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FAITH AND THE SIGNS OF EXPECTATION

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The reality and experience of faith has been articulated in a variety of ways, each attesting to a particular and limited conception of the human process and its relation to the divine. What is needed is a generic account that will exhibit the basic features of faith regardless of the finite and historically determined perspectives within which faith is located. In most cases, at least, faith has been sharply demarcated from belief insofar as belief is tied to the logical structure of assertive judgments of the form "S is P". The affirmation of a predicate, be it a quality or an event, of a given subject entails that such a predicate can be brought under circumscribed forms of inquiry and possible validation. The reality of faith, on the other hand, is of a radically different logical nature. As Paul Tillich has persuasively argued, faith is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern (Tillich 1963). In the sheer bindingness of this concern, all mere beliefs about the divine nature are broken open by that which can not be the bearer of predicates or a subject within which or upon which such predicates could inhere.

If faith is fundamentally different from belief, it follows that it can not be rendered in the same semiotic terms as those that pertain to beliefs. To believe that something is the case is to articulate and ramify signs and interpretants as they serve to illuminate and embody the object of belief. Thus, for example, to assert that the divine is complex in its nature is to struggle toward a specific series of signs that will exhibit the various forms and orders of the complexity of God. Each sign series will be related to the other relevant series that together flesh out the contour of God's complex ways of being. For the Christian, for instance, beliefs about God's incarnation in the slumbering orders of nature will be expressed in a body of signs that make the incarnation actual to a community of believers. It makes sense to say that some signs are more compelling than others or that some interpretants promise to facilitate further inquiry into the divine nature. Yet none of this semiotic material clarifies the deeper and more problematic phenomenon of faith.

In being grasped by an ultimate concern the human process is inverted and shriven of its semiotic plenitude and compelled to go beyond the semiotic richness of its religious beliefs. Mere preliminary concerns, always concretized in communally available sign systems, cannot replace the ultimate import of the elusive 'object' of faith. The signs of the determinate religions, to use Hegel's formulation, become curiously suspended in the moment of faith and recede in the face of that which is

not a sign or a body of interpretants. Our theological beliefs are finite and determinate and thus can fit in with the rest of our interpretive life. But the movement away from belief toward faith requires that the finite give way to the infinite. This process is already foreshadowed in the unconscious. Hegel, lecturing in 1827 shows this quite clearly (1827: 423):

Instead the genuine other of the finite is the infinite, and this is not bare negation of the finite but is affirmative, is being. . . . This affirmative process is the process of our spirit; it brings itself about unconsciously within our spirit; but philosophy is having the consciousness of it. We bring the same thing to pass when we raise ourselves up to God. Thus the infinite itself is at first something finite or negative. The second [moment] is that it is something affirmative. There is a progression through different determinations, and it is by no means an external one but is rather necessity itself. This necessity is the deed of our spirit.

The human process is compelled by its own unconscious momentum to move beyond determinate beliefs toward that infinite that cannot be circumscribed or delimited by the 'sum' of finite affirmations. Hegel brings us to the moment of transition in which semiotic plenitude is overturned by the higher power of the infinite.

But this transition to the non-finite is more than the drive of the concept toward transparency. In spite of his innovations and insights, Hegel erred in seeing faith in terms of conceptual encompassment. The deeper reality of faith lies in the unconscious potencies that speak to us from beyond our categories. Hegel's panlogism affirms that the world is a self-contained cosmos that only awaits proper categorial analysis. Faith would be but one moment within the quest for totalization. Yet Hegel, more forcefully than anyone before him, brings us to the threshold of faith but does not allow us to understand the more elusive presence of that which is not graspable by our sign systems. The true power of faith lies in its absolute refusal to become bound by any categorial analysis no matter how fecund. This negation of a bound totality has been seen more clearly by Jürgen Moltmann, a theologian who remains in dialogue with Hegel. Writing in his *Theology of Hope*, he states (Moltmann 1965: 92):

Hence every view which sees the world as a self-contained cosmos, or history as a universal whole that contains and manifests the divine truth, is broken down and transposed into the eschatological key of 'not yet.' Our knowledge, as a knowledge of hope, has a transcendent and provisional character marked by promise and expectation, in virtue of which it recognizes the open horizon of the future of reality and thus preserves the finitude of human experience.

