

“Christ Crucified” and Faith



THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST

And so, while the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks look for wisdom, here are we preaching a crucified Christ; to the Jews an obstacle that they cannot get over, to the pagans madness, but to those who have been called, whether they are Jews or Greeks, a Christ who is the power and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

—1 Corinthians 1:22–25, JB

In these words, St. Paul distinguishes the Christian Gospel from two characteristic religious outlooks of his age, which he labels simply “of the Jews” and “of the Greeks.” For both of these outlooks, his message of “Christ crucified” is nonsense, but for different reasons.

Coming to terms with this passage is probably the most important single purpose of this book, because this passage brings into focus the break with the cultural *structure*. There is considerable conflict among various groups *within* Paul's culture and much legitimating rhetoric invoking the divine on all sides. Paul is not lining up one cultural group against another (here, “Jews” as against “Greeks,” or in other places, “slaves” against “free,” or “male” against “female”). He is dealing with something that challenges *all* groups in the culture because it challenges the *form* through which their understanding functions.

The Demand for Miracles or “Signs”

“Christ crucified” is an obstacle or stumbling block to “Jews,” who look for miracles and signs — that is, physical manifestations of divine *power*. This

"looking for signs" characterizes the religion of those here labelled "Jews." Although this represents a popular understanding of the expectation of Old Testament religion (and in this sense may be regarded as reflecting an important Jewish religious orientation), as a religious outlook it is certainly not confined to ethnic Jews, particularly in the twentieth century. In fact, this outlook, like that of the "Greeks," bridges the centuries. The "search for signs" is found, perhaps even more dominantly, among certain contemporary Christians. Paul's emphasis is on the outlook, not on the particular people who may hold it.

The search for miracles or signs goes with the conviction that we know more about the processes and goals of life than we have power to live out, that we entertain more possibilities than we can actualize. Hence, we search for power beyond our own capacities or control but yet in line with them. The divine manifestation is both the gift of power and the confirmation of our interests and desires through extraordinary events. It is the unusual, unexpected aspect of "miracle" that gives it its "sign" value as a *divine* act. God intervenes from time to time in human affairs, in this view, to help individuals, groups, and nations achieve their goals or frustrate attacks on them.

For example, the Old Testament "sign" surpassing and typifying all others in the Bible is the Exodus from Egypt. Israel was trying to escape to freedom from Egyptian slavery. Just when escape was cut off and re-enslavement was imminent, the sea blocking the escape route parted. The Israelites were able to flee over the exposed land and the returning waters engulfed the Egyptian forces. Escape to freedom was the goal sought, and when human and natural agency could not secure it, a most unusual and totally unpredictable course of events brought it about. That unexpected change assuring their freedom was the "sign" to the Israelites of God's presence and favor.

Again and again in the Hebrew Scriptures, similar events — though none quite so dramatic — are taken as signs of God's presence: the unexpected turn of battle delivering beleaguered forces, the unexplained rumor sending the enemy army home unvictorious, the provision of food in famine, the healing of fatal disease, or the restoration of a dead person to life. All these examples are of a timely aid that is beyond human resources but that supports the values of the people involved; such expectation of divine intervention marks the outlook of those who search for signs or miracles.

This expectation became focused in the "messianic king" who, in the time of ultimate crisis, would arise to subdue Israel's enemies, establish justice, and regather its scattered people once again into a nation. The "signs" of the messianic age are the events through which this program is accom-

plished. The messianic king, God's anointed, is to be recognized by his carrying out these acts. Without the confirmation given by the expected divine signs, one who claimed the title could be only a pretender. Historical results establish authenticity. Through them the power of God is recognized.

Many people today hold a similar outlook. For example, some regard physical healing in the face of impossible medical odds as such a divine sign, whether healing seems to come through the skill and wisdom of medical personnel and techniques or in some unexplained turn of events. But the less that can be explained in natural ways, the greater the sign value of the event. Lourdes, the center of pilgrimage for hopeless cases, for example, has a commission to distinguish authentic "miracles" from natural processes. The prophet whose movement peters out indecisively is forgotten. Leaders of successful movements are often deified not only by their followers but also by those who regard a movement as demonic but who nevertheless are awed by successful, decisive leadership. For example, many who hated all that the Nazis stood for thought of Hitler as charismatic, a great leader who "went wrong."

Just as people think they recognize God's presence in such dramatic signs supporting human values, so the sign is sought as the point where people can be *sure* they see the hand of *God*. This is the outlook that St. Paul labels "of the Jews."

