

## ***FAITH AS TRUST***

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When faced with the issue of faith, most people in our society would put the matter in pretty much the same way: “Do you believe in God?” This is in fact a central question for faith in a number of religions, but not all. It is a question that would not readily occur to a Buddhist, for example, for some reasons we will explore a little later. Still, it is not a bad starting point if one truly understands the question. The qualification is quite important, for the meanings of both belief (as faith) and God are more difficult to discern than most appear to realize. Furthermore, discussions of faith are easily derailed by such confusions and by the emotional baggage many bring with them when entering such conversations. Therefore, there may be some benefit in trying to clear away some problematic preconceptions while addressing the question of the meaning and value of faith.

### **THE HEART OF FAITH**

Probably the most prevalent understanding of the question about belief in God is that this is a question about whether one gives mental assent to the proposition that there is an all-powerful being that we call God. Clearly, this is the intent of a significant number of believers who express faith in God, so one cannot deny that this is a possible way to understand the question. However, I want to suggest that this view of faith does not penetrate to the heart of the matter, failing to illumine why faith has such power for many.

The assumption that “believe” means to give assent to a proposition about something (in this case God) reflects what the twentieth-century Christian theologian Paul Tillich called an “intellectualistic

distortion” of faith.<sup>1</sup> It assumes that faith is primarily an intellectual exercise, and God will judge us according to whether we manage to think correctly about difficult questions such as the reality and nature of God. What this common view tends to overlook is another possible meaning for faith: faith as trust. When you consider whether you believe in a friend who has made a solemn promise, you are not pondering whether you believe in the existence of that friend but whether you trust her/him to be reliable. Seen in this light, the question of whether one believes in God is the question of whether there is something one takes to be ultimately and unconditionally trustworthy.

Which view of faith is more adequate? One’s answer to this question will depend on an entire network of convictions, experiences, and assumptions that we cannot address here. One point worth considering in this connection, however, is that understanding faith as trust helps to illumine much about why faith matters to people in a way that the intellectualistic approach cannot. In fact, the latter approach makes it quite easy for someone to say, “I believe in a God who is a remote source of all things, but this is basically unimportant to my life. Why make such a fuss?” On the other hand, we cannot be so indifferent if the question is how we relate to existence at the most fundamental level of being, in other words, if it is a question of fundamental trust.

Trust in what? The need to answer this question shows that the propositional

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1957), 30-35.

aspect of faith does not disappear in the understanding I am commending; it is rather subordinated to the dimension of trust. Moreover, this question places us on the cusp of a thorny thicket of issues centered around what believers mean by God. Many mean *a being* existing beyond the universe who oversees things and may interfere in the normal course of events from time to time. Those who believe this way are often Christians, Jews, or Muslims who tend to assume that this is what their religion teaches. The fact is that they are not aware of some important aspects of their religions. They can certainly find strands in their different traditions that would support their view, but there is also much that would not.

In considering what else “God” might mean, one place to start is with a statement by Paul Tillich: “God is symbol for God.”<sup>2</sup> What Tillich was saying is that the word God points beyond itself, which means that we are confused when we take our ideas about God to be the same as what they symbolize. What, then, is a believer symbolizing with the word God? One possible answer comes from the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, who said, “A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need . . . [T]hese two belong together, faith and God. That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God.”<sup>3</sup> He also described that which is truly God as “the one, eternal good.”<sup>4</sup> This understanding of God undoubtedly influenced Tillich when he used such symbols as “Ground of Being,” “Power of Being,” “Being of Being,” and “Being-itself” to express his understanding of God,<sup>5</sup> and when he said that faith is

ultimate concern (i.e., final, unsurpassable, and fundamentally life-shaping concern).<sup>6</sup>

A properly oriented ultimate concern will direct itself toward what is truly ultimate, the Ultimate Ground of Being, according to Tillich. By Ground of Being he did not mean some remote cause of all things, such as the first cause of the Big Bang around thirteen billion years ago. Rather, the Ground is an ever-present empowerment of life and meaning, or the continual source of “all good,” “in which we find refuge in every time of need.” This source is not *a being*, for it is the Being of Beings or Being-itself. In other words, it is not itself a being since it is the power of all beings. If so, all of our language about God is ultimately inadequate, for language can only properly deal with discrete things, among which we will not find God. Still, we can try to *point to* God with our language, which functions symbolically, even if we cannot describe or define God in a precise conceptual way.

