

Divine Faith

By Henry Cardinal Manning
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"Faith cometh by hearing; and hearing by the Word of Christ." — Romans, Chapter 10.

If there is one truth in which all men in this Christian land are agreed, it is that we are saved by Faith, and that without Faith it is not possible to please God, for such are the words of the Holy Ghost. But if there is one thing on which men in this Christian land are divided it is as to what Faith is. It is a good thing, then, that we have at least one foundation upon which to build. We all believe, or profess to believe, that Faith is necessary for our salvation. Let us then be agreed as to what Faith is. It is not enough to know where we desire to go unless we know the way. Now there are many definitions or descriptions of what Faith is. First, we have in the Word of God, from the Holy Ghost, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen as yet." Again, we are told by one of the most illuminated teachers of the Church "that Faith is to believe what we cannot see." But I will give another definition or description of Faith, which is very short, and I believe all men will accept it — "Faith is to believe the Word of God." Here I think we ought all to be agreed. Let us then go on carefully to see the full meaning of these few words, "Faith is to believe the Word of God." And we shall more clearly understand it if we take it in this way. First, "Whence does Faith come?" Secondly, "What does Faith believe?" Thirdly, "Why does Faith believe it?" If we can agree in this we shall agree in all things.

First, then, "Whence does Faith come?" Faith does not come from the human reason. It is not a mere extension of the human intellect as the telescope extends the human sight. The faculty of sight is extended by a telescope to see those things which are not visible to the naked eye. Nevertheless it is always one and the same natural faculty aided and helped by a mechanical power. That is not Faith. The reason, however extended or cultivated, will not give us Faith. Faith is something beyond the powers of nature; it is beyond the reach of the intellect altogether. It is not within the limits of the nature in which we are created. It is a gift of God; and a faculty that comes from God, super-added to the human intellect, to the human heart, and to the human will, for Faith affects all three.

And, therefore, we begin by saying this — that without the gift of God no man can have Faith. It belongs to the supernatural order, not to that state in which we were born; for we were born children of wrath, spiritually dead; and Faith is given in the supernatural order, when we are born again and become children of God, and receive a spiritual life, of which Faith is the root. And, therefore, Faith means the light or illumination of the Holy Spirit of God given to the reason or the intellect, at the same time giving the heart a pious desire to believe, and impelling the will also to make an act of Faith, or of obedience of our whole intellect and heart to the truth which God has revealed. That is the first description of Faith. In the beginning, when our Divine Lord, God manifest in the flesh,

preached to the people in Jerusalem, all men knew that He was a man, and so their senses told them. That was not Faith. Nicodemus came to Him by night, and said "we know Thou art a teacher sent from God, for none can do these signs that Thou doest unless God be with him." That was the beginning of Faith in Nicodemus. But when our Divine Lord asked of Simon, "Whom say ye that I, the Son of Man, am?" Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;" and our Lord answered, "Flesh and blood have not revealed this to thee, but My Father who is in heaven." Peter was illuminated by the gift of Faith. That which sense and reason had already told him was elevated and perfected by the revelation of God.

Every one of you who has been baptized has already received this gift of Faith. Every one of you in baptism, in your regeneration, received the three chief theological virtues, as your catechism tells you, "Faith, hope and charity." You may ask "How is it possible for an unconscious infant to have the gift of Faith." I answer by asking you, "How is it impossible for an unconscious infant to have the gift of Faith?" There lies the intellect, which, if cultivated, may become the highest mathematical genius, the deepest philosophical speculator. The power of that intellectual development lies in the reason of the child, even in its unconscious state in its mother's arms; so there is a supernatural light given that natural reason: and that supernatural light is the infused gift of Faith, to be developed all through the life of the child, trained faithfully by parents and pastors under the guidance of the Church.