The "not yet" hovers over the faith experience and makes it permeable to that which is without a contour or semiotic shape. To be grasped by an ultimate concern is, on the deepest level, to be grasped by the fundamental not yet that speaks from out of the unconscious potencies of the self and nature. If Hegel ignored the not yet in his drive toward the luminous plenitude of the category, Moltmann reminds us that our thought systems are themselves shriven by the open horizon that cannot be filled in.

The human process lives between and among meaning-horizons that give it its fundamental wealth of signs. To live in the innumerable orders of nature and history is to be buffeted by the cultural and natural signs of these various meaning-

horizons. A horizon of meaning can be defined as the location of actual and potential signs. No horizon is fully isolated and must interact with other horizons and their internal sign systems. More importantly, all cultural horizons derive their dynamism and hermeneutic clarification from the orders of nature. Nature is permeated by its own intrinsic sign systems and meanings and serves as the enabling condition for all cultural systems.

The basic contour of the self thus emerges from out of the felt pressures of these horizons. Belief systems attain some kind of survival value according to the practical strategies of the sign using organism. Yet, within the protean unconscious of the self, an unconscious that is universal and rooted in the vast evolutionary structures of nature, lies this deeper potency of the not yet, that is, of the open horizon that cannot be reduced to a cluster of signs (Corrington 1987).

The movement from belief to faith, as the movement from bound to open horizons, entails a painful and dramatic emptying of the self. Hope, as concretized in the promise of a new personal identity, destroys the old self. Moltmann, referring to the faith experiences of Martin Luther, makes this clear (1965: 91):

The event of promise does not yet bring him to the haven of identity, but involves him in the tensions and differentiations of hope, of mission, and of self-emptying. If revelation encounters him as promise, then it does not identify him by disregarding what is negative, but opens him to pain, patience and the 'dreadful power of the negative', as Hegel has said.

Analogous to the loss of a closed and bound cosmos is the loss of the self and its attendant sign systems. If self identity in the pre-faith stage can be seen as sustained by innumerable signs and meanings, then the new identity emerging out of hope will make such an identity impossible. The power of the negative is actually the gift of the not yet that breaks open the semiotic self to something not filled with semiotic content. The liberating power of expectation is initially experienced as the wrath that consumes the plenitude of the self and leaves it dangling over an abyss seemingly devoid of all transforming power.

Finite subjectivity deludes itself that it has attained that radical openness that will bring it into contact with the potencies of the divine. The loss of the merely subjective, as a moment with the experience of faith, is only possible through the eschatological perspective that brings the power of the not yet out of the unconscious into the center of the finite subject. The illusory plenitude of the ego is dispersed into the negating abyss of the not yet conscious. Hegel, while over stressing the role of pure thought, fully understands this negation of finite subjectivity. He states (1827: 446-447):

It is part of knowing the true that one should dismiss one's subjectivity, the subjective fancies of personal vanity, and concern oneself with the true purely in thought, conducting oneself solely in accordance with objective thought. This negation of one's specific subjectivity is an essential and necessary moment.

The sign using organism becomes freed from its own semiotic richness by the unconscious potency of the not yet that negates all finite self will. The signs at its disposal become permeable to the ever receding movement of the open horizon of the not yet. From the standpoint of the threatened subjectivity, this negation appears in the guise of death, of an impending loss of center and meaning that will destroy the

integrity of the self. But another interpretation will appear to the self on the other side of this seeming shipwreck.

The loss of finite subjectivity and its internal sign systems prepares the way for an eschatological transformation of human nature. The signs of mere belief overcome their opacity to ultimate import by foundering in the not yet. In being overturned, these signs become transparent to possibilities of transformation in nature, history, and the human process. An ordinary sign becomes a sign of expectation when its semiotic density is negated to allow for an empty radiance open to the not yet conscious. Moltmann describes this process as it is exhibited in the self (1965: 91-92):

Thus the promised identity of man leads into the differentiation of self-emptying. He gains himself by abandoning himself. He finds life by taking of death upon him. He attains to freedom by accepting the form of a servant. That is how the truth that points forward to the resurrection of the dead comes to him.