Some may think that Tillich has abandoned his Christian roots in a dramatic way here, but this is not the case. To be sure, he has introduced some new perspectives that have important ramifications for Christian thought, yet his argument that God is not a being among beings and that God’s nature is beyond human thought is in significant continuity with Christian theology. In fact, it is also consistent with some strands of thought in a number of other religions, including the other two major monotheisms that arose in the Middle East, Judaism and Islam. (It is also consistent with several types of Hinduism.) A sixth-century writer whom we now know as Pseudo-Dionysius, who had a profound impact on the development of Christian mysticism, insisted that we

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 46.

<sup>3</sup>Robert H. Fischer, tr., *The Large Catechism of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 9.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>5</sup>Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *Reason*

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*and Revelation, Being and God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 235-241.

<sup>6</sup>*Dynamics of Faith*, 1-29.

cannot adequately describe God in positive terms. The closest we can come to saying anything directly about God is to enumerate what God is *not*. When one considers this approach carefully, it soon becomes apparent that God is not any *thing* (that is, God is No-thing but *not* nothing). Further, if God is No-thing, we cannot say God exists in the same way things exist (exist comes from a Greek work meaning “to stand out” – that is, to emerge as a thing among other things). So Pseudo-Dionysius wrote of God: “It is the universal cause of existence while itself existing not, for it is beyond all being.”<sup>7</sup> Other Christian thinkers have expressed similar ideas through the centuries, and so have some thinkers within several other religions.

The train of thought we have been following has thus brought us to an apparently odd conclusion: faith in God amounts to trusting in No-thing, which is beyond our understanding. While this is an accurate summation of the argument, it would be misleading to end the matter here because something important is still missing. We will turn to what has been left out of account shortly. For the moment, it may be helpful to take the time to let this negation of our ability to understand the Ultimate Horizon of existence work its effect on us.

### **THE LIMITS OF REASON AND FAITH**

Perhaps this strikes you as a mountain of mystification that simply tries to use our ignorance to create space for baseless speculation that then becomes the foundation for religion. Some would add that the motivation for people to engage in such dubious enterprises is fear. Sigmund Freud interpreted religion in such terms, and so did the famous twentieth-century skeptic, Bertrand Russell. The continuing influence

of such perspectives was apparent in a recent column in the *St. Petersburg Times*. The columnist, citing Russell’s claim that all religion derives from fear, and contrasting science (the reasonable approach) with faith (the unreasonable approach), dismissed the efforts of believers to come to terms with the tsunamis that killed about 200,000 people around the rim of the Indian Ocean.

Views that dismiss faith on the grounds that it is irrational would benefit from an awareness of the diversity of religions and a healthy recognition of the limits of reason and faith. I will say a bit more about religious diversity below. First I wish to note that there were widely divergent responses to the tsunamis within the religious communities. For example, some Buddhists affirmed that we must accept the nature of things yet also respond out of compassion for the victims; some Christians asserted that God was punishing sinners via the monster waves; other Christians insisted that the tsunamis were no such thing and that Christians are called to act out of love for those suffering from the disaster rather than judge the victims; a Jewish Rabbi suggested that, if we are looking for God in such an event, we should look at the compassionate responses of people. Some tried to explain how the disaster is consistent with faith in a loving, good God, while others doubted that such explanations are possible. These responses are but a tiny slice of the answers that believers of different persuasions have given to the question of how the divine is related to tragedy.

Are all such responses a waste since they try to buttress unreasonable worldviews? More to the point, do those who reject God’s existence have reason on their side, whereas believers must affirm the incredible? At one time in the history of Western thought, it may have seemed so. But this was during a time when many in the

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<sup>7</sup>Quoted in Keith Ward, *God: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002), 58.