This power of belief — the Faith which believes in things not visible, giving the substance and reality, and a confidence founded on that reality of things not seen, and the hope which is a trustful desire of things that are yet to come, namely, the things that are eternal — that is perpetually growing in the intellect and the heart and the will of the child, just as the musical ear, which all possess in some degree, may be trained and cultivated to perfection, but without that cultivation will lie dormant; and also as the eye, which has in it an exquisite skill of design and of drawing, may either be developed to the perfection of the artist, or may lie dormant, if it be not cultivated. In like manner there is in every regenerate child this gift of Faith, which, for its development and perfection depends upon the fidelity of parents and pastors under the guidance of the Church. To every child, therefore, "Faith cometh by hearing." There is not one of you that learnt your Faith in our Divine Saviour, in the ever blessed Trinity — in a word, in your Christianity, from a book or the individual effort of your own. You will see clearly that Faith came to you by a living voice, and Faith came to you by hearing, before as yet you knew your letters or had learnt your prayers. You learnt the doctrines of your catechism before as yet it was possible for you to read a verse of the Holy Scriptures, or, if able to read, to reason upon it. Such, then, is the nature and origin of Faith. It comes from God.

Now, secondly, "What does Faith believe?" In one word — the Word of God, and nothing else. All of you would say that Faith is belief in the Word of God; but that is not enough. Nothing but the Word of God is the matter of Divine Faith. All human beliefs are merely human in their nature and in their authority. All pious books written by human intellects are outside the Word of God. Everything, however Christian and pious it may be, which is not the Word of God, is outside the matter of Divine Faith; and whatsoever there is of revelation contained in such beliefs or books is there, because it has been borrowed and inserted from the Word of God: and you believe it, not because it is there, but because it is the Word of God. And, therefore, the second question is already answered. Our Faith believes the Word of God; that is, the whole revelation of God, as revealed by Himself in the light of nature, in the face of the whole world, in the things that are made by which

His existence is proved, in our own soul, in the lights of our intellect, in the dictates of our conscience, and in the affections of our heart — in all these God has revealed Himself. This, I may say, is the natural Word of God. But there is the supernatural Word of God — that which came by the Holy Ghost speaking by seers and prophets from the beginning, that which came, above all, by the manifestation of His Son Incarnate. Every word that proceeded out of the mouth of our Divine Redeemer: all that was revealed by the illumination of the day of Pentecost, by the coming of the Holy Ghost, who came to fill up, to interpret, and to perfect all that our Divine Lord had taught before, and to add those things of which he spoke when he said "I have many things to say to you, but you cannot hear them now." This is the supernatural Word of God, and that Word of God was preached throughout the world, and the nations of the world believed it, and Faith came not from a book, but by hearing; by the expansion of the day of Pentecost in all the world; by the living voice of the apostles, and evangelists, and messengers who were sent out to preach the gospel to every creature. It was the living voice that filled the world with the knowledge of the Word of God: and that living voice continues to this day, unfaltering and perpetual. As it was in the beginning so it is now. The chief and living scripture is the whole Catholic Church, the mystical body of Christ of which the Divine Head is at the right hand of His Father, and the Light, and the Life, and the Guide of that mystical body upon earth is God the Holy Ghost. But when on the day of Pentecost He descended, He made that Church to be His sanctuary, His perpetual dwelling-place, and the organ of his perpetual and infallible voice. And upon that testimony we know that the written Word of God is Holy Scripture, or that the Holy Scripture is the Word of God. The greater scripture is the unwritten Word of God, the living scripture which is written upon the world-wide and lineal intelligence of the Church. From the testimony of that greater scripture we receive the lesser scripture, which is the letter of the Word that has been written.

We believe that God has revealed His Truth and Will by an unwritten and written testimony — that is, by the whole Divine tradition of the Church. This is the answer to our second question.

Now for the third point — "Why do we believe this revelation?" "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ." It says by the Word. It does not say by the Book. And they who draw their Christianity out of the written Scripture only have proved for centuries the insufficiency of that rule of Faith, by the multitudinous contradictions and ever-increasing diversity of the interpretations they put upon the Divine Word. We need, therefore, an interpreter and an authority higher than all human teachers, for without a teacher who is divine how can we have divine Faith? And, therefore, the wisest human critic cannot give me divine certainty of the meaning of Holy Scripture. The most learned scientific historian cannot fix for me the meaning of the written Word of God. No one, however pious or devout, no minister of religion, no priest of the Catholic Church, apart from the Divine authority of the Church itself, can venture to interpret that written Word by his own light or his own discernment; therefore, all teachers and interpreters, all those who would fix the sense of the Bible by their explanations, expositions, interpretations, however piously they may be intended, unless they first learn of the only Divine teacher, whose witness can neither change nor mislead us, are only human. In them we cannot repose our confidence. We cannot know that what they teach is with Divine certainty the Word of God. And if any man, if any human teacher comes between your soul and the light of the Holy Scripture, he obstructs the light, as any obstacle between the light of the noon-day sun and your eye hides its flood of light from you. We may apply this not only to individuals, however learned, however pious, however well-intentioned they may be, but also to bodies of men.