People who look for God in signs are repulsed by "Christ crucified." From the standpoint of those expecting a sign to confirm the career that they thought was receiving divine approval and energy, crucifixion is no sign at all. It is not the self-manifesting act of God confirming our values but, at best, only an unfortunate event. To be recognized as a sign of God, the event must be deliverance from injustice, oppression, and death. Only a remarkable deliverance of Jesus *from* crucifixion could have signified God's unique presence with him — in terms of the search for signs. In regard to these human values, crucifixion manifests weakness and failure that are nothing as *sign*.

On the other hand, the quest for signs may find the crucifixion to be the negative sign of God's curse on a deceiver and troublemaker. Anyone executed by hanging was seen in Jewish tradition as cursed by God. The sign of such a death was taken as divine corroboration of the administration of human justice. In other words, God was seen as acting in this sign-event to give the victim "what was coming to him."

Hence, the preaching of "Christ crucified" is a stumbling block to those looking for signs. It runs counter to the values that culture assigns to and seeks in divine activity. The affront is not merely the one case of the ignominious, brutal death of Jesus — which might be accommodated as but one

baffling event in an overall story of deliverance in line with expectations. After all, many heroes have been glorious even as they went down in defeat. The affront is to the whole religious outlook that searches for signs. Preaching "Christ crucified" is not saying merely that bad things happen to good people but that God's approach to us belies our expectations — in fact, is manifest in the very contradiction of our expectations.

Jesus is a historical figure and as a historical figure embodies personal and historical contradictions. To say that *Jesus* was crucified is to state a historical fact that can be set alongside other historical facts — for example, his preaching, healing, and gathering disciples. One might say of Jesus, "Although he was a good person, he was crucified: his enemies conspired against him, Roman authority obsessed with the threat of insurrection misjudged him, one of his disciples turned traitor." But to say *Christ*-crucified is a conceptual, even moral contradiction. It has to do not with just one case but with a whole set of values that belong to our circle of reality, not merely to individuals as individuals. It is the contradiction between what people expect of any *divinely* inspired and empowered leader and God's presence among people. To hear that "Jesus was crucified" may bring sadness, determination to fight injustice, perhaps even profound gratitude. But to hear "Christ crucified" brings personal and social offense, primarily at God! It is an obstacle, *the* obstacle to those who seek signs, for it condemns the nature of such a quest. For faith, however, Jesus' crucifixion manifests Christ crucified, and Christ crucified becomes a judgment on our circle of reality.

The Search for Wisdom

The other religious outlook that Paul refers to is the search for "wisdom" — that is, the overall rational pattern in which everything can "make sense" for us. Like the term "Jews," "Greeks" has some historical identification, for the history of "philosophy" (etymologically, "the love of wisdom") in its early centuries in the West is the history of Greek thought. But again, like "Jews," "Greeks" is not confined to this history. Our characteristic cultural expectation is that there should be an order to all things that people might understand, a "meaning" by which they can set the course of their individual lives and the direction of their corporate life. God, it is popularly assumed, provides satisfaction for our understanding. The search for wisdom is evident in the poignant questions of people confronting evil in the world: "Why should dozens of children on a schoolbus have been killed by a drunken driver?" But it also extends to the curious "Is there intelligent life elsewhere in the universe?"

While the term "wisdom" includes all things in our daily experience,

the "Greek" quest is for ultimate meaning that is the *key* to understanding everything else. Hence, in the pursuit of wisdom, one does not seek the sign that, as a part of this day-to-day course of events, can be no more than a fleeting instance of divine power or mind but rather that true Power to which such manifestations can only point. True Power is known by the intellect, not seen by the eyes. To know eternal truth is to be related to the realm of perfection that can never be wholly embodied in the world of sense and history. In fact, it is that perfection by which every present moment is defined as "deficient." The philosopher lives above the ambiguities of everyday experience in the search for ultimate rationality.

Whereas the quest for power looks for God in an evident, tangible, visible "sign," the quest for wisdom always sets God beyond the tangible. The search for wisdom recognizes that the present course of events, including "sign" events, cannot be understood in and of themselves. Understanding comes only in relation to that perfection available to the intellect. Wisdom is something we bring to events through our intellects, something that enables us to set these events in an order of significance because it gives us a perspective in which to view them. God belongs to this perfection as that ultimate Mind which is the source of all rational order. No sign of any sort, given in a historical event or even in the totality of history, could be the sign of *God present*, for God is met as idea through the intellect, not in signs and miracles through the senses.