Behind the mythological understanding of the resurrection is the deeper existential truth of the power of the not yet that enters into the region provided by the shipwreck of the finite self. Put in different terms, the semiotic self, that is, the self of "personal vanities", is reborn through the transformation of its internal sign systems. The new self is gathered into the movement of expectation and thus lets go of its previous identity.

All of the orders of creation are quickened by the power of expectation that gently undermines the tyranny of the powers of origin. Put in evolutionary terms, expectation provides the open spaces within which novelty and creativity can emerge for sign using organisms. Without the presence of the not yet, evolution would consist in the blind reiteration of the structures of origin. The potency of the not yet, retained forever in the unconscious of nature, goads evolutionary ramification toward a richer unfolding of its various forms of consciousness. While this unfolding is not governed by an intrinsic or final goal, it retains a fundamental restlessness that points eternally toward the not yet.

When signs of belief become signs of expectation they leave the realm of death and negation and allow the positive contour of the divine to emerge. Faith, as the human clearing within which this transition occurs, is remolded on the other side of negativity. In this renewal, the finite self is brought into proximity with the divinity that speaks from out of the not yet. In what remains we will exhibit the correlation of faith and the divine. While the experience of the not yet lies beyond all signs, the experience of the divine can be rendered into semiotic terms. Put in different language, God stands between the abyss of the not yet and the orders of creation (including history and the human process). As such God lives between the poles of the ontological difference and participates in post-semiotic and semiotic reality. Only in distinguishing between God and the not yet are we able to show how faith lives in an ambiguous relation to semiotic structures. Thus far we have emphasized the negative dimensions of faith. It is necessary to emphasize the positive.

In passing through the shipwreck of the finite subject, faith becomes permeable to transcendence. This is first experienced in those complexes of nature that reveal the potencies of God. Some orders of creation reveal a power of Being that is not evident in other orders. For example, the divine is manifest in certain musical structures but is curiously absent in many others. Where this power of Being appears, the music points to an ultimate import that cannot be reduced to the formal, material, or expressive qualities of the work itself. Faith is quickened and given an objective

correlate in its encounters with these fragmentary and oft-times elusive traces of God. The power of great works of art comes from the promise of transcendence, that is, of the eschatological transformation of human nature. Faith, in this first positive dimension, is not a belief about the traits of these works but is the response to the power of Being embodied in them.

Phenomenologically, the first dimension of faith is manifest in those experiences tinged or permeated with a sense of power and mystery. Finite subjectivity is opened to an elusive actuality than is incomparable to ordinary experience. Rudolf Otto has probed into the nature of this first dimension and has exhibited its structure in terms of the tension between the daunting and the fascinating (1963: 31):

These two qualities, the daunting and the fascinating, now combine in a strange harmony of contrasts, and the resultant dual character of the numinous consciousness, . . . is at once the strangest and most noteworthy phenomenon in the whole history of religion. The daemonic-divine object may appear to the mind an object of horror and dread, but at the same time it is no less something that allures with a potent charm, and the creature, who trembles before it, utterly cowed and cast down, has always at the same time the impulse to turn to it, nay even to make it somehow his own.

In the orders of nature, this fascination with that which breaks into the ordinary causal realm gives the impression of the miraculous. These traces of God are not, however, violations of the causal order, but marks of the fragmentary and elusive divine potencies. In encountering these traces, in nature or art, faith is given content that points beyond the complexes within which these traces appear.

The first dimension of faith is more passive than active. It responds to those traces of God already manifest in nature or human creativity. As such it remains bound to the structures and powers of origin. The second dimension of faith is more volatile and reveals the restlessness within God. If the first dimension is correlated to epiphanies of power (the numinous), the second points toward positive forces of transformation within social orders. We see this dimension most clearly in social eschatologies and their utopian expectations. Faith, unlike belief which relies on cost-benefit calculations, struggles to participate in the evolution of God in human communities. Here God is not so much manifest as the power of Being but as the lure toward justice. Faith is gathered into this lure whenever it transcends given social conditions. Many of our signs of expectation point toward the Kingdom of Justice in which all forms of heteronomy and domination are overcome. No finite set of beliefs can compel us to act and live in the light of the Kingdom of Justice.