If a whole province of the Catholic Church separate from its unity, or two provinces that once were in the unity of the Catholic Church but now are separated from it, should — what has never yet come to pass — unanimously decide some doctrine in one sense, neither so can we make an act of Divine Faith. No such human authority can give us a Divine certainty that we have the true meaning of the written Word of God. If a whole nation, a national religion in which all national teachers by whatsoever name they may be called, shall agree together in Synod or Convocation, and shall issue doctrinal decrees, neither would that give a certainty upon which we can found an act of Divine Faith. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ." But the Word of Christ must come from Christ Himself, and not from any person or persons, not from any provinces or nations, interposed between Christ and our souls.

There remains, then, no Divine interpreter but the Giver of the revelation and the Inspirer of the written Scriptures — God the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Truth, Who, according to the promise of our Divine Master, came to abide with us for ever, and to be the Guide, the Light, and the Teacher of the universal, imperishable Church. Therefore St. Gregory the Great, to whom we owe our restored Christianity, has said these most pregnant words: "The teachers of the faithful are the disciples of the Church." They are taught first; they learn by hearing the Divine voice before they venture to teach the faithful. Unless the teacher has the Divine certainty of what he has learned how can he venture to say "Thus saith the Lord": "This is the meaning of God's Word, take it from me." If he has a Divine commission to teach, so much the worse if he has not an infallible knowledge of the Divine message which he has to deliver. The greater his authority the more he will mislead, unless he has been first guided, instructed, and taught himself as a disciple and a learner. Therefore, do not let any man imagine that the Church, which we profess in our baptismal creed, is an institution like any other on the face of the earth. Amidst the empires and kingdoms and the commonwealths of men, amongst the communions and bodies that are called Churches, there is one and one only which has these special conditions — first, that it comes to us from the day of Pentecost, the living witness of the advent of the Son of God in the flesh, upon the human and historical evidence which — if we take it only so — we have the maximum or moral certainty that Christianity was revealed by Jesus Christ. But the Church is not only a perpetual human and historical witness. It is, as I have already said, the mystical body of Jesus Christ. It has a Divine head; it has an imperishable organization; it has a Divine hierarchy; an order of pastors; multitude of people knit together in a living body; and in that living body dwells perpetually God the Holy Ghost. The witness and testimony, therefore, of that universal Church is not only a human and historical witness; it is not like the historical witness which the British Empire can bear of its own past. It is also a Divine witness — Divine in its head, Divine in the Life-giver who dwells within it, Divine in the life which it derives from Him, Divine also in the voice which speaks by it, as our Divine Lord said to his apostles "He that heareth you heareth Me." The voice of the Church, as St. Augustine says, is the voice of its Head; the Head of the Church is Christ himself; and the voice of the Church is the voice of Christ; so in strictness of truth and fact "Faith cometh by hearing that voice and hearing by the Word — that is the voice of Christ." This, then, is the answer to the third question. You who hear me have learnt this from childhood. You do not need that I should draw it out; but if what I have said falls upon any ears to whom my words may sound strange and new, I would ask them to do two things — ponder them well, and pray to the Holy Ghost to show them whether or not my words are true.

Let us make application of what has been said. This great gift of Faith may be lost. The gift of charity may be lost if we act uncharitably, that is, with malice or ill-will, or if we hate our neighbor. The gift of purity is the gift of the Holy Ghost; but it may be lost, and certainly will be lost, if men

expose themselves to that which is contrary to it. All the gifts of the Holy Ghost may be lost. If we trifle or tamper with them, if we despise or expose them to peril, they will be lost. So Faith may be lost. Nothing extinguishes Faith more surely than an immoral life. An immoral life darkens the intellect, blunts the conscience, and makes the heart desire that the warnings of God's Word may not be true. I will not dwell upon this point. Faith may be lost by unbelief, and the beginning of unbelief is doubt: a doubt spreads into scepticism, scepticism into infidelity. How do men begin to doubt? They read that which is deliberately written contrary to the revelation of God; and they cannot judge for themselves. They listen to those who contradict the Word of God, as Eve listened in the beginning when the tempter said, "Why hath God said," and "God hath not said." We live in an atmosphere in which doubt, scepticism, and unbelief flit to and fro, so that we can hardly breathe it without taking in some of the germs of doubt or scepticism. We need to make acts of Faith continually, to resist and to expel the influence and the action of the literary pretentious atmosphere in which we live.

