

Faith and Ideological Belief in God

The different nature of faith and belief in God

Clinging to an ideology which sets God in the center of its teaching is different from faith. When we courageously and firmly follow to its end the path along which our encounter with our own human condition leads us, faith is the first choice from which we cannot escape. Despite its religious context, this clinging to an ideology, which is half a matter of the intellectual and half a question of feeling, does not go back directly to what is absolute unless it is supported at least by an implicit beginning of faith in God. It cannot promote the growth of that faith by its own means alone. On the contrary, it wrongfully replaces it. For as long as we are satisfied with it, it will prevent us from taking the blind and unique step required by faith. It comes to us from outside and is only concerned superficially with us.

Unlike faith, even an ardent clinging to an ideology that is firmly rooted in us by our heredity or because of long practice is not sufficiently our own for it to be able to reach our being fully. So long as faith in God is not primary, religious beliefs can only be goods which we possess or from which we derive some consolation that we may or may not openly confess. Because of some collective involvement, they are normally obvious to us and we hardly ever need to ask ourselves about them. We refrain from doing this because we lack interest or because of prudence, mixed with a certain degree of superstitious fear. Not publicly perhaps, but privately in our conscience, we also quite often regard these beliefs as no more than probable, for reasons that are no more than briefly glimpsed. We consider it wise to set them aside in practice and not to examine them too closely, as we would other aspects of our knowledge.

Ideological belief is less exacting than faith in God

Faith in God, if it is to remain pure and true to itself, calls on us to recognize that we have to continue in absolute ignorance of the mystery of God,

despite a natural tendency to seek reassurance in precisely defined convictions. Ideological beliefs about God, on the other hand, make our existence and our activity clear and classify them within their intellectual framework. They satisfy our need for knowledge and certainty and lead us to believe in God as we believe in them.

It draws our attention away from ourselves and from reality

Ideological speaking about God conceals God at the same time by what it says about him. Because of its probability, it hides him behind the image that it creates of him. Even when it is the result of an elaborate development, its concepts and images are always derived from a relatively superficial experience of societies and things, because they are suggested to everyone without distinction. They only make use of material that is remote from what is essential to us in order to teach about God. They cannot utilize the full range of subtle emphases and meanings, which are in themselves quite defective, but which are given to us only by a profound understanding of our human condition when we reach within ourselves at a personal level and thus come to faith in God. The systematic structures of these ideological beliefs which are presented to us and which are in accordance with the current ideas of society and our own concerns prevent us from encountering ourselves in our basic solitude. This ideology draws our attention away from our own human mystery. Without a knowledge of that mystery, the mystery of God will always be not only inaccessible, but also radically alien to us.

We welcome religious ideology in an instinctive rather than a reflected way. It reveals to us a universe that is reduced in dimensions and makes that universe almost human and familiar to us. It enables us to overcome a feeling of loneliness and strangeness on earth. This is the principal reason why we are attracted by ideological belief and are able to cling to it. It conceals the inhuman brutality of reality that is subjected to mechanical and biological forces which insure its stability. It interprets events as wills that go back directly to God, but at the same time it conceives them as mortal human wills, whatever divine quality it may ascribe to them.

When this religious ideology is sufficiently developed and at the same time preserves the gratuitous nature of the divine decrees without retaining their arbitrary character, it affirms that there is a certain intimacy in the relationship with those who are concerned in them. It also tries to provide a basis for the events that have taken place by reference to the future, if the past or the present does not give sufficient justification. It gives the facts an intention that enables us to explain them and gives them a meaning that corresponds to our concerns. As soon as events have been made less dangerous in this purely external way, we are able to trust them and abandon ourselves to them with a

tranquillity that would be very difficult to achieve without it. This tranquillity is in no sense passive.

Thanks to this religious ideology, we do not need to cling personally to events or to confront and dominate them in an interior way by means of faith in ourselves. We do not have to accept them actively, raise them up to our own human level in their rough, unpolished state and introduce them by an act of creation into our own existence. Because of the blessing conferred by ideology, we can limit ourselves to enduring them or to conforming to them as others might do, whatever our inner state may be or whatever our past may have been.