West had supreme faith (yes, faith) in the ability of an independent reason (combined with experience) to arrive at all the truths available to humans, which were all the truths that really mattered. Academics call that time the modern age. Many philosophers and others are convinced that we no longer live in the modern age; we live instead in a postmodern age, a time when we know that reason is not independent but depends on the context in which it operates. That is, our thinking necessarily takes place within a framework of presuppositions, so that all knowledge involves interpretation. As the philosopher John Caputo states, echoing many other contemporary voices, we should regard truth as “the best interpretation that anyone has come up with yet.”<sup>8</sup>

This, of course, does not prove nonbelievers wrong; it merely puts them in the same boat as believers when it comes to matters of reason and faith. To put it another way, all thinking must ultimately rest on some presuppositions that people accept on faith.

The upshot of this is *not* that every interpretation is equally reasonable. It does mean that we must consider which positions are most reasonable in a situation where everyone is ultimately operating with presuppositions that are beyond proof. One of the issues we can discuss is which presuppositions are most adequate (which usually includes considering their consequences for material existence, one of the major factors supporting the sciences as the best way to understand the physical world's operations).

Thus, the limits of reason do not excuse faith from the question of whether it is reasonable. Moreover, apparently pointless human suffering is one of the major challenges to the reasonableness of

faith in a creator God who is good. Paradoxically, I have to confess that I am in agreement with those who argue that no believer has managed to provide a fully satisfying explanation of evil in the world. If faith in God were a logical system providing a general explanation of existence and knowledge of how all things fit together from God's perspective, this failure would be fatal for faith. However, faith is not a system of thought but fundamental trust in the Ultimate Mystery at the heart of existence.<sup>9</sup> Such faith does not presume to be able to provide a comprehensive explanation of all things. At the same time, it also recognizes the need to wrestle with issues raised by apparently pointless suffering, and to consider whether one may reasonably live by fundamental trust even in the face of such suffering.

#### **GROUND AND ORIENTATION OF FAITH**

Perhaps you are wondering why people would place any trust in what they do not understand, much less invest a life-shaping fundamental or ultimate trust in it. This question brings us to what I suggested was missing in the earlier discussion: one may know (in a direct, personal sense) something (or someone) without understanding it (or her/him). There is much about the operation of the computer I am now using that I do not understand, yet I know it well enough to accomplish certain tasks with it. I do not have to know *how* it works to know *that* it works (or to know not to trust it too far). We could easily multiply such examples. The Ultimate Mystery is not at all like whatever we may use in such examples, to be sure; and there are people who have an

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<sup>8</sup>John Caputo, *On Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 21.

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<sup>9</sup>Again, I feel obligated to note that there are believers who view their faith as a system of thought. They face a formidable task when trying to explain events such as the sudden death of about 200,000 people in a natural disaster.

understanding of computers (to stay with this example), whereas no one can comprehend the Ground of Being. Still, the analogy helps us to consider the fact that the Power of Being may impinge on persons in ways that make some sort of personal knowledge possible, even though it ultimately remains beyond conceptual grasp. This, at least, is what many who have faith in the Ultimate Mystery have affirmed. They have experienced an unconditional Trustworthiness, an ineffable Goodness, at the heart of being that elicits a fundamental, life-orienting trust.

There is no single way that people come to have such faith. There can be no doubt that many have faith because they have grown up in communities or families that have imparted such faith to them. It is not coincidental that the majority of people in India are Hindus, the majority in South America are Catholic Christians, and the majority in Southeast Asia are Buddhists. It was part of their socialization, and they have either never questioned what they learned or went through some questioning and ultimately found their religion to be a fitting, compelling way to live. We should be cautious in our assessment of this way of coming to faith. It is not wrong simply because it is the way a culture, or community, or family has taught someone to be (of course, it is not right for that reason either). It is possible that such religions have become widespread and have power to endure because they bring people into significant contact with the deepest Mystery of being.<sup>10</sup>

This mention of some of the world's religions could encourage a misunderstanding, so a brief aside is in

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<sup>10</sup>See, for example, Rosemary Radford Ruether's discussion of founding and continuing revelatory experiences within religious communities in *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 13-16.

order. We should be aware that not all religions deal with life's Ultimate Mystery in ways that make faith a central issue. Many forms of Buddhism and Hinduism, for example, are focused on the issue of enlightenment and release from samsara (the round of rebirth we call reincarnation). Buddhism at its heart is non-theistic, that is, does not express any attitude toward the question of God's reality. Confucianism gives no significant attention to the Ultimate Horizon of being, focusing instead on proper relationships with others here and now. The varieties of indigenous religions is so great that most, if not all, generalizations find exceptions. To be sure, faith as trust may still be present in one way or another in a number of religions that do not treat it as central (for example, one might argue that Buddhists express fundamental trust in Nirvana or the Void). Nevertheless, this leads me to an important caveat about what I am doing and not doing in this essay: I am trying to examine faith but I am *not* trying to define religion or to claim that faith is central to all religions.