While the quest for signs looks to the *future* for some decisive event to fulfill human expectations, the quest for wisdom seeks fulfillment in a clue that will make sense of everything *now*, some principle that will reveal its existing coherence. The quest for sign looks to historical *change* for fulfillment; the quest for wisdom looks to *understanding* for fulfillment.

Just as the Exodus typifies the notion of sign, so in the New Testament Stoicism typifies the quest for wisdom. Stoic teachers often competed with Christian preachers for popular attention. The Stoic believed in God as an all-pervading energy or power of reason ordering or structuring all things. No physical process, no event was outside its control. Therefore human beings had no need to try to reconstruct external events. Instead, they could concentrate on their own personal integrity, regardless of the circumstances in which they found themselves or of what might happen to them. This overall rationality in which even apparent contradictions are caught up in ultimate order is the notion of "Providence." God works in everything to bring about the divine good will. The only true evil, then, is the evil will or intent, not what happens "from the outside." The ultimate control of all things by God, or their ultimate rationality, frees people to look to their own inner development.

sign is Providence

think against the things

Stoicism, though an ancient philosophy, has perennially flowered throughout Western history, often triggering a renaissance in Christian theology. But the quest for this kind of "wisdom" is certainly not confined to antiquity nor to the history of Stoicism. Wherever religion promises fulfillment through an understanding that penetrates beneath appearances to grasp meaning, there is the quest for wisdom. When tragedy strikes people they are often comforted by the thought that even such terrible things "have a purpose" — if we only knew what that might be. Some find resolution in the affirmation, "It is God's will." Many feel that knowing such a purpose, knowing the "meaning of things" would bring them peace, confidence, and safety. And even in the absence of tragedy, people try to know — the future, if not the whole eternal order of things — in order to make wise decisions. *Knowledge* is the ordered appropriation of facts; *wisdom* is the sense of what should be done with factual knowledge.

But just as "preaching Christ crucified" is a stumbling block to those looking for a decisive manifestation of divine power, so also it is a denial of the expectation of rationality. "Christ crucified" makes no sense. Instead of linking God to the enveloping rationality that absorbs or even overrides the passing contradictions of goodness, it focuses attention on the contradiction itself. That is, "Christ crucified" is no key to the meaning of life and human events. It is a *problem* to meaning, a problem requiring explanation.

The theology of meaningful Christianity offers such a solution by putting the crucifixion within a larger frame of the "plan of God" or by "correcting" or overriding it with the reversal brought by the resurrection or with some program of general human betterment. The search for wisdom cannot find the crucifixion of Christ in itself as anything other than the victory of evil and the impotence of good. Hence, those who seek the deeper level at which human affairs are rational and intelligible must regard preaching the crucifixion as madness — the very opposite of wisdom.

Again, the issue is not the single event of the death of Jesus — for Jesus could be regarded as an exemplary Stoic, uncorrupted by wickedness and perversity, faithful to the end. Preaching Christ crucified, however, repudiates the search for the inherent rationality of things because it focuses on that event which wisdom seeks to absorb or neutralize in order to achieve an overall pattern of meaning. That is, the search for wisdom can incorporate the crucifixion of Jesus as one event in a whole series of events that, as a whole, "make sense." But it cannot accept this proclamation that repudiates the search for meaning. Preaching Christ crucified denies that the manifestation of God fulfills the quest for rationality and order.

FAITH AND GOSPEL

✠ *If it was God's wisdom that human wisdom should not know God, it was because God wanted to save those who have faith through the foolishness of the message that we preach.*

—1 Corinthians 1:21, JB

The response to his preaching Christ crucified that St. Paul seeks is not that of seeing (and thereby possessing), which would be the fulfillment of the expectation of the sign, the manifestation of power. Nor is it that of knowing (and thereby possessing), which would be the fulfillment of the expectation of wisdom, the rational understanding of everything. Rather, the response to preaching Christ crucified is *faith*. And in this way Paul sets a new outlook over against the typical religious outlooks of the "Jews" and the "Greeks."

Seeing and *knowing* both indicate some kind of control over their contents. Things one sees or ideas one knows are resources to be held against present or future need. They are possessions to be employed at one's own discretion — for protection, furthering one's interests, securing goals. They are elements of power in dealing with others. *Seeing* and *knowing* indicate an availability — a "having ready-to-hand."