Faith is gathered into a social eschatology that points beyond the fragmented structures of community. God holds forth ideals in which finite subjects find the courage and power to move beyond the stagnant forms of interaction. Within the larger communities and their heteronomous powers live the smaller and more focused communities of justice. The members of these communities live in hope of social transformation in which all heteronomous powers will be broken by the divine will. This expectation is not reducible to a teleological belief in progress but lives in the full radicalness of justice that overcomes the demonic distortions of history (Corrington 1988).

The third positive dimension of faith is much quieter than the first two and emerges whenever the self participates in the agapistic love of God that preserves all of the orders of creation from corrosive powers of non-being. As Hartshorne has argued, God preserves all complexes in eternal memory even when they cease to

prevail within nature (Hartshorne 1948). No order is ever bereft of divine love, even in the moment of death and destruction. Faith responds to the divine security and remain steadfast against the threat of non-being. The courage required of faith in the second dimension comes only when it penetrates into the mystery of agape in the third dimension. Social expectation can not long prevail without the gift of divine love.

Faith, in this third dimension, is most attuned to the power or Being that is never reticent to show its face. In the words of Schleiermacher, this is the experience of "sheer dependence" on the absolute and underlies the more active forms of faith that respond to epiphanies of power or social expectations (Schleiermacher 1830). All created beings are gathered in the felt "whence" that supports and sustains them against annihilation. Schleiermacher makes this quite clear (1830: 17):

Now this is just what is principally meant by the formula which says that to feel oneself absolutely dependent and to be conscious of being in relation with God are one and the same thing; and the reason is that absolute dependence is the fundamental relation which must include all others in itself.

All of our dealings with the orders of creation are governed and measured by the God relation in this third dimension. That is, the quiet power of Being, operating in us through sheer or absolute dependence, makes it possible to comprehend and expand the other moments of faith. Our partial dependence on the epiphanies of power and on social expectation is grounded on that dependence which knows no limitation. The finite subject is remade and redeemed through its dependence on the unbounded love of God.

Most difficult to articulate is the fourth dimension of faith. The first three dimensions all relate to the divine itself without explicit reference to the not yet. In the final moment within the life of faith, the tension between God and the not yet emerges in all of its purity (Corrington 1987a). For here faith must learn to experience the movement of God toward its own not yet. Using the language of Tillich, this is the God beyond the god of theism, or, echoing Meister Eckhart, this is the Godhead within which God is embedded. The abyss of the not yet lives as the lure for God's own eternal self-overcoming. While Hartshorne has well understood that God is eternally self-surpassable, he has not penetrated into the ultimate mystery of the elusive not yet. This abyss stands before God as a goad toward divine growth and evolution. The God of process is only made possible by the not yet which is not itself a process.

Faith leaps beyond its first three dimensions by participating in the divine travail. While we live within the gift of agape, the divine stands in need of a counter movement whereby we augment its life by our love and concern. Our own struggles with the not yet serve, by analogy, to awaken us to the divine self-overcoming. In a paradoxical sense, God is both infinite and incomplete. God's incompleteness in the face of the not yet is the final reality with which faith must contend.

Our finite existence is sustained and nurtured by the power of Being manifest in nature and great works of culture. Our social existence is quickened and augmented by the lure of the Kingdom of Justice. The core or our being is preserved in the gift of agape that sustains all orders or creation. Yet the lack within God can only be healed when faith returns the divine love. God's lack in the face of the not yet is eased by those of us who live out the full plenitude of faith. In overcoming our own forms of shipwreck we learn of the shipwreck within God as it struggles against the recalcitrance within its own natures. If we assume that God participates in our

suffering, through an eternal and responsive sympathy, then it follows that we are obligated to participate in the sufferings of God. Traditional theisms have ignored this aspect of God's life and have thereby misunderstood the true core of faith.

Faith, in all of its dimensions, is made possible by the signs of expectation that point ultimately to the not yet. In theological terms we can say that eschatology is the measure for anthropology. The finite subjectivity of the semiotic self gives way to the expectant self. Yet this quickening of expectation is manifest throughout the innumerable orders of creation. Nature is eschatological through and through and both gives birth to and receives the manifestations of the not yet. Whenever we participate in the divine promise we reach down into the heart of nature and outward toward the Encompassing power of the not yet that most fully serves as the measure for our being.

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