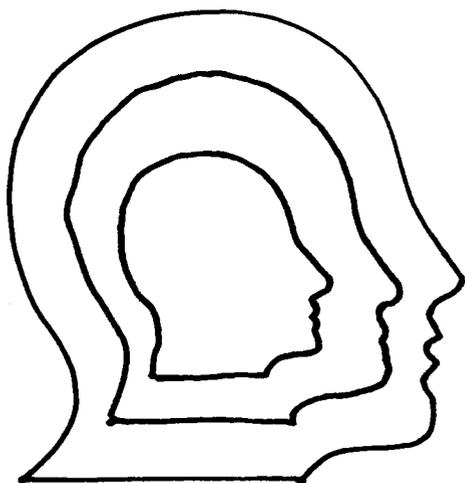


clearly been inspired by Protestant theology, but that no longer sends a chill down the spine. Most intellectually committed Christians start from models other than the "substantialist" one, but may then find that they have to claw their way back there, at least for some minimum of "substance," in order to preserve some semblance of identity in the chill deserts of absolute openness.

Each of the models (except for 2) has something positive to contribute to the rich and complex and *unfinished* idea of the Church. In that sense I agree with Ms. Ruether: the Church has still to be invented, and so the cultural conversation, which is the workshop in which it will be forged, must go on as broadly as possible. But it would be wrong to assume in advance that



I HAVE been convinced for some time that the source of many, if not most, of the troubles in the Catholic Church today is our stubborn failure to discern the differences among faith, theology and belief

Many Catholics who should know better (even a cardinal or two may come readily to mind) continue to insist that faith and belief are somehow independent of theology. They assure nervous audiences of parents that the job of the religious educator is not to teach the views of modern theologians but to teach the faith, indeed "to teach as Jesus did" (the title of one of the American bishops' recent catechetical documents).

I could cite actual statements and identify the speakers, but that would serve no useful purpose. We are now long past the time when such purveyors of gross theological distortions have to be exposed. They are known, and competent religious educators do not take them seriously any longer.

In the meantime, however, many innocent bystanders remain confused. They wonder if there is any point or purpose to being and remaining a Christian. The shadow of a question mark hovers ominously over everything in sight.

In this essay I propose a way out of the problem.

no flowers grow in episcopal gardens, while all is in bloom elsewhere. Meanwhile, it is the existence of overlapping and sometimes competing models—all sketches of a possible future—which makes the question "Am I a Catholic?" so difficult to answer today. To say "It all depends on your model" may not seem very satisfactory, yet it is more honest than rushing flat-footedly in. Perhaps all that talk about boundaries, even extended ones, was misleading, a relic of the Roman mania for definition; and perhaps, too, the Quakers are right to distinguish grades of membership. There is a place for the "listening" friends whose "yes" to this historically continuous community is qualified by hesitations and questionings. But to say that is already to select a model.

'Teaching as Jesus did?'

FAITH, THEOLOGY AND BELIEF

RICHARD P. McBRIEN

It is a matter of clarifying fundamental concepts and the interrelationships which exist among them. My thesis may be summarized in this fashion: faith is not theology is not belief.

1. *Faith is not theology.* Faith is a way of perceiving reality. The person of faith "sees" more than meets the eye. Faith apprehends the "beyond in our midst" (Bonhoeffer), the "other dimension" (Dupré), the ultimacy of secular experience (Gilkey), the Ground of being (Tillich). It is a judgment of faith that reality is more than the sum total of persons, places, things and events which constitute both history and the cosmos. The person of faith discerns those "signals of transcendence" (Berger) intermingled with the sights and sounds, the sensations and the smells of ordinary, everyday human experience. Faith is a stance, a posture, a fundamental attitude. Faith infers the reality of God from reality itself. But like all inferences, the evidence is circumstantial. In the terminology of the recent House Judiciary Committee hearings, there is no "smoking pistol" by which the God-problem finds its definitive resolution. Nixon is more easily tracked down than the Lord of the universe.