Seeing the Sign

Consider seeing, which is related to the search for signs. To be given a sign is to have the divine resource in tangible form. In many ancient communities, the temple was such a sign because it was regarded as the dwelling place of God. Destruction of their temple could therefore demoralize a people. Individuals have carried amulets or charms of reassurance. Today, soldiers often carry pocket Bibles or New Testaments not only to read but in a sense to certify God's presence with them. Likewise, small religious statuettes are often seen in automobiles as tokens of divine protection.

Memories and traditions may function in a similar way. No matter what might be happening to them in the present, Israelites could repeat the story of the Exodus and be assured that God was with them now, for they were the people God had delivered from the hands of the Egyptians. Individuals who have survived near fatal accidents or illnesses sometimes derive from such experiences assurances that God has a "plan" for their lives. This belief bolsters their confidence in times of doubt or stress. We Americans often regard our unique history, democratic government, and abundant natural resources as evidences of divine favor. And we, along with other peoples, have seen in our general prosperity, industrial expansion, and international prestige evidence of God's special favor.

Such "possession" of divine signs operating on a communal level is

institutionalized. Thus, the church, "which is of God," may be a source of strength for both communities and individuals, not so much as a building tokening divine presence in the ancient way, but more as a spiritual reality with divinely authenticated structure and teaching — that is, an institution. The presence of a priest or minister in life crises may bring reassurance not only as an immediate manifestation of holiness (the holy person, the authentic representative or vicar of the holy God) but as one whose advice may be trusted and followed because it has divine authority. For many people the Bible carries its own signs of authenticity as the divine Word set over against the "words of men," signs that are there for anyone to see and appreciate: its antiquity, privileged information, internal consistency, moral integrity, textual accuracy preserved through the centuries, historical reliability, and so forth. These signs become the evidence in hand that the book is "God-given," a body of truth that can be possessed.

Through such institutional assurances, seeing shades almost imperceptibly into knowing. Knowing always sets up a tension between the thing seen (be it sign or institution) and its *meaning*, so that what is "possessed" is only ancillary to the meaning, the "real" value. The very seeking of meaning indicates a shift from the tangible, the seen, to the idea, the conceived — the unseen but knowable, from the deficient to the perfect.

Knowing the Meaning

The relationship between the *thing* that *has* meaning and its *meaning* is akin to the relationship in language between the physical facts of oral sounds or written signs and their meanings. Meaning is not simply *there* — "ready-to-hand" — in the sounds or text: it is *encoded* in them. Only one who knows the code can transmute the cypher into a message. Both speech and writing are "codes" one must learn to use. Reading is a program of "decoding," as reading experts themselves describe it. When one tries to learn a foreign language, one learns that hearing and speaking involve similar processes. Identifying and interpreting nuances of tone and accent (decoding) are necessary to ascertain meaning. The programmed ease with which one handles one's native tongue belies the complexity of the process.

The process of "knowing" turns everything tangible into a vehicle for "meaning" that the mind alone can grasp. To move from the sense impressions of a *physical* process (the labelling is itself an adjunct to meaning), such as hearing or touching, to the "laws" which govern it and of which it serves as an example is to *know* it. To move from the raw data of human affairs to some principle such as "the movement toward human self-determination" by which these data can be "understood" is to know *history* — that is, how these affairs are related and what their fulfillment is.

The fundamental structure of knowing involves the jump from fact to meaning, the ability to relate the world of the senses to the conceptual world. But since the conceptual world is the unique province of the mind, the material expression of concepts is always deficient to them. I can *conceive* a better chair than I can build. The tangible world can serve as the base for the mind's leap to meaning, but no more than that. And meaning extends beyond the direct relation to facts into a realm of its own — a coherent, integrated, intellectual system that incorporates the world of sense into its own larger scheme.

In this sense, the conceptual world is the "should-be" or "ought-to-be" world, not the "is" world. In one traditional vocabulary, it is a world of *essences* rather than *existences*. The physical world is never the "should-be" world, cannot be the "should-be" world, which is why meaning always extends beyond it. The god known in wisdom is thus not a present god but an ideal, known god who binds things together in "meaning," a god encountered in the intellect.

Seeing and knowing are similar in that the relation to God is immediate and direct: one possesses the sign, one knows the idea. But they are opposite each other in that possession looks for God in the actual, tangible world, while knowledge moves beyond this world, even negates it, to reach the realm of ideas in which it understands God is to be found.