Finally, religious ideology helps us to make an idol for ourselves that corresponds to our hopes and fears and, perhaps remotely but quite accurately, to what is best in us, although from time to time it also strengthens what is mediocre in us. This idol, which is developed and created by ideology, satisfies a natural tendency that we have to approach the mysterious element. It satisfies our taste for the marvelous and at the same time corresponds to our fundamental need for security.

The idol created by ideology is needed by people at the beginning of their religious life

This idol is not an abstract entity if we are spiritually alive. It calls for a much greater degree of cool, measured and subtly shaded intellectual clinging. It must be the object of belief, love and fear. It is not enough for it simply to be known. It exercises significant power and reveals the importance of the elemental and primary needs to which it corresponds. It would not arouse such a strong echo if it did not come from our deepest depths. It does not come from the innermost depths of our being, which we have never sounded sufficiently, but it is not remote from our nature. It was rather born in our bowels and it is there that it takes hold of us.

All spiritual progress begins with spontaneous attraction and initially calls for nothing more than an openness to all that is human. In the same way, religious ideology, so long as it is in tune with the spirit of the times, provides an initial and perhaps crude and even blasphemous idea of God. It is good to receive that idea, however imperfect it may be, although it has to be transcended later. There can be no doubt that the early hopes that are experienced originally in the case of this ideology and are fulfilled in the cult of the idol made by the ideology are, to begin with, unformed or badly expressed and contain many superficial elements with a social origin. It is for this reason too that they are, again to begin with, so effective. There can also be little doubt that they are narrow and base in many respects. All the same, both the idol and the ideology that creates it are indispensable at the beginning.

For human beings, this idol provides light and force, however impure they may be. It arouses us from our torpor. It raises us above ourselves as nothing else can do in the state in which we find ourselves, that is, hardly emerged from unconsciousness and still almost completely dominated by sociological influences. It is sometimes so heavily disguised that it cannot be recognized, but it is really always a messenger sent by God, who descends to the level of the humanity of the persons in question. We are prepared to purify our ideology, without knowing that we are doing it, in order to go beyond it, to the extent that we serve it.

We create our idol by following the means available to us in our social environment and by our own personal means. We also submit to the disciplines imposed on us by our ideology. Those disciplines will, at least at the beginning, be fairly closely in accordance with the laws of our growth into humanity. We will also construct our idol by responding generously to the appeals that it makes. These appeals come from depths within us of which we are ignorant and which our idol does not recognize. In this way, we can advance in our humanity to a certain point and come closer to the clarity and strength which will lead us to criticize our clinging to an ideology and therefore to go beyond our idol. This clarity and strength will, if we do not give way, enable us in time to believe, that is to have true faith in God, with a faith that is really worthy of God and ourselves.

We must go beyond this idol at every stage of our spiritual life if we are to come to faith in God

We can be preoccupied by our possessions, but are still able to transcend them and, after possessing and using them, to reject them completely. Similarly, we can and must be able to criticize the ideology that we have constructed for ourselves when the time comes, if we are to live spiritually. Even if we do not know it, we are greater than the idol that we have made for ourselves. If the idol brings about a sense of what is sacred in us, this is good, but the same idol still continues to be the god of our needs for a certain time. It is not the God of our being. It comes from us and it satisfies what is merely contingent in us, even if it is indispensable. It does not affirm, nor does it strengthen what is essential in us. Even when we are fully alive, the time will always come when we can no longer accept this idol as real, because of the attitude required by the ideology underlying the idol and the deepening of human experience resulting from it. We will then, if we do not go beyond it, not be able to continue to make spiritual progress, even though we may have raised it to a very high degree of excellence.

So long as we do not give way to a fanaticism that is often no more than a false representation of a generous ardor that has been deprived of all critical

spirit and so long as we do not yield to the routine conservatism that often lurks beneath protective intellectual activities, we will be led to improve our religious ideology and the idol provided by it, on condition that we grow in authenticity. We are able to do this by our own means. These approaches are of great importance. They call for courageous and tenacious faithfulness. They never come to an end since, as believers make use of them, they continue to grow in their humanity and in this way become more and more demanding. They show us that God is more and more difficult to conceive and they make it more and more difficult to encompass him within any ideology. They also surround the very existence of God with doubts in our eyes, since we regard this as depending on the kind of evidence on which we base our ideology. These doubts constrain us to become more conscious of ourselves and our human condition. Indirectly, then, by the absence of all doctrine and the fundamental impotence of all knowledge and directly by means of a personal deepening and an encounter with the human condition, the way is prepared for the coming of complete faith and belief in God.