But inference is, after all, something to go on. It is

not sheerly arbitrary. As Representative Cohen of Maine argued at mid-summer, if a man wakes up in the morning and finds the ground covered with fresh snow, he has every right to infer that snow fell during the night, even though he never actually saw a flake of it descend. The analogy cannot be applied precisely to our presumed experience of God, but the analogy is applicable in some measure nonetheless. We infer that reality is ultimately gracious and provident in our own experience of gracious and provident people. We infer that the world is rooted in love by reason of our own experience of love. We infer that the transcendent God is real in our own experience of the transcendent virtues of loyalty, generosity, compassion, justice, honesty, truthfulness, sensitivity, gentleness and love.

Faith involves a risk-taking. We did not need Kierkegaard to tell us that, but we sometimes talk and act as if there were no risk at all. Infallibility stands at the ready. In this view, religious people—especially Catholics—are supposedly more certain than others of the reality of God and of the divine plan of salvation. The more one thinks and speaks of God, so it seems to be assumed, the more certain one becomes of the object of those thoughts and words. That's not true, of course, and the great Christian mystics should have impressed the contrary lesson upon us by now. The closer we approach toward God, the more deafening the silence. The more intensive the quest, the more elusive the goal.

Faith is that precognitive, prereflective, prescientific perception of God in the midst of life. But unalloyed faith doesn't exist. Nowhere can we discover and isolate "pure faith." Pure faith exists only in the mind, as a logical construct. Real faith, on the other hand, exists always and only in a cognitive, (more or less) reflective, (more or less) scientific state. Every thought about the meaning of faith is precisely that: a thought about the meaning of faith. Every word of interpretation designed to articulate and illuminate the meaning and implications of faith is, again, precisely that: a word of interpretation, not faith itself. When Catholic public figures warn the rank-and-file against the contamination of "the faith" by "theology," they simply don't know what they are talking about.

Faith is not theology, to be sure, but neither does faith exist apart from, or independently of, theology. Theology comes into play at that very moment when the person of faith becomes intellectually conscious of that faith. From the very beginning faith exists in a theologically interpreted state. Indeed, it is a redundancy to put it that way: "theologically interpreted." For the interpretation of one's faith is theology itself.

Theology is, as St. Anselm of Canterbury defined it nine centuries ago, "faith seeking understanding." Theology is that process by which we bring our presumed perception of God to the level of expression. Theology is the verbalizing, in a more or less systematic manner,

of the experience of God within human experience.

Theology may emerge in the form of a painting, a piece of music, a dance, a cathedral, a bodily posture, or, in its most recognizable form, in spoken and written words. These forms, of course, never do complete justice to the perception which they hope to express. Not all theology is good theology. We can ineptly translate our experience into language, or we can have a thoroughly distorted or even false experience of God in the first place, which no form, however cleverly constructed, can ever redeem.

When all is said and done, religious educators, bishops, preachers, and the Church at large do not transmit "the faith." They transmit particular interpretations or understandings of faith. In direct words: they transmit theologies.

It is entirely beside the point to warn religious educators against teaching theology instead of handing on the faith. The faith exists always and only in some theological form. The question before the Church today and forever is not *whether* the faith shall be transmitted according to some theological interpretation, but rather *which* theological interpretation is best suited to the task at a particular moment in time.

What is so offensive about appeals to "the faith" over against the "private views" of theologians is that *a particular theology* is subtly being cloaked in the aura of faith itself. Consequently, an attack upon that theology is automatically perceived as an attack upon the faith (as an attack upon the character and performance of the President was once conveniently perceived as an attack upon the office and institution of the Presidency). What some cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church learned in his theology courses (or catechism classes) in the 1920s or 1930s or what he himself may have taught as a professor of theology in the 1930s or 1940s may be useful or not in making sense of such Pauline texts as "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:19), but that theology remains only that: a theology, a specific, time-conditioned, culturally-conditioned, interpretation of the vast expanse of human history and, in particular, of that crucial segment of human history wherein the Christ-event comes clearly into view and focus.

And so we reach the supreme contradiction of the piece: "the faith" which must not be confined and corrupted by *any* theology can only be understood in terms of *one* theology, in this instance the scholastic theology popular in Catholic seminaries just prior to Vatican II.