Preaching Christ crucified cannot be appropriated by seeing or knowing. "Christ crucified" is the absence of that divine confirmation of human values which seeing seeks and the absence of that rational coherence which knowing seeks. It cannot be received, then, as either sign or wisdom. It is neither sign nor wisdom even potentially. It stands outside these two provinces. Our relation to it is unique. We possess the sign that is tangible evidence of divine support for our values; "Christ crucified" is not a sign to be possessed because it denies our values. We possess knowledge and wisdom by which everything may be rationally understood; "Christ crucified" is not meaning to be known because it is the breakdown of meaning. Rather, we *faith* "Christ crucified."

Faithing "Christ Crucified"

St. Paul, in a continuation of the passage cited, speaks of "Christ crucified" as a "spiritual wisdom" that is spiritually known. But he says spiritual knowing is not at all like philosophy, the "love of wisdom" of the present age. It is faith — and not knowing of the usual sort at all. That Jesus was crucified can be known as a historical fact; that "God always delivers those who trust him" can be known as a possible meaning of the events of history. But

that "Christ crucified" manifests the power and wisdom of God cannot be known but only *faithed*.

The uniqueness of this word "faith" is crucial, not only to an understanding of this passage but to Christianity as a whole. In New Testament Greek, "faith" is both a noun and a verb. English lacks a special verb to translate "faith" and so uses "believe" instead. But the English "believe" carries a very different nuance of meaning. Of the many things that conceivably could be known, some we definitely know, some we definitely do not know, and of others we are not certain. Uncertainty is not the same as not knowing, however, for although we may not *know*, we may have very good reason to "believe" that something is or is not the case, and here "knowing" and "believing" function the same: I turn down the road I *know* goes to Franklin Forks or that I *believe* goes to Franklin Forks. We often speak of this latter situation as "taking it on faith."

There are various grounds for taking something "on faith" or "believing" it to be true: commonly held opinion, the word of experts, incomplete investigations with only tentative results, perhaps even "divine revelation." But such "belief" is imperfect knowledge because although it is something to be known, it is not yet certainly known. So "believing" or "taking something on faith" functions *like* knowing, only it involves more personal risk.

This popular usage of "believe" leads to a misunderstanding of *faith*, the New Testament noun, as "beliefs," so that Christian faith is then equated with Christian *beliefs*. In this way, the uniqueness of Christian faith is made to lie with the singularity of Christian beliefs — how the "Christian" concept of God differs from the "Islamic" concept, for example. And Christian "beliefs" are understood within the relationship of knowing of which we have just spoken — things of which we are not quite certain but that are very likely true and that entail some measure of risk to us if we act as though they were true. Because of this element of uncertainty, we say that we take these Christian tenets "on faith."

The culture regards its understanding of "faith" — an optimistic confidence in its own circle of reality in spite of contradictions — as a Good Thing. As we tell each other, "We must all have faith that things will turn out all right," or "We must have faith in our leaders." What St. Paul, and the New Testament more generally, is talking about as "faith," however, is not this positive cultural attitude but a specific relationship with "Christ crucified."

"Faith" is not to be understood as a kind of knowing at all, particularly an inferior kind of knowing. Rather, "faith" pertains to a unique relationship that becomes clearer if it is approached through the verb, which might be translated "to faith" (coining an English verb) to distinguish it from

the common (and ambiguous) meaning of "believe." From this, one who "faiths" is a "faither" (instead of believer). The noun, then, instead of meaning "belief" or "beliefs" would mean the act of faithing. To qualify "faith" by the adjective "Christian" would be redundant in as much as "faithing" is itself a unique relationship. It is this relationship that Christianity and the Gospel are all about. Popular usage, however, emphasizes the adjective rather than the noun, as though faith becomes something quite different by such qualification. Usually, the adjective is only a reference to certain cultural baggage. If one truly *faiths*, being "Christian" or "Buddhist" or "Moslem" in the cultural sense is beside the point.

The "content" of faith, instead of being "beliefs" would be that which is open to us only in faith. In the terms of St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, there are three fundamental relationships between persons and the divine. Each relationship has its own "content," however. *Seeing* has as its content signs or miracles, tangible divine confirmations of human values. *Knowing* has as its content wisdom, concepts, and principles that constitute the meaning of sense data. *Faith* has as its unique content "Christ crucified." Hence, faith is differentiated from these others not by the particular kinds of "signs" it claims (which would make it a form of possessing through seeing) nor by the particular "beliefs" it propounds (which would make it a form of possessing through knowing) but by its own unique content of "Christ crucified," which must be faithed.