Indeed, for some the historical religions have served more as a hindrance than as an aid to faith. It is not unusual to find people in our society who have either become estranged from faith communities they have known or who have had no significant contact with faith or religion. On occasion (perhaps frequently) people in such a position nevertheless may have fundamental trust in the Mystery at the heart of being. Again, the reasons vary from person to person, so we cannot give a generalized account of why this might happen. British philosopher/theologian Keith Ward has described one way that many would likely find resonates with their own experiences. He notes that when we experience the beauty, goodness, and hope that life sometimes brings our way, with these experiences may come a sense of an

ultimate Beauty, Goodness, and Ground of Hope. Out of this may arise a trust in an Ultimate Goodness, to which we hold as we face the vicissitudes of life.<sup>11</sup>

One of my favorite literary accounts of such an experience comes from a short story by Flannery O'Connor, "Revelation."<sup>12</sup> Its protagonist, a woman from rural Georgia named Mrs. Turpin, was self-righteous and fond of categorizing people in a social-moral hierarchy that she kept in her head (she herself was close to the top of this ladder, but others outranked her). One day she encountered a young woman named Mary Grace, who inexplicably showed great hatred for her and, throwing a book at her, told her, "Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog" (207). The circumstances of the encounter convinced Mrs. Turpin that this was a message directly from God, which understandably left her quite shaken and angry. Wrestling with her feelings, she went out to a her pig parlor (a pig pen with a concrete floor) to wash the hogs. After finishing the task, she stood immobilized for a time. The story continues,

Then like a monumental statue coming to life, she bent her head slowly and gazed, as if through the very heart of mystery, down into the pig parlor at the hogs. They had settled all in one corner around the old sow who was grunting softly. A red glow suffused them. They appeared to pant with a secret life.

Until the sun slipped finally behind the tree line, Mrs. Turpin remained there with her gaze bent to them as

if she were absorbing some abysmal life-giving knowledge (217).

With her new, life-giving knowledge, Mrs. Turpin then had a vision of the many types of people she had ranked below herself gamboling along a highway into the heavens – ahead of respectable people such as herself. She also saw that her ilk were maintaining a respectable decorum at the tail end of this procession, even as their virtues were being stripped away in the march.

Again, the faith that arises from such experiences is not a theoretical framework that provides ready answers to many questions we may have about life. People commonly ask, "Why?!" when tragedies strike,<sup>13</sup> and they will not find a theoretical answer in faith as I have described it. On the other hand, fundamental trust does provide a way to respond to the tragic circumstances of life, as well as to life's wonderful moments.

### FAITH'S RESPONSE

At its best faith calls people away from a narrow preoccupation with self and to a concern for others. The reason for this is not hard to discern. The sense of goodness at the heart of things to which fundamental trust is a response is not the sense that everything is good for me in a narrow, individualistic way. The faith I have been describing is not a confidence that I will find a parking space when I need one, that I will get a new room for my house if I but ask for it, or that my life will be safe from all tragic events. Such ideas expect the ultimate Goodness to conform itself to my needs and desires. An ultimate Goodness worthy of the name would have the power to bring

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<sup>11</sup>Keith Ward, *God: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (Oneworld Publications, 2002) 54-57 and 241-253.

<sup>12</sup>Flannery O'Connor, *Everything that Rises Must Converge* (New York: Noonday Press, 1965), 191-218.

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<sup>13</sup>This is a very different question than the, "Why?" that science explores. Science is mostly seeking to know *how* things operate rather than *why*.

about precisely the opposite result; it would be a power that draws me to itself and calls me to recognize and respond to it. This is not something any of us can manufacture by sheer force of will, nor is it likely to come about because a logical argument has convinced us that there is an Ultimate Good. If one is drawn to such Goodness, it is because one has come to see it in some personal way; one has experienced an epiphany (a manifestation of the sacred).

