

Introduction to the Theme: Exploring Questions of Faith

Christianity should remind our society of our buried desire for the truth and walk with it as it searches.¹

We live in a world filled with conspiracy theories, where individuals can spread or denounce ‘fake news’ and remain largely unchallenged. It is a frightening world in many ways, but it is not new: people have always questioned what is truth and what is reality – and rightly so. But the Christian quest for truth is different; it does not say that ‘what I believe is true *for me*’ – this is called *relativism* and is the path to personal and social insanity. There is no such thing as ‘personal truth’, as though truth were something we can possess which others cannot. There is simply Truth and in the Christian perspective this Truth has a face. It is Personal; it is God.

This is why Christians seek Truth together. We understand that, beyond ‘my truth’ or ‘your truth’, there is simply Truth. We believe that this Truth, which is God, has been spoken to humankind in the Person of Jesus, and we believe that the Spirit of Truth has come at Pentecost, and comes to us all in the sacraments:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.²

This is why we hold tightly to Scripture and Tradition:

- **Scripture** because we believe that God has spoken in the sacred texts and continues to speak to us through them
- **Tradition** because we believe that, guided by the Holy Spirit we, together as Church, grow in faith and understanding over the centuries; that it is only together that we can truly discern what is true

This *holding tightly* to truth has, for many of us, felt as though we are expected to keep quiet and not speak ‘our own truth’, and, indeed, in the past it has been the case that only those ‘in authority’ were allowed to speak: the priest, the bishop, and so forth. This is wrong. We are each created in God’s image and, as baptised Christians, we take part in Christ ‘priest, prophet and king’. We have received the Holy Spirit and our lives manifest God’s Truth. Perhaps, as Church, we have taken the warning in the first letter to Timothy too seriously:

¹ Timothy Radcliffe OFM, *What is the Point of Being a Christian?*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005, p.115

² John 16:13-14

If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.³

It can seem difficult to ‘speak our truth’ and – even more so – to disagree with others. We have been taught to be polite and to keep quiet when we do not agree, but this is not the Christian way!

Saint Paul teaches that we must speak the truth given to us – otherwise how can we proclaim the Gospel? But we must discern what is true, and we must submit our own opinions to proper authority:

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ⁴

None of us has a monopoly on the truth and there are many ways for us all to be deceived and to lead others astray, but in the Holy Spirit, as members of Christ’s Body, together as Church, we believe and trust that we can follow the path of truth and lead our sisters and brothers, who themselves have a deep need to search for what is true, towards the Face of the One God who is Truth Himself. This is what it means for us to be created in God’s image: that we have within us the yearning for what is Good and True and, as Saint Augustine wrote,⁵ we can each only find our fulfilment in the One True God.

How to explore questions of faith

Humankind learns through the sharing of ideas. We agree and we disagree, and this is good. Together, hopefully, we are in search of understanding.

Our faith is a gift from God, the seed of which is planted in every human soul. We are created in God’s image to seek our Creator.

We do not, however, *understand* all things. The mystery of God Himself is beyond our human understanding, yet revealed in Christ, and we can ponder this mystery in our search for understanding. This is the meaning of ‘*fides quaerens intellectum*’,⁶ a principle taught by both Saint Augustine⁷ and Saint Anselm of Canterbury.⁸ It applies not just to questions of

³ 1 Timothy 6:3-5

⁴ Philippians 1:9-10; cf. 1 Corinthians 2:14; 14:29; Romans 12:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:21. See also 1 John 2:27; 4:1; Colossians 2:8; John 7:24; Matthew 24:24

⁵ See the extract from his Confessions (below)

⁶ Latin: ‘faith seeking understanding’

⁷ AD 354-430

⁸ AD c.1033-1109. See Anselm’s Proslogion II-IV

faith but to the understanding of all things – of the world itself, of life, of meaning, of truth wherever it may be found.

We should seek understanding with humility, that is, recognising the limitations of our humanity, but also its immense gifts.

We should seek it together, with patience, compassion, forbearance, and willingness to learn from others – not just to teach *them*.

This is why to be a catechist – a teacher – is a gift to both the one who receives and the one who gives.

Questions are good. Remember that it can be helpful to say ‘I don’t know’ and to seek an answer **together**.

Catholic faith is not merely ‘the right answers to the right questions’. It is life shared among those who believe and those who seek to believe. We are all on the Journey in Faith.

For Your Reflection

To each of us, the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one, is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom; and to another, the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit. Another by the same Spirit is granted faith, while still another is granted the gift of healing by the same Spirit.

To one, is granted the gift of mighty deeds; to another, the gift of prophecy; and to yet another, the gift to discern spirits. One receives the gift of tongues and another the ability to interpret them. One and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing them individually to each person as he wills.⁹

⁹ 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 (New Catholic Bible)

This is the famous passage from St. Augustine's Confessions in which he states, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you".

Great are you, O Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise; your power is immense, and your wisdom beyond reckoning. And so we men, who are a due part of your creation, long to praise you – we also carry our mortality about with us, carry the evidence of our sin and with it the proof that you thwart the proud. You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.

Grant me to know and understand, Lord, which comes first. To call upon you or to praise you? To know you or to call upon you? Must we know you before we can call upon you? Anyone who invokes what is still unknown may be making a mistake. Or should you be invoked first, so that we may then come to know you? But how can people call upon someone in whom they do not yet believe? And how can they believe without a preacher? But scripture tells us that those who seek the Lord will praise him, for as they seek they find him, and on finding him they will praise him. Let me seek you then, Lord, even while I am calling upon you, and call upon you even as I believe in you; for to us you have indeed been preached. My faith calls upon you, Lord, this faith which is your gift to me, which you have breathed into me through the humanity of your Son and the ministry of your preacher.

How shall I call upon my God, my God and my Lord, when by the very act of calling upon him I would be calling him into myself? Is there any place within me into which my God might come? How should the God who made heaven and earth come into me? Is there any room in me for you, Lord, my God? Even heaven and earth, which you have made and in which you have made me – can even they contain you? Since nothing that exists would exist without you, does it follow that whatever exists does in some way contain you?

But if this is so, how can I, who am one of these existing things, ask you to come into me, when I would not exist at all unless you were already in me?

Not yet am I in hell, after all but even if I were, you would be there too; for if I descend into the underworld, you are there. No, my God, I would not exist, I would not be at all, if you were not in me. Or should I say, rather, that I should not exist if I were not in you, from whom are all things, through whom are all things, in whom are all things? Yes, Lord, that is the truth, that is indeed the truth. To what place can I invite you, then, since I am in you? Or where could you come from, in order to come into me? To what place outside heaven and earth could I travel, so that my God could come to me there, the God who said, I fill heaven and earth?

Who will grant it to me to find peace in you? Who will grant me this grace, that you should come into my heart and inebriate it, enabling me to forget the evils that beset me and embrace you, my only good? What are you to me? Have mercy on me, so that I may tell. What indeed am I to you, that you should command me to love you, and grow angry with me if I do not, and threaten me with enormous woes? Is not the failure to love you woe enough in itself?

Alas for me! Through your own merciful dealings with me, O Lord my God, tell me what you are to me. Say to my soul, I am your salvation. Say it so that I can hear it. My heart is listening, Lord; open the ears of my heart and say to my soul, I am your salvation. Let me run towards this voice and seize hold of you. Do not hide your face from me: let me die so that I may see it, for not to see it would be death to me indeed.

Confessions 1,1-2,2.5,5