"Faithing" is a willingness to live without the control and understanding (the "power" and "meaning") that the relationships of seeing and knowing provide. God manifest in "Christ crucified" can be neither seen nor known. In this sense, *only* "Christ crucified" can be faithed, for anything else — say, Christ saved from crucifixion by God's timely intervention or by God's larger strategy of deliverance in which the crucifixion was but a tactical maneuver in no way definitive of the larger strategy — would be a proper object of seeing or knowing, like any other sign or belief. Whatever is "sign" is witness to a god available for the support of accepted human values. Whatever is "wisdom" is witness to a god who enables us to make sense of everything. To faith is to live in the absence of such reassurances. This is why the way to faith is never a direct manifestation of signs or a simple clarification of beliefs. (Of course, we also use "see" in a metaphoric sense, as "I see the point of your argument." For the present, we will try not to confuse matters by such usage. One could "see" a miracle in the sense of its being an unexpected course of events. One could then really "see" it by grasping its meaning. Finally, one could "see" in actually coming to faith.) To point to signs and demonstrate their divine origin replaces faith with the form and content of seeing. And to articulate beliefs and make a plausible

case for their rational acceptance replaces faith with the form and content of knowing.

The language for this contradiction of the expectation of sign and wisdom in the Christian tradition is "Christ crucified," messiah executed. The quotation marks are deliberate. Whether there is some other way of speaking of this stance of faith, whether it is to be found in other traditions are questions that arise. Such questions come not only from the popular and dubious view that all religions are so many paths to the same goal, but also from analysis of the relationships of seeing and knowing and from their implicit repudiation in the Christian language of crucifixion. Conceivably this repudiation could be expressed in other ways, although our tradition does not give us another. Perhaps the language of "holocaust" in the Jewish tradition would be closest to the language of crucifixion. The popular expectation is to find God through the search for power and the search for meaning. Both the crucifixion and the Holocaust tell us that God must be found in the absence of power and in the absence of meaning.

CRITERIA OF FAITH

I have been crucified with Christ, and I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in this body I live in faith: faith in the Son of God who loved me and who sacrificed himself for my sake. . . .

The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts: the Spirit that cries, "Abba, Father," and it is this that makes you a son, you are not a slave any more; and if God has made you son, then he has made you heir.

—Galatians 2:19b–20, 4:6–7, JB

This unique relationship between "faith" and "Christ crucified" needs further explanation to avoid basic confusion. Distinguishing the three possible relationships, as we have done, is fundamental. But we need to say more about the interrelationship between faith and "Christ crucified."

Both seeing and knowing are authenticated by their object. That is, the burden of their authenticity is carried not by the one who sees or the one who knows but by the "objective reality" of what is seen or known. To see the sign does not change the nature of the sign but only acknowledges its reality as sign. Only genuine power can make a sign authentic. Actual historical deliverance from foreign bondage is such a sign, as it was for ancient Israelites. Empty promises of deliverance are not signs. Claiming the power of God without any manifestation of that power is not seeing a sign but delusion.

Similarly, to know "wisdom" or "meaning" does not change the nature of the wisdom but only acknowledges and appropriates its truth. Only genuine "meaning" can validate knowing. Claims to know that are not validated by objective data accurately sensed and rationally interpreted are false claims. The ideal for knowing is the computer working from electronic sensors — the machine that records and relates data with no "subjective bias" — other than its "program," which must itself be evaluated in a similar way. By exercising the relevant faculties — opening and focusing the eyes, listening intently, counting accurately, thinking rationally, reporting straightforwardly — the knower minimizes subjective bias to report only "what is there."

One runs a risk in taking as sign what does not yet have proper authentication, or in taking as wisdom what has not yet been demonstrated. But the authentic sign or the demonstrated wisdom absorbs this risk in its own "objective reality."

The "Objective" Criteria of Faith

But with faithing the matter is different, for authenticity is not determined by something that remains external to the faither. In New Testament language, the "realities" that faith grasps are *preached* realities: "Christ crucified," resurrection, forgiveness of sins, reign of God, Gospel. This use of "preach" is technical and differs from our familiar use of "preach" as synonymous with scold, harangue, sermonize, orate, or exhort. "Preach" in this technical sense is more synonymous with "proclaim." But these "preached realities" are not external — simply there to be described, seen, known, and proclaimed — to which the preacher only directs attention as a teacher would direct attention to the objective data of the subject matter. Through preaching that is heard and "faithed" they have their own present reality. They are given to *faith* and for *faith*. One who "faiths" invests them with the unique power of faith. Their being *from God* distinguishes them from the spurious "reality" generated by make-believe.