The idea of God, stripped of the absolute character that is given to it by belief still preserves, however, the advantage of custom, as long as it is sufficiently adapted in its mode of expression to the believer's level of humanity. In the absence of any better way, believers have to try, in the explicit practice of their religious life, to be satisfied with this form of expression. Even if we do succeed in finding a better language, this too will one day prove to be insufficient and imperfect. Unfortunately, we are often so indifferent or so scrupulous that we continue to speak about God using the same words, because we think that we should or we want to persist in giving those words the same value and the same meaning. In fact, however, we are pretending and deceiving ourselves at the very point at which it is important to be authentic.

Our progress in conceiving God and in going beyond that idea of God—something that we must do if we are to reach faith in God—is closely united to the deepening of our personal experience. As we become conscious of all the artificial, contingent and fortuitous elements contained in our religious ideology, we withdraw from it the absolute character that we gave it without any restrictions at the beginning. We discover its origins and make its development explicit. We draw attention to the inner contradictions, despite the vain attempts to reduce them in the past—efforts that have only succeeded in making them more complex. We expose the reasons which make our ideology attractive rather than plain. We correctly assess the extent to which it inflates the imagination and the feelings and the exact nature of the systematic distinctions and the intellectual structures with which it adorns itself and which at one time attracted us so much. We see more clearly both the direct and the indirect practical consequences that our religious ideology contains. We also recognize that they are all to some extent and in certain circumstances capa-

ble of harming our deep human reality. We gradually release ourselves from the almost physical embrace that comes from a continuous repetition of the same affirmations and the same attitudes. We set ourselves free from the oppressive grasp of collective clings to ideology. If we did not experience this reaction, which is healthy, energetic and even brutal, it is unlikely that we would be confronted with the question that we have to ask ourselves in order to believe in God rather than simply imagine him and in this way make him probable for ourselves.

Spontaneous belief in God can be expressed on the basis of our concerns and our experiences of life in society

To begin with, we were only able to think of God by means of what we could see and touch. The idea that we formed of him was based almost exclusively on the knowledge and understanding that we had acquired in this way. The relationships that we could claim to have with God were all of the same order as those that we had with the material world that governed us or with the people who controlled us. Our submission to fate and our struggle against fatality became obedience to the deity in a religious sense. This formed the essential aspect of our religion.

At their lowest level, these beliefs are purely utilitarian. We have them in order to ward off the dangers that threaten us or to obtain what we want for ourselves. When we begin to ask questions about the world that surrounds us, they become a cosmology. In both cases, they still remain at the level of knowledge. Believers possess them and are, in turn, possessed and unconsciously limited by them, because they are sufficient for them.

At the origin of these beliefs is not a personal activity, but society. Its structure is intimately tied to these beliefs and makes use of them on the one hand, while protecting them on the other from criticism. It keeps a store of them and, with the help of all kinds of pressures, imposes it. Society also derives its inspiration from the knowledge that is current at the time and, in return, does not ask for anything more than a passive welcome in the name of what is generally obvious, of the wisdom of its traditions and of submission to some authority that is higher than we. All that it requires is to be respected by the established order at the level of teaching and custom, even though it is not necessary for the proprieties that are observed to be understood. It even goes so far as to make a virtue out of this blind and ignorant obedience.

The ancients thought that God was omnipotent—the undisputed sovereign power over men and events. They believed that he acted directly and that this action depended on his pleasure alone. He acted not only in the most trivial circumstances, but also in the most painful and outrageous situations. This caused them scandal, but they piously suppressed it. In this will that

they attributed to God, they found an explanation for and a justification of everything that happened to them, while reserving the right to return, when it seemed to be necessary to do so, to an attitude of fatalism concealed beneath a respect for the mystery of God's ways. Every enigma with which they were confronted was at once solved in this way. Thanks to their beliefs, they were ignorant of ignorance.

