of later tradition, which needed to be expunged, while defenders of tradition have posited continuity between the scripture and the tradition, sometimes by characterizing them as "two sources of revelation" but sometimes by describing the ongoing tradition as the process through which the properly validated authorities have gradually made explicit the content of the faith already implicit in scripture. Thus a twentieth-century Russian Orthodox thinker, Vladimir Lossky, defined tradition as "the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church, communicating to each member of the Body of Christ the faculty of hearing, of receiving, of knowing the Truth in the Light which belongs to it, and not according to the natural light of human reason." By setting faith into the framework of such a theory of tradition, Lossky and his counterparts in other faiths (who could have used much of the same language, substituting other proper names) have sought to combine the static view of tradition as a "deposit of the faith" in the past with a dynamic view of tradition as "living faith" in the present and future.

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE. Whether it has been interpreted as a second channel of revelation for faith or as the development of a truth already implicitly present in the original deposit of faith, tradition has been a way of knowing the truth. Faith, therefore, has been taken to be a species of knowledge

differing from ordinary knowledge by its superior claims: An arcane character, a transcendent content, privileged channels of communication, or divine certainty (or all of the above). So long as such claims remained publicly uncontested, faith could stand as objectively sure, even when subjectively the individual believer might question or doubt it. There is no reason to suppose that such existential questioning and doubting have ever been absent from the experience of faith, and plenty of reason to find evidence of their presence in the artifacts and literary remains of various religious faiths from the past. What has made the situation of religious faith in the present unique, however, is the gravity and the universality of the tension between faith and knowledge. One by one, each of the world faiths has been obliged to confront the competing truth claims not only of other faiths, as it had perhaps done before, but of other forms of knowledge that seemed to render any faith-as-knowledge, regardless of which faith was involved, superfluous or absurd. The identification of faith with accounts of miracles and similar wondrous events that a later generation has found to be, quite literally, incredible has undermined the authority of the faith itself. Orthodox methods of harmonizing away contradictions in the authoritative tradition through allegory or a theory of multiple meanings have not been able to withstand the pressures of the historical method of dealing with the tradition. The discovery or invention of alternate means of dealing with those crises of life and needs of society for which faith had served as the divinely prescribed cure relegated it to a secondary status as a superstitious nostrum still needed only by those who did not know any better. When Immanuel Kant said in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) that he had "found it necessary to deny *knowledge* of God, freedom, and immortality in order to find a place for *faith*," he was speaking for believers in many traditions who have salvaged faith by making it invulnerable to the claims and counterclaims of knowledge; but in so doing, they have also brought into question most of the other functions of faith. At the same time, the very challenge of knowledge to faith has produced a clearer understanding both of faith's relation to other aspects of human experience and of its distinctive meaning and power.

SEE ALSO Doubt and Belief; Knowledge and Ignorance; Obedience; Orthopraxy; Physics and Religion; Tradition.

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