This means that there is personal risk in faithing, but it is not the familiar risk of taking something as true or real with insufficient evidence — as our culture judges such evidence. *Faith simply is not a religious option offered by the culture.* The much more serious risk of faith lies in moving outside the familiar circle of reality to engage new phenomena and new criteria. The truth and reality of what is faithed are inseparably tied to the unique quality of faithing itself. Inasmuch as faith is not generated by itself, "preaching" is prior to it. Faith is a response to the "proclamation" of "Christ crucified," resurrection, forgiveness, reign of God, and Gospel. But this priority is neither chronological nor logical but rather experiential.

Faith is made of relating to the break!

Faith's validity does have an "objective" aspect, but of a unique kind. All of these *preached* realities mark a *break* with the continuities of life. It is this "break" that makes them the unique content or object of *faith* rather than of seeing or knowing. The "break" of "Christ crucified" is a break with meaning; that of resurrection with all the possibilities of the present; that of forgiveness with justice and innocence; that of the reign of God with historical significance. It is a unique content determined by the nature of faith itself. That is, faith can have only this content and no other; and our relationship to *this* content can be only *faithing*.

"Christ crucified" is the end of the expectation that power will bring life to its fulfillment in the sense of actualizing its present potential. Hopes for "more of the same" or an incremental "improvement of the same" terminate in the crucifixion. Faith in Christ crucified means giving up the kind of justification of life that realizing one's potential would offer. There is thus a direct correlation between faith as the surrender of the claim to divine power and "Christ crucified," which is the absence of such divine power.

Similarly, "Christ crucified" is not a principle that satisfies the search for wisdom by becoming the key to the "meaning" of life. If it were satisfying in this way, only deep cynicism could result, for then the key to the meaning of life would be the tragic frustration of life's unselfish motives or a glorification of suffering for its own sake. And if such cynicism is forestalled by resurrection also interpreted as wisdom, then life's "meaning" would be the rosy promise that "every cloud has a silver lining," no matter how dark the cloud is — scarcely commensurate with the weight of the Gospel.

Resurrection is not the restoration of what has gone before, something anticipated in the natural rhythms of life, but the abandonment of that kind of expectation in the faithed certainty of new life beyond the point where "possibilities" leave off. Forgiveness is not an adjustment in the balance of one's good and bad deeds but the end of that kind of calculation altogether. And the reign of God is not the realization of human political hopes but the end of the present order along with its possibilities.

The break of human continuities that "Christ crucified" entails, which only faith can receive and affirm, marks faith as genuine. Anything lacking this element of discontinuity would be content for seeing or knowing — not faith! The authenticity of faith can be checked, then, by what it affirms. There is a unique relationship between what faith itself *is* and what it *faiths*. To faith is to live without power over the future; and that surrender of power over the future is precisely what "Christ crucified" entails. To "faith" is to be "crucified with Christ."

The "Subjective" Criteria of Faith

Along with this "objective" test of faith's validity there is also a "subjective" check. This subjective test is the intimate, personal quality of faith's affirmation that is so remarkably different from seeing or knowing. Like all forms of life, human beings are oriented toward self-preservation, not merely as physical organisms but as *cultural* beings. For human beings, self-preservation takes the form of securing the future by actualizing possibilities. We cannot surrender by our own efforts this ground on which we are sustained. We can modify our drive for self-preservation in light of a better understanding of where our true interest lies. But this only means that all our idealism is a matter of enlightened self-interest.

Under certain circumstances we may be willing to sacrifice our own lives for the welfare of the larger human community, but only because in some measure we recognize that the quality of our own life — *ourselves*, actually — is bound to this larger human future. We might do it "to preserve our own integrity." Self-interest sometimes takes the crass form of the individual over against others; but it may also take the lofty form of the individual for the sake of others because there can be no flourishing individual apart from the others. Hence, self-concern can make us idealistic and self-giving as well as calculating and selfish. In other words, all the possibilities of seeing and knowing — namely, possessing — are within the range of *self-interest*. In fact, they are possibilities only insofar as they are in this range.