2. *Theology is not belief.* If theology is faith brought to the level of self-consciousness, then belief is theology in a kind of snapshot or frozen state. Theology is a *process*; belief is one of its several *products*. Other products include Sacred Scripture (this is exceedingly important to remember lest one mistakenly conclude that

theology is reflection on the biblical message; it is entirely the other way round: the biblical message is itself a product of theological reflection), doctrines (beliefs elevated to the level of official approbation), dogmas (doctrines that carry the highest level of official approbation, the denial of which normally separates one from the community of faith), liturgies (*lex orandi, lex credendi*— the perception of God in ritualized form), artistic works (churches, statues, paintings, music, dance, and so forth).

In stop-action language: theology follows faith, and belief follows theology. But this is said only for purposes of distinguishing among the three elements. As we have already seen, faith and theology do not really exist apart from one another, whereas belief and theology can and do exist apart. The theologian can express all sorts of judgments about the reality of God as he/she presumably experiences God, without at the same time resorting to formulae or propositions which have received an official (doctrine) or quasi-official status (catechism, religion textbook, etc.) within the community of faith.

And that has been yet another serious distortion of the meaning of theology and of its relationship to belief and/or doctrine. Many, especially in the Roman Catholic tradition, have assumed that theology is essentially the study of church teachings. Indeed, Catholic seminary courses were for many years labeled simply "Dogma." The task of the theologian, in this view, is to analyze, explain and defend what is already "on the books" (in Denzinger and in modern papal documents). With that kind of understanding of theology abroad in the Catholic Church throughout most of this century, it is hardly surprising that the dissident posture of some contemporary Catholic theologians should have shocked and infuriated so many of their brothers and sisters in the Church. But theologians are not commissioned to be the Church's (or the Pope's) Ron Ziegler. They are more nearly her Walter Lippmanns.

3. *Faith is not belief.* There are many beliefs but only one faith. There are many Christian beliefs, but only one Christian faith. Faith is a way of perceiving God in human experience. Christian faith is a way of perceiving God in Jesus Christ as the key and focal point of all human experience.

Over the centuries of Christian history there have been literally thousands of beliefs held and transmitted at one time or another, i.e., interpretations of faith which significant segments of the Christian community found useful for expressing and articulating their own perception of God in Christ. Some of these beliefs endured the test of time (e.g., the great Christological dogmas), while others have been consigned to the intellectual rummage room (e.g., the Two Swords theory of papal authority). What has been true in Christian history is true in the contemporary Christian community. Hun-

dreds of different beliefs vie with one another for a kind of momentary or long-term dominance. Some of these beliefs are grounded solidly in the history of the Church (e.g., belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist), while others have very short and tender roots indeed (e.g., belief in the Pope as an absolute, infallible monarch).

The sorting-out process is never finished. We are faced constantly with the problem of evaluating and re-evaluating our beliefs in the light of our ongoing experience and our fundamental (theological) interpretations of that experience, and these in turn are judged against that instinct of faith which somehow gives the whole Church its inner coherence and its radical identity and continuity. It is at the point of the "somehow" in the preceding sentence that our rich poetry about the Holy Spirit inserts itself.

At key historical moments in that sorting-out process, representative leaders of the whole Church may be compelled to assemble in solemn ecumenical council (the broader the representation, the more ecumenical the council) to confront an issue of belief that threatens the very unity of the Church. Their task is not to draw the circle so tightly that many will fall beyond its limits, but to draw it as generously as conscience allows so that as many as possible might continue to stand together within it. Nothing in this essay is intended to be prejudicial to the important, irreplaceable function of what we Catholics call the official magisterium, but neither does this essay support the ultramontane mentality which still prevails in certain vocal sectors of the American Catholic community and even among some of its pastoral leaders. For papal and/or episcopal pronouncements are no less conditioned than the biblical message itself. And if we have adjusted ourselves at long last to the *critical* reading of Sacred Scripture, then it is certainly time that we similarly abjured our galloping fundamentalism in the use and abuse of ecclesiastical documents and doctrines. It is never enough to know what a conciliar text *said*. What did the text *mean* in its original formulation? And what can the text *mean* for us *today*?

