

Faith

Because of clashes between Christian beliefs and scientific discoveries the widespread view developed that, compared to science, faith is a very inferior and very unreliable source of knowledge.

The sad thing is that the conflict was very much rooted in a narrow and therefore misleading view of faith. For centuries Catholics had come to think of faith as being little more than a source of knowledge about religious truths that we could not prove by reason, but which we accepted on the authority of the God who revealed them to us.

However, what was overlooked was the fact that the knowledge sought by faith was not primarily a list of religious facts or doctrines. For what faith seeks is first and foremost the knowledge of a person. It is the sort of knowledge a lover seeks of his or her beloved. For faith is first and foremost a way of relating to a person. It is a way of showing trust, belief in, reliance on a person.

Indeed an attitude of faith is absolutely necessary for any sort of community to exist. We all live with an attitude of faith as a basic structural part of our lives, because that which we value most of all – love – is impossible without faith. Faith in each other, at least to some extent, is essential for participating in any human community. It is therefore also essential for participation in the community that is centred on God, i.e., Church.

Christian faith then is a response of trusting and relying on God and Christ and is not primarily about believing things that cannot be proved. It is something far more important and more glorious than that: it is the foundation of Love.

However, having said that, faith does indeed lead to believing in certain doctrines. The reason for this is that part of our response to God is the acceptance of all that God reveals to us about the love that Father, Son and Holy Spirit have for us and the way we can share in it.

In reflecting on all that the scriptures record of God's interaction with Israel and above all about the life and teaching of Christ, it is only natural that we express in the form of doctrines what we have learnt from it all – especially the basics on which a deeper understanding is built.

The assent of faith to these things is more like the faith we have in the goodness of our friends, spouse, neighbour, etc. It is not the sort of assent scientists give to their conclusions.

This does not mean that our Christian faith is a wishy-washy thing. On the contrary since it reflects what God and Christ have taught us, it has about it a certainty that millions of people down the ages have laid down their lives for, since God can be trusted totally.

However, this does not mean that people are never tempted to doubt their faith. The temptation to doubt is normal for God and Christ are not visible to us and what we can see and touch is more real to us than things we cannot see or touch. To strengthen our

faith therefore we must allow God and Christ to become more real for us. And we do that by getting to know them better through prayer and the study of the scriptures and of the vast amount the Church has come to know about them through such study.

Such study is important because faith is not a blind leap into a pit filled with doctrines and dogmas that don't make much sense. There is nothing blind about the step we take when we freely and joyfully accept what faith offers us. Far from there being a conflict between faith and reason, faith and reason go hand in hand to enrich our lives and enable us to see the reasonableness of it all. For to believe in the Christian message must be a reasonable thing to do. We must have reasons for believing even if faith is not the end product of a chain of reasoning.

Faith is reasonable – but it is not reasoned.

Brian Gaybba