Surrendering the grasp on the future that Christ crucified entails is not a product of self-interest at all, enlightened or not. Faith is not to anyone's self-interest. Faith comes from a totally different source, which St. Paul calls the witness of the Holy Spirit. Faith is not a human possibility but a gift. It does not belong to the store of human possibilities as something desirable to our enlightened self-interest. Therefore, our faith rests in a unique event in which our identity is changed from creatures oriented in one way or another to self-interest to creatures for whom self-interest is coming to an end. To give up self-interest in confidence and trust is the change from being "slaves" to being "sons," in St. Paul's terms.

Many find this emphasis on *sons* offensive today because of its sexist implication: daughters seem to be excluded. Our desire to be inclusive in this matter does not separate us from St. Paul, however. His emphasis is not the separation of the sexes (elsewhere he writes that in Christ there is neither male nor female, Gal. 3:28) but the distinction between self-interest and faith. The notion that we possess some claim against God on the basis of "natural human right" or some particular accomplishment on our part as

either son or daughter would put us at odds with Paul. His use of "sons" (in relation to his own time) emphasized both maturity (as against the usual connotation of "children") and the right to inherit: being made co-heirs with Christ. The movement from self-interest to faith is a radical shift of identity. It is expressed, not in the claim of one's own status — "I am a son, or daughter" — but in the cry to God, "Abba, Father." In the face of the anticipated desolation of faithing "Christ crucified" (the surrender of the quests for power and meaning, or "sign" and "wisdom"), we nevertheless stand in confidence and trust, not in despair, because we are moved to it.

The word "abba" is the Aramaic intimate word for "father," somewhat comparable to our word "daddy" — *if* we take into account the difference in the role of father in a first-century Palestinian household from the role of the typical father today. For us, both the formal and the intimate words for "father" lack much of the awe that the biblical word conveys. "Abba" is one of those few words of Jesus' own speech that have been carried over intact into the Greek New Testament and on into its various vernacular translations. (Another is Jesus' words on the cross, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani" — My God, my God, why have you deserted me — Mark 15:34.) In the Christian tradition, "Abba" is the unique word of faith, expressing both awe and intimacy beyond the usual conceptual levels. It comes from the life of Jesus himself who, as he confronted death and the absence of God, nevertheless prayed, "Abba."

The fact that this word remains untranslated makes it particularly appropriate as the cry of faith in distinction to those words derived from our efforts to form concepts of God. The base of such concepts is our daily experience whose reality we borrow to give substance to our more vague thoughts of God: God is *like* a parent, *like* a ruler, etc. "Abba," however, is not this kind of word. It does not arise from our efforts to form a concept of God but as our address to God, expressing the unique trust that faith is. It is possible that those who faith have their own equivalents of "Abba." In one sense, "*abba*" belongs to a particular culture: it is a first-century Aramaic word. *Faith*, as we have seen, is not a cultural matter but a unique relationship between human beings and God. Vocabularies, which are cultural, break down when they are extended beyond the culture. "Abba" as a faith word is to be translated, not by our terms for the male parent — or female parent — but by the otherwise inarticulate cry of faith. "Abba" has entered our tradition as Jesus' word.

Nothing supports faith in the sense of making it certain on some ground other than this "witness of the Spirit." Faith bears the marks of its own genuineness in that its affirmation, while personal, is not an affirmation of the "self" seeking power and meaning for its fulfillment or authentication.

Faith is confidence - not in something, but in the presence of something

tries hard enough, that good intentions assure positive consequences. In churches, make-believe takes such forms as reading only a narrow selection of Scriptures, which stress joy, fulfillment, power, and happiness, and ignoring those that try to penetrate experiences of pain, evil, and suffering; or of condemning people who fail in their efforts by insisting they did not try hard enough or did not believe strongly enough. The make-believe world is most often a communal world because individuals, by themselves, generally lack the energy needed to sustain it. Individuals seeking self-fulfillment cluster around reported "signs" and esoteric "wisdom," repeating them to each other to generate excitement in lieu of energy.

Unbelief acknowledges "Christ crucified," makes of it sign and wisdom, and tries to build life on despair. Make-believe avoids "Christ crucified," either by rejecting it as false or by quickly neutralizing it with "resurrection" understood as the meaning that "good always triumphs."

In distinction to both, faith acknowledges "Christ crucified" but does not try to turn this into sign or wisdom. Rather, it sees the quests for power and meaning as ultimately futile but does not thereby surrender to despair or nihilism. Unlike make-believe, faith does not strain to substitute a meaningful world for the ambiguities of daily experience through the sheer intensity of its wish. In a strange confidence, faith lives in the new reality of the new identity given the father.

WA into into (H. H. H.)
Grip but reduce to single
the whole