This belief is instinctive and, at the critical times of one's life, cannot be destroyed

This way of believing in God is offered to us spontaneously throughout the whole of our lives, so long as we have some interest in religious questions. It is situated at the level of their ordinary concerns and corresponds closely to them. It forms part of a very long legacy. It makes itself felt with the violence of an instinct and to such an extent that, even in a society that is opposed to all forms of religion, no other certainty can diminish it or prevent it from reappearing when people feel that their lives are seriously threatened or that those whom they love are in some way endangered. Famines and epidemics, civil wars and conflicts between nations—these have done more and will continue to do more than all attempts made by preachers to preserve religious ideologies. Such events restore these ideologies to their original vitality when all have forgotten them in the tranquillity of an existence which is without history and in which they do not reflect about their human condition.

This same way of believing in God also leaves the way wide open for us to follow each other like sheep along it. It does not require us to go down to a deeper level of personal experience. On the contrary, it exempts us from this need. Both in its origin and in the methods used to spread it, it is collective. It only encourages a feeling that is brought about and kept alive by mass emotions and the shock caused by events. On such occasions, it is indiscreetly eloquent and precludes balanced, sound thinking. It also helps us to endure the various forms of slavery imposed on society by certain governments by granting to those governments the sometimes questionable authority of absolute power. Whatever its context may be, it makes use of the natural credulity of most of those who believe in this way with regard to all hope of paradise, either on this earth or elsewhere, a paradise that is always, however, material and tangible. It also utilizes their irrepressible need for security. This belief in God is found almost unanimously in those religious societies that have been fashioned by its influence. Because of this, it seems to the members of such societies to be perfect and to go back directly to God. It makes those who follow it into the elect who are comfortably established in the certainty that they will acquire certain goods and possess them forever.

For modern society that does not reject this belief, it can only be artificial

For several centuries now, this belief in God, which came about spontaneously in society, is purely ideological in character and is only related to true faith in God in a very embryonic way. It has been clearly too childish for it to be an authentic expression in the case of developed beings. Modern people, so long as they are not dragged down by the great distress that lays bare the legacy of superstition inherited from their ancestors, can never be as fully convinced of the truth of this strictly material and primitive idea of providence, which makes God himself go every day in search of the safest forces in creation, as people were in the past. If they continue to cling to this belief, it will, whatever they think about it, inevitably confine them to a religion that is quite artificial because it is tainted with purely formal affirmations. Their way of speaking about God will be the same as it was in the past, but their intonation will deceive no one. They are religious only in their way of expressing themselves and sometimes, for this reason, they express themselves all the more eloquently. They cannot be as deeply religious as people were in the past. If their religion is authentic, they will not reply to the questions for which earlier answers could provide no valuable contribution. But generally they reject this silence because it feeds the doubts that they would prefer to suppress.

As soon as they reach a certain point in their human development, they have to reject this superficial belief and go against the blindness of spirit and the alienation that it imposes on them. It is not worthy of a developed being, nor is it worthy of God, whom all persons must of necessity reach in a way that becomes more and more superhuman, the more fully human they become themselves. It is only in this way then that men and women, set free but still naked, are led and are even driven to assert themselves in faith in God. They still, however, have to be able to find in themselves the light and the energy that they need to accomplish this task. Most people, when confronted with this crisis, which calls for a hard struggle and an unremitting search on their part, which they may not be able to carry to a conclusion, become indifferent and in practice atheistic, although they reserve the right to rediscover, at the end and under the pressure of an implacable fate, the belief of their childhood or that of their ancestors. This belief also gives rise, in the case of many, to deep and passionate reactions which, if these people are not sufficiently developed in their inner lives, lead to a militant form of atheism. For the best of these persons, there is no other prospect but a painful advance through a suffocating form of atheism toward a naked faith. This movement is similar to that made by believers through a belief in God which harms their humanity deeply by deriving its authority from a submission that is really no more than an abdication.

Scientific knowledge is remote from faith in God and is hostile to the most primitive forms of belief in God

Scientific knowledge inevitably destroys the simplistic ideas that we may have of God's activity, however beneficial those ideas may have been in the past. The more persistently these ideas claim to be directly related to the facts that go back to our sphere, the more explicitly this imposture is denounced by knowledge, which not only exposes as improbable all explanations of those events that were, in the past, ascribed exclusively to God's direct initiative, but also discloses the rational causes of these events. In the past, God seemed to be present everywhere and to be present in a very manifest way. His existence was so obvious that atheism was unanimously proclaimed to be foolish. Later, however, he became more distant and almost disappeared beyond the horizons that were expanding wider and wider by human knowledge. He continues to become more remote from us when we are deprived of all personal spiritual activity and limit ourselves to following the traces of God exclusively in a world determined by events and phenomena.