We have come to a day when men are laboring to efface the very name of God from the laws of the land. Politics are to be human and to have no contact whatever with God or with Faith. I call these Godless politics. What can be the legislation which does not recognize first the law of God as its foundation, and next the Supreme and Divine Law-giver as its sanction and authority? Once more; we live in a day when philosophy has become Godless too. Men have turned their back upon two realms of that great hierarchy of science by which the Christian world until this later time was illuminated. The first great light of the hierarchy of science was the knowledge of God, and the next great light was the knowledge of man, and the third, last, and lowest light is the knowledge of the earth under our feet and of the sky over our head — that is, the knowledge of the world. The knowledge of the laws of God the Creator in the works he has made is a great and noble science; but woe to those who make it the sole and only science. Woe to those who turn their back upon the science of God and the science of man, to teach us that the only science for man is the knowledge of the mud under our feet, and the strata under the mud, and the laws of electricity, magnetism, and chemical affinity. I must call that the Godless science.

Then, again, there is such a thing as Godless education. That is, the culture and development of the human reason, and the training of men for the life of this world, without God. We are told, "But we take care to teach morals." No, you cannot teach morals without God. Morals are the relations between God and man, and man and man; and unless you first teach the knowledge of God you cannot teach morals, which are the relation of the creature to his Creator, on whom he depends. He must depend on Him for the whole guidance of his life; and unless you first teach a little child the knowledge of God you cannot teach him morals, which measure and govern his relations to God as his Father, Lawgiver, and Judge. Neither without this can you teach him his duties to man. Therefore, education without religion is impossible: the thing is a contradiction in terms. Instruction there may be; education there cannot be. You may teach a child to sing and to sum — I readily admit that — without reading the Bible, without a catechism or a creed; but to educate means to unfold, to cultivate, to develop, to shape, and to perfect the intellect, the heart, the will, the conscience, the character and the life, and therefore the whole living man, according to the definition which we gave in the beginning. Therefore, education without Faith is a thing intrinsically impossible. You may as well say that you can have living action without life.

Neither can you teach morals between man and man without Faith. How do you know the duty you owe to your neighbor except from the revelation that God has first written upon your heart, and has

next taught you in the light of Christianity? All education must be founded on the Word of God, the whole undiminished revelation, which we are bound to believe if we have the Faith by which we are to be saved.

My last word shall be a question. What made England? England is a Christian land. I do not ask what made it a Christian land; I ask what made it England. There was no England at the time when all the races of the land were divided and broken up into seven or more kingdoms always in warfare and mutual conflict. There was no England till it became one. What made England one? Not warfare, not conquest, not the right of the stronger. Again and again England was almost united under one head, but it broke up again. It was not politics that united it at last, nor legislation. There were no imperial politics then. There were the beginnings and the germs and rudiments of councils. But they were local and partial. They did not make the unity of England. The unity of our land had a deeper source, and a more enduring foundation. England was made by one faith. It was Christianity that blended its conflicting races in one national life, in the love of God, in the love of the brethren in the common partaking of the precious body and blood of Jesus Christ at one altar: in one worship; under one pastoral authority, subject to the one Supreme Shepherd over all, to whom our Divine Master said, "Feed my sheep"; that one chief pastor sitting in the see of Peter, who represents the Son of God, the Divine head who sits at the right hand of His Father. England became a province of His kingdom of which there shall be no end. This is what made England to be one people. The unity of England was a supernatural work springing from Faith, and sustained by Faith. There was no England until that supernatural knowledge was impressed upon it.