Mrs. Turpin experienced an epiphany. So did a number of people in *The Brothers Karamazov*<sup>14</sup>. For example, Zosima underwent a radical transformation when he came to a life-shaking realization of who he was (and was not), which he saw most clearly in his abuse of his servant. With this self-perception came a further insight into life, which he expressed in these words:

“Gentlemen,” I cried suddenly from the bottom of my heart, “look at the divine gifts around us: the clear sky, the fresh air, the tender grass, the birds, nature is beautiful and sinless, and we, we alone, are godless and foolish, and do not understand that life is paradise, for we need only wish to understand, and it will come at once in all its beauty, and we shall embrace each other and weep . . . .” (299).

Here the relevant point to notice is that, in each case, with the epiphany came a wholly new orientation toward others, a new way of being in the world. Just as Mrs. Turpin saw that those she treated with contempt were no less than she, were in fact closer to God than she, so Zosima no longer wished to be served by others and instead made himself available to them.

The perception of goodness at the heart of being certainly includes a recognition that goodness is at the center of our own lives, even though we may not reflect this very well at times. Just as importantly, it includes a recognition that goodness is also outside of ourselves in all other beings, that they possess an inherent value. Realization of this inherent value in others elicits an acknowledgment that each of us is but one person in the full scope of humanity – and, furthermore, that humanity is one part of a much larger assembly of beings. Thus, one whose life is shaped by fundamental trust moves outside of the confines of a narrow self-preoccupation, for awareness of goodness in others entails recognition of and response to their inherent value – a recognition and response that come to expression in active concern for other beings (which some religions call love and others compassion).

Active concern for others comes to expression in personal acts that seek to alleviate suffering or to enhance the quality of life for individuals. Many have found that concern for others cannot stop with helping individuals, however, for in our time we are deeply conscious that we have an impact on others through the way we help shape the life of institutions. In the context of this realization, fundamental trust leads to action on behalf of social justice. In such cases, social concern influences the way people vote, the difference they try to make in their work, volunteer activities, and personal lifestyle choices that impact the social and environmental fabric. In some cases, those who work for social and political changes are the victims of injustice, who have come to believe that they can make a difference and feel empowered to act. A few who come from more privileged situations have entered into a radical identification with the poor and oppressed in order to help them work to change their

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<sup>14</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990).

social conditions. A number have died at the hands of those who feel threatened by such efforts.

Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, is a high profile example of dying in the cause of helping the socially marginalized.<sup>15</sup> El Salvador was a society in which most of the arable land was in the hands of only a few families, poverty was widespread, and the poor were without meaningful social or political power. When he first became the leader of the Catholic Church in El Salvador in 1977, Archbishop Romero was opposed to the activities of priests who were engaged in helping the poor work to transform their situations through learning how to become self-determining and to effect political and social change (they were influenced by a new form of theology that had come to be called Liberation Theology). His experiences in his new position led to a change of heart, however, when he witnessed first-hand how the opponents of change, supported by the government, were torturing and killing people engaged in efforts to make a difference. He appealed to soldiers to disobey their commanders when ordered to kill innocent Salvadorans, and he asked for help from the international community. He also insisted that the poor should be allowed to be full participants in society, which entailed some important political and social changes. On March 24, 1980, he became one of the victims of the violence directed against those for whom he spoke; he was gunned down as he was finishing a sermon. A few days later, about forty people were

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<sup>15</sup>One site where you can find information on Romero and the other Salvadorans killed by government-sponsored people is "Remembering the Assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, March 24, 1980," (The Collaborative Ministry Office at Creighton University, n.d.), <http://www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/romero.html> (accessed 5/31/2005).

killed as gunmen opened fire on the crowd that had come to Romero's funeral.