The results of scientific knowledge and its hypotheses that are at least partly justified by their great abundance and their efforts on rational knowledge and technology do not, if we are prepared to think seriously about them, lead to the suppression of the idea of God. They do not, however, allow him to play any more important part in this sphere than the limited one of prime mover, an active presence that is at the same time infinitely remote by virtue of his transcendence of the secondary causes which we reach, measure and rely on. God is only a reality for scholars if the latter are metaphysicians, and this is rare, because their studies, their methods and their life will be taken up by work in the laboratory or the library, which is hardly likely to lead them to metaphysics. With regard to knowledge, God is simply the point of departure to which they have no need to return once they have left it. Scholars can therefore forget God without any loss to their scientific knowledge.

This knowledge helps us in our movement toward faith in God

Knowledge, then, does not provide us with a foundation for faith in God. At the most it is able to support, by means of the ideas that it provides, a belief in God that goes back to an ideology that is simply more learned than other ideologies and perhaps more in accordance with our modern way of thinking. It is, however, for believers at least, an indirect but indispensable help that they have not had for a long time.

It sets us free from ways of thinking that are derived from a mythology or a cosmology which was at one time attractive to our spirit, but at the same time paralyzed it. It also frees us from the prejudices and superstitions that

are deeply rooted in us because of atavism and have been instilled into us by our social environment, thus preventing us from achieving greater personal depth on the basis of a certain level of humanity. These convictions recede continuously, despite the importance that they have gained over the centuries, in the minds of even the least developed of people as scientific knowledge advances. Before they disappear completely, however, they become imperceptibly reduced to the level of very formal opinions.

This spiritual education, which knowledge provides for us, for which we actively look or which we value only in the light of the results that it furnishes, gives the believer a sense of intellectual honesty. It enables us to reject the arguments by which we are more or less forced into a conviction, either in the name of a tradition that is no more than a long series of unanimous, passive and often progressively weaker repetitions of the same statements or else in the name of an openness that is supposed to go back to a childlike spirit, but is really just simplistic. It gives us enough intellectual energy to be able to resist the pressure exerted by our social environment. It also helps us to be critical of a pietism that is usually unconscious, sought for its own sake and attractive because it is irrational.

The most essential requirement for believers is a fundamental uprightness of the spirit, an intransigence of thought and a sense of independence. Without these elements, they would not be able to go forward without a reliable guide along a way that is their own and which is perhaps the most difficult of all. It is on this way that they will become more and more conscious of their unique role, despite frequent inner conflicts, confrontations with the outside world, diversions and frustrations. They must also be so faithful that no directive coming from without will be able to replace their own personal reactions. It is only these reactions that can provide them, at the times when they need them, with the power of discrimination, the ability to make subtle distinctions and the flexibility of will coupled with the determination that is essential to them if they are not to go astray.

At the same time, however, knowledge continues to be a very ambiguous ally. Even if it does not draw their attention away from themselves, the brilliant successes gained by scientific knowledge inevitably fascinate them. They almost always become its servants, whereas they ought to continue to be its masters. If they do not, they may become its slaves.

The growth of faith in God takes place in secret. From the outside, it can only be seen in certain manifestations which do not in fact take it fully into account, since they are spiritually less valuable than what really takes place in people. It is in these moments that they display themselves in their fundamental reality and are not at the same time disfigured by any influence exerted by teaching, society or their ancestors. Can we come closer to faith in God in a slow process of increasing maturity based on our own strength and up-

rightness and sometimes on the reactions of a humanity that refuses to give way in those spheres that are concerned with what is essentially human? Can we turn to advantage those occasions when we go beyond our own life in moments of deep understanding of ourselves and affirm our existence through faith in ourselves so that we are able to cross the threshold of faith in God? When we are sufficiently conscious of ourselves to be able to be conscious of God's activity in us, we will be able to overthrow the idol that we have served for so long. Faith in God does not replace clinging to an ideology by another more perfect belief of the same nature. This faith is of a completely different kind. In us, its point of departure is the ultimate affirmation of our total being. It is inseparable from our faith in ourselves and it calls for and strengthens that faith. Both have to be revived and renewed again and again, but at certain important times, they are also bathed and even crowned with light.