4. *Unity in diversity.* Diversity and pluralism is a fact of life in the Church today. It was a fact of life in the Church of yesterday, in biblical and post-biblical times alike. And it will remain a fact of life in the Church until the very end of history. So long as we find ourselves in these peculiarly human circumstances where no one can claim to have seen God (John 1:18), we shall proceed in a groping, tentative, provisional and halting manner: trusting our perceptions as far as we can; articulating our convictions as modestly as we can; formulating our beliefs as fairly as we can; and respecting those with different theologies and different beliefs as conscientiously as we can.

But we cannot conclude that diversity and pluralism,

on the one hand, and unifying theological principles, on the other, are forever mutually exclusive. We Christians may differ in the way we express our perception of God and formulate those expressions consensually, but we are one in the conviction that the God of our theology and of our belief is a real, living God.

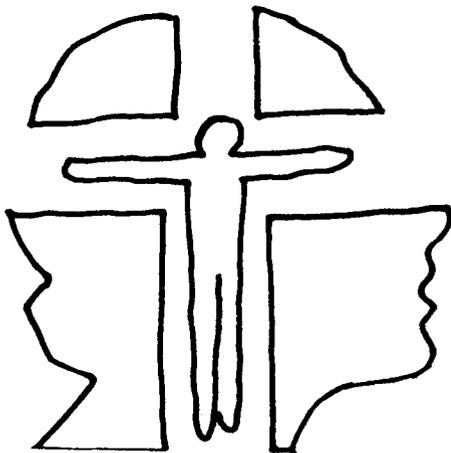
We Christians may differ in the way we express our perception of God in Jesus Christ and in the way we formulate those perceptions officially, but we are one in the conviction that the God of our theology and of our belief is truly present in Jesus of Nazareth to the extent that it can be said of Jesus alone that he is indeed the Lord of history (Phil 2:5-11).

We Christians, and particularly we Catholic Christians, may differ in the way we express our perception of God in the community of faith called the Church and we may differ, too, in the way we dogmatize that perception of God in the Church, but we are one in the conviction that there is indeed more to the Church than meets the eye, that God is present there in such wise that we can call it the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the People of God of the New Covenant.

And, finally, we Christians, and particularly we Catholic Christians, may differ in the way we express our perception of God in those ritual signs and symbols we call sacraments and we may differ in the way we

precisely formulate our apprehension of God in those sacred rites, but we are one in the conviction that the God of our theology and of our belief is truly present within and under these signs which serve as climactic points of encounter between God and ourselves.

The struggle to believe is not necessarily made any easier by the mere enumeration of these abiding elements of Christian faith. Nevertheless, they might provide a tangible and meaningful context within which we can make sense of, and apply, three key principles which the Second Vatican Council bequeathed to us: (1) Not all beliefs are of equal importance. "In Catholic teaching there exists an order or 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their relationship to the foundation of Christian faith" (Decree on Ecumenism, n. 11). (2) There are very few beliefs indeed which one must accept in order to remain in good standing within the Christian community. "In order to restore communion and unity or preserve them, one must 'impose no burden beyond what is indispensable' (Acts 15:28)" (Decree on Ecumenism, n. 18). (3) One cannot question the integrity of those with whom one chooses to disagree on matters of theology and/or belief. "Let there be unity in what is necessary, freedom in what is unsettled, and charity in any case" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n. 92).



No one who has lived through the last decade and watched the various movements, religious, occult, artistic, or otherwise, associated with the name of Jesus, can fail to realize what that Palestinian Jew of over nineteen hundred years ago has come to mean to modern man. This is not a phenomenon that is restricted to North America, for areas in Europe, Asia and South America have been caught up in it. Liberation has been proclaimed in his name—even revolution. Nor is it a phenomenon that is restricted to Christians, for who has not heard of "Jews for Jesus"? And to paraphrase an ancient Christian writer, what we have seen with

Which is the Jesus of faith?

BELIEF IN JESUS TODAY

JOSEPH A. FITZMYER

our eyes, what we have heard, what we have looked upon concerns the Word of Life. For to many people today Jesus means life. And the question is why.

Yet at the same time there is for individual Christians who are identified with various churches having a traditional Christian heritage a real struggle to believe. Many of them readily identify themselves as Christians and would not have it otherwise. Yet they find it so difficult to articulate that Christian identification, to express to themselves or to their neighbors what that really means or should mean. All that such an identification should entail might have to be explained by diverse factors,