Many others have died in several Central and South American countries as a result of similar struggles. In December 1980, three nuns and a lay worker in El Salvador were killed by those who opposed their work with the poor.<sup>16</sup> In November 1989, intruders (probably Salvadoran soldiers) killed six Jesuits who taught at the University of Central America in San Salvador and two women who were on campus trying to find a refuge. Again, the victims had been involved in working with the poor.<sup>17</sup> In 1981 in a village in Guatemala, some gunmen supporting the government killed Father Stanley Rohter, a priest from Oklahoma City who was not much influenced by Liberation Theology but worked closely with the people to try to improve their lives.<sup>18</sup> In early 2005, two gunmen killed Sister Dorothy Stang, an American nun who was active in working with the poor and on behalf of the environment in Brazil.<sup>19</sup> These were all people of faith who rendered the ultimate sacrifice in their commitment to responding to the goodness they perceived in others.

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<sup>16</sup>Margaret Swedish, "Four Churchwomen: American Martyrs in El Salvador," (Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico, 2005), <http://www.rtfcam.org/martyrs/women/women.htm> (accessed 5/31/2005).

<sup>17</sup>"Martyrs of the University of Central America," (Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico, 2005), <http://www.rtfcam.org/martyrs/UCA/UCA.htm> (accessed 5/31/2005).

<sup>18</sup> Stanley Rohter: "The Shepherd Cannot Run from the First Sign of Danger," (Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico, 2005), [http://www.rtfcam.org/martyrs/fullness\\_of\\_life/stanley\\_rohter.htm](http://www.rtfcam.org/martyrs/fullness_of_life/stanley_rohter.htm), (accessed 5/31/2005).

<sup>19</sup>In this case, the gunmen seem to have acted on behalf of those wishing to develop the Amazon rain forests, not the Brazilian government. Larry Rohter, "Brazil Promises Crackdown after Nun's Shooting Death," *New York Times*, Feb. 14, 2005.

It is very easy to take one's cause to be the Ultimate itself when involved in such situations of conflict. Indeed, it is hard not to think of one's own goals in ultimate terms when risking one's very life. However, a self-aware faith in the Ultimate Mystery will not confuse any human institution, social arrangement, cause, achievement, or anything else with the Ultimate itself, even though the causes for which people are willing to die may have important connections with the Good. Human plans and achievements, however noble and praiseworthy, are inevitably conditional, partial, incomplete, even flawed in some way; we confuse them with what is ultimate and unconditional only at great risk of doing damage to self and others. "True believers" who brook no dissent are frequently willing to do great harm to achieve the good they claim to possess. At the very least, they will tend to be blind to their shortcomings. However, the view of faith is that we cannot tame and capture the Mystery pervading existence; it is never directly available to us in our finite human projects. Practically, this means that no human effort or achievement is beyond critique and improvement. Self-aware people of faith who give themselves to great causes, then, including social justice or human freedom, will remain sensitive to the fact that their group, program, policy, or nation is not a perfect embodiment of the ideals they pursue. Moreover, they will realize that their very ideals are only partial, less-than-perfect reflections of an Ultimate Goodness. The Mystery in which they trust forms a horizon within which appear the limits of all things human. Thus are they motivated to retain a measure of humility about themselves and their efforts, remaining open to correction and improvement, yet to lean into life in the direction of the Good.

## CONCLUSION

This brief survey of faith and its implications for life has touched on many issues that we could pursue further, given time and inclination. It also has followed the lead of a particular take on faith that, while not exclusively my own since it is continuous with elements of several different faith traditions, is not an understanding of faith that all share. Nevertheless, my own conviction is that understanding faith as fundamental trust in the Ultimate Mystery at the heart of being sheds light on the function and importance of faith in the lives of many. The insistence that the word God points to a Mystery pervading beings, without existing as a being, appears to be a logical implication of such faith. Understanding faith as fundamental trust also helps us to discern faith both inside and outside of religious communities (without denying that faith traditions may play an important role in nurturing, deepening, and shaping faith). Finally, it throws light on the ethical consequences of faith.<sup>20</sup> You may find that this approach has raised questions you want to pursue, or you may find that you disagree with some or all of it. Such reactions are welcome, and can hopefully be the starting point for further thought, alone and in conversation with others.

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<sup>20</sup>It may be helpful to add that I have not meant to argue that only those with faith are concerned for others or can see the limits of human achievements. My intention has been to show how faith shapes one's perceptions and acts, not to claim that there are no other ways to come to similar positions. One question worth some discussion and debate, however, is whether acts of caring for others imply a faith in the goodness of being.