The practical atheism of many believers

Atheism is accepted by modern men and women as quite natural, because the abstract god postulated, for example, by scientific knowledge hardly exists for us. Society, on the other hand, is successful in its structures and organization, present and powerful in its technological achievements and perfect in its means of propagating its ideologies, which are being continuously adapted to conform to the changing aspirations of its members. Because of this, it has replaced God in all those areas in which in the past we made him intervene because we needed him.

Even believers are not safe from the influence of this popular form of atheism which is so widespread and accepted as a matter of course and penetrates imperceptibly into the minds of believers because it is expressed in traditional terminology and enveloped in sentimental piety. Verbalism is a permanent temptation for scholars who have not yet mastered their thoughts in the field of their own studies. It is an even greater threat in the complex and ambiguous sphere of non-scientific thought, where we are not constantly struggling to overcome this natural inclination. The danger is particularly serious when preservation is confused with tradition. There is always a tendency to do this in environments in which there is a close attachment to the past, which is regarded as venerable. There are no doubt pious reasons for this confusion, but it lacks the discernment that is indispensable for a true spiritual life.

God is in fact dead for many who regard themselves as believers. If he is not dead, he is at least absent. There are a great many people who do not experience faith in God. Even in spite of their energetic affirmations and their frequent repetition of their "profession of faith," all that they have of

God is a fragile belief. God is not at the center of their daily lives, probably not only because of their personal poverty, but also because they are only able to distinguish his activity verbally if it is external and visible. They use the words that were employed in the past to speak about God and they talk about him with the help of ideas that were common then. For this reason they cannot express themselves authentically. They continue with their religious practices in a routine manner, under the cover of the traditional religions. God is for them simply an abstract notion. He only becomes an effective force in their lives at exceptional, dangerous or tragic times and then only because they have a superstitious understanding of him inherited from their ancestors. Even if they try very hard to come to such belief and are convinced that they have it, they cannot really possess the unimpaired belief of their ancestors, which is still that of those who have not yet been deeply influenced by modern scientific thought.

Modern atheism is partly the result of the unjustifiable means made possible by past belief in God

In the past, people believed, on the basis of the evidence of their senses, that God intervened again and again and everywhere. Did they, however, know what he really was for them? The means that were available to them, enabling them to believe in God, probably concealed his essential transcendence from many of them, however much they may have asserted it. They therefore did not need to look for God, because those means gave him to them directly.

These means, which are unjustifiable from the legal point of view because they must surely have been impossible to reject them at the time, when they were imposed with such authority and accepted by the majority so spontaneously and almost unanimously, are also at the origin of the difficulties that people encounter today in their religious life. God is held captive by these early beliefs, kept concealed behind their teachings and in this way set at a distance from modern men and women. Such early beliefs also give rise to conflicts that are quite legitimate, but often passionate, in the modern world and defend themselves by pronouncing anathemas which are both solemn and pretentious but which also result in driving people away from them and from God himself.

People today can no longer think of God as they did in the past, with a certain spontaneity. They react systematically and sometimes almost morbidly against the earlier way of believing and this paralyzes them and prevents them from committing themselves to a real search for God in this important sphere. They are only really interested in ideologies which, if they are not anti-reli-

gious, are at least areligious and either scientific or political. They therefore call themselves atheists without examining what is really implied by this denial. Sometimes they are only religious in a routine, cautious, half-reticent and passive way.

Neither the atheism that some of us profess, with a certain secret apprehension, even when surrounding it with a protective covering of assurances, nor the profoundly disorientated religious life of others who try to banish their doubts by doctrinal transpositions that are always exposed to chance is really strengthened by ideological beliefs that are silent about the truly ultimate questions and try to draw our attention away from ourselves. This atheism, which is mute and solitary and hands us over ir retrievably to the absurdity of life, is very different from a self-satisfied atheism that proclaims its presence everywhere and is the result of our mediocrity and self-sufficiency. The deep dissatisfaction felt by so many believers that smoulders beneath the practices and statements respected by discipline cannot, however, be compared with the placid indifference of those whose religion has a purely social basis. This true atheism and courageous dissatisfaction are signs of a real authenticity that is looking for itself in darkness. Both are paths that are worthy of those who are trying to reach themselves in themselves. They are both steep and thorny, but they can both lead to faith in God. It is important to recognize that the more sweat we have lost in climbing them and the more vigorously we have rejected all temptation to deny ourselves and all the means available to us that are no more than escape routes, the more likely we are to discover faith in God in all its purity and nakedness.