More than this: we talk largely of our political liberty and our personal freedom. What made England free? The freedom of Faith. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty." It was Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that first taught mankind true freedom. English freedom and liberty came with English Christianity. It taught the true freedom and the true liberty of self-government, that is self-command, to every man who became a true disciple of his Divine master. And when men began to govern themselves in liberty, the domestic life of England began to arise. English homes were Christian homes. There is liberty and freedom in Christian homes. The homes of a people make up the commonwealth as the stones built into the wall make up a sanctuary such as this. The liberty and freedom of England came with the freedom and liberty of Christianity — that is redemption from sin and falsehood, cruelty, mutual oppression, and tyrannous power. I will ask them, "Whence came the self-government of England?" We are full of inflated confidence in our powers of self-government. What, I ask again, made England capable of governing itself? It was Christianity. This taught men the liberty of law and the freedom of justice, and obligations of conscience, and the duty both of people and of princes to obey a Supreme Legislator to whom all must give account. In one word Christian education made England. It made England one; it made England free, and it made England capable of governing itself. Am I not then justified in saying this: that, if Christian education made England, education without Christianity will unmake it? And are we not bound, every one of us, to be ready to lay down everything — aye, God giving us the grace, life itself — rather than be partaker in the remotest degree in the breaking up of our inheritance of Christian education, already mutilated, and now more gravely threatened, but still surviving — the richest, noblest, and most vital heirloom of this land.

There was a time when from sea to sea England was full of the illumination of one faith. There was a time when in every church, every great cathedral, every parish church and every little chapel — I was about to say — there was the presence of our Divine Master, the Word Incarnate upon the altar.

There came a day when from every altar the Presence of our Divine Lord was taken away. There came a day that rose with the sun and set in darkness when the Divine Presence was banished by royal decree from every sanctuary throughout the land. The chief Christian inheritance of England was cut asunder in that day. Still it survived, but with this difference. All the men that had grown up whilst Faith in the Presence of our Divine Lord in the Blessed Sacrament governed our land retained some lingering consciousness of their privation; but their little children were utterly disinherited. Until that day the ploughman and the shepherds, as well as the noble and rich came into the sanctuary leading their little ones to kneel before the presence of our Lord — of those little ones some who had begun to know Him and to feel His presence, for the rest of their lives grew up with a fading consciousness which soon died out. Every church and chapel stood stripped and empty as we see our own on Good Friday. Who can realize the change from the warmth of a living Faith, in which they believed till then, to the chill which fell upon them for the rest of their days. I will not dwell upon this; time would fail me.

I wish to make one more contrast. Down to the other day every school in England was a Christian school — that is, was a school in which Christianity was taught in definite, precise, and intelligible doctrines. The inheritance of the people of England had been cut asunder once, by that unspeakable loss of the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament. God forbid that it should be cut asunder again, and that the education of the Christian people of England should be no longer Christian education. The letter of the Bible read and interpreted, not under the Divine guidance of the Church, not by the rule of creeds which have descended from the apostles; not in the precise exposition which fixes the true meaning of that creed, but by the chance interpretation of man or woman, neither ordained, nor taught, nor trained as minister or priest; pious I will believe; good I trust, but absolutely incapable to do that for which they have not received either command or fitness.

I say then to you who are fathers and mothers, and have responsibilities for children: Suffer any loss that this world can inflict upon you rather than let your little ones be robbed of that which is beyond all gold and silver. Remember the divine words "Buy the truth" — that is, at any cost — "but sell it not" — that is, take no price for it, no prosperity of this world, no secular culture, no advantage which may raise your children in the social scale or make them rich hereafter. "Sell it not." Having got the whole and perfect Faith do not doom your children to a creedless Christianity, to a religion that cannot be put into a catechism, and to belief that has no divine certainty. As God has given the Faith to you by inheritance, so hand it on to those who shall come after you. Cherish in your heart, with all fidelity of love, the gift of Faith which you have received; watch over it in your little ones, for the light over it lest in any way it be dimmed or quenched. Love is burning in their hearts bright as in your own. Watch the Word of God, which is the matter of our Faith; but above all love the Divine authority upon which we believe all things — the Divine voice of the one only Church of God — the sole witness and messenger from the day of Pentecost, imperishable as the earth under our feet, and more, for that will pass away, and the Church of Jesus Christ can never pass away — pure as the light of Heaven, immutable as its divine Head; "yesterday, and to-day, and the same for ever": from Whom, "by hearing," you have received your Faith, the pure, undefiled, and immutable Word of God.