These paths are not essentially different from the way that those who have faith in God have to follow to the end. This way has a long and hidden history that is marked by repeated struggles and conflicts, fought against everything that surrounds faith and is inextricably entangled with it, but goes back to superstition and ideology.

The way of faith in God

Following the way that can lead to faith in God, those who are longing for authenticity have first to overcome the many obstacles built up by purely verbal beliefs which claim God and turn him into a caricature. They will have also, when they are tired and meeting opposition, to resist the attractive temptations of purely emotional teachings that make human beings dormant. These teachings, like the verbal beliefs, are not worthy of people, who must also leave behind them a scientific knowledge which, by its methods and its results, can only draw their attention away from themselves. They must also abandon a society which can only offer them what is useful and superfluous, but not what is essential to them. This knowledge and this society have to be

given up on the way to faith in God because they do not recognize what people fundamentally are.

This same way must also lead us to ourselves. The main steps that we have to take in life will at the same time usually take us down to this deeper level. These steps are our encounter with love, the arrival of parenthood, the call of the goods that we have been able to make human and the perhaps distant approach of death. All the events that take place in our life and especially those that threaten us or those whom we love may, if we are able to experience them as human beings and are not simply enslaved by them, can make us more open to inner experience. They bring about in us, by the demands that they make or by the shock that they cause, the attentiveness and the expectation that are indispensable to faith. They make us used to believing without seeing in the rare but very valuable light that illuminates our best moments and to go forward without knowing where we are going, led only by our own faithfulness to our deepest intuitions. They put us in touch with the consistent and lasting element in ourselves, help us to enter into our own existence and encourage us to reach faith in ourselves. They also make us leave ourselves without drawing our attention away from ourselves and they allow us to glimpse the true being of our neighbors through what we are ourselves.

When we have discovered ourselves sufficiently and when we are also sufficiently conscious of the creative power required by the circumstances of our life and our human goods for us to be really accepted, we will be alert to the fundamental demand made by faith in God. This attentiveness to everything that takes place within us also contains a secret expectation which calls for and favors the unknown growth of that faith.

None of these steps, however, can raise us up to the level of faith in God. They can only show it to us as something that is possible, suitable and desirable. They can also let us see that it is necessary. At certain times, they can almost enable us to reach that faith and touch it briefly before it disappears again. When we give our assent to this faith we are not necessarily believing. In fact, these steps can do little more than simply bring about, at certain times, a change in perspective which is always dependent on chance and bring all these different views together in order to go beyond them. Even if they are rightly regarded as necessary for our access to a pure, naked faith that is free of all ideology, these steps are still unable to bring about faith in God and to provide the intimate impulse which will lead us to cross the threshold to which we only have access insofar as our limited means permit us. Despite the spiritual uplift that can be caused by love, parenthood and creative activity, all these, together with oneself, expect faith in God to strengthen in a transcendent way what they are in themselves and what they both suggest and invoke although, to judge from appearances, this strengthening is quite illusory.

Faith in God demands more from us than we are able to be alone

Faith in God is the keystone of the building that is erected in us when we gradually take possession of ourselves in silence, when we fill our solitude with presences, when we become truly creative and finally when we become increasingly conscious of being and at the same time of our fundamental absence of being. Everything that emerges in us from our animal nature through this deepening of our humanity invokes this faith. We do not have direct access to any faith in God through anything that is in us. This faith cannot find a sufficiently stable and lasting support in us alone for that to provide any foundation for us. Because of its weight, it crushes anything in us that might uphold it. Because of its vital impetus, it is able to fly further than anything that we can reach.

Is there any way by which we may be confirmed in the faith in God to which we have been inescapably led, but which nothing in us or outside us can help us to bear? Such a way would of necessity call for an unlimited effort made by the whole of our being if it were to draw attention to our totality. This way undoubtedly exists and it can make us capable of embracing this faith by deepening our humanity. We can, moreover, fulfill ourselves by living this faith and following this way.