

May 2004

Faith- it is ...

Tony Gravitte
St. John Fisher College

[How has open access to Fisher Digital Publications benefited you?](#)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/verbum>



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gravitte, Tony (2004) "Faith- it is ...," *Verbum*: Vol. 1: Iss. 2, Article 2.
Available at: <http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/verbum/vol1/iss2/2>

This document is posted at <http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/verbum/vol1/iss2/2> and is brought to you for free and open access by Fisher Digital Publications at St. John Fisher College. For more information, please contact fisherpub@sjfc.edu.

Faith- it is ...

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Faith—it is everywhere around us, a part of us, a gift from God. By providing my personal definition of faith, enunciating pertinent details, and explicating my experiences, I hope to paint an accurate picture of what faith is. Denotatively, faith is the “theological virtue defined as secure belief in God and a trusting acceptance of God’s will” (“Faith”). To be critical, what is meant by “secure?” What is defined as “God’s will?” These are all good questions and each subject to controversy. Consequently, I have connotatively come to know faith as simply the belief in a higher power. Allow me to explain.”

Faith—it is . . .

by

Tony Gravitte

Faith—it is everywhere around us, a part of us, a gift from God. By providing my personal definition of faith, enunciating pertinent details, and explicating my experiences, I hope to paint an accurate picture of what faith is. Denotatively, faith is the “theological virtue defined as secure belief in God and a trusting acceptance of God's will” (“Faith”). To be critical, what is meant by “secure?” What is defined as “God’s will?” These are all good questions and each subject to controversy. Consequently, I have connotatively come to know faith as simply the belief in a higher power. Allow me to explain.

Faith is internal and directs us beyond our own finite and conditional existence to something infinite, unconditional, and otherworldly. After all, “faith, in a sense, is always ‘without seeing’” (Hill, Knitter, and Madges 11). If you cannot see something, how can it be so? That is where faith comes into play. As for the definition of faith, it is indefinitely subjective due to the fact that we have faith in something that cannot be visually depicted or proved scientifically. On the other hand, common grounds can be found in each individual’s faith that can be used to bring us all together and reinforce an important point. One of these grounds is recognizing that there is something or someone of a higher state of being than us that we are constantly in search for. The discrepancy arising from that search is that one faith may rest in a God that is the embodiment of all justice and goodness, while another faith may be offered to a strictly biblical God. However, we all share something in common: faith. As Paul Tillich said, faith is “ultimate concern” (Hill, Knitter, and Madges 36). The infinity we long to reach is the ultimate state of being, the last and final stage. Christians believe that state of being is in heaven and mastered by the God revealed through Jesus Christ. Faith can be in a God, in a heaven, or in a religion itself. Faith takes on many forms.

Faith can be “a commitment on many levels: intellectual, emotional, volitional, even physical, imaginative, and aesthetic” (Hill, Knitter, and Madges 9). In other words, faith can be enlivened through the things we do. These activities can range from engaging in the sacrament of marriage, creating an inspiring piece of artwork, or simply imagining who God is. It is through these activities that we experience faith and, in a sense, experience God. Faith is alive everywhere. You have faith that your car brakes will work at the stoplight. You have faith that you will get to school safely in the morning. Faith is an inevitable and unavoidable characteristic of humanity. It is something inside of us yearning to be evoked, and is, thus, given intrinsic value. Faith is also a gift. It is a gift because “in faith, we are enabled to reach beyond, transcendent to our human capacity” (Hill, Knitter, and Madges 36). As Brother Roger put it, “let us never forget that this simple desire for God is already the beginning of faith” (Roger).

My desire to be faithful and understand God has been an ever-changing process that began at a young age. I was raised in a traditional, Roman Catholic family where Sunday masses were a given. It was understood that I go to a Catholic school and accept the tenants of my faith undoubtedly. I was “living my parents faith,” as Father Chase has put it. Fowler instructs that faith comes in stages. That was simply the beginning of my faith journey. As I got older and surpassed the intuitive-projective and mythic-literal stages, I explored more and more into how *I* felt. By the coming of adulthood, I reached the synthetic-conventional stage (Conn). I began to put things together and decide what had meaning in life. Instead of reinforcing my faith, I grew wary about it. I began to question if there even was a God. I took it that all the suffering around me and all the hardship I faced was what God threw in my path. As time passed, the day came when my

mother told me a story that altered my pessimistic train of thought and revitalized my faith. She told me how on a snowy day she was taking my brother to the dentist office for an emergency brace repair. The roads were snow ridden and traction was low. As she was approaching a corner adjacent to a streaming river, she lost control of the car and began sliding down the bank towards the freezing water. She and my brother sat motionless. Out of nowhere, a tow truck came and stopped to help. In no time, the car was lifted off the bank and my mother began thanking the man with fervor. The snowfall was coming to a halt. She then got in her car and the man got in his. She started it, looked up, and to her astonishment saw no one—not for a clear half-mile down the road. That story touched not only my heart, but also the inner depths of my soul. I began to realize the problems humanity creates for itself. God did not make my mom drive onto the bank; God is the one who helped her out. My faith grew stronger as a result. I was beginning to understand the world and approach the individuating-reflective stage of faith. Now, here I stand somewhere in between the fourth and fifth stage—conjunctive faith (Conn).

The next step towards furthering my understanding of faith occurred quite recently. I was meeting with Father Chase in a disclosed location to debate my many ambiguities concerning faith and Catholicism. After much discussion, I left the room feeling closer to stage five in my faith. I understand that my growing faith has been the result of my growing experience. All the symbols and doctrines of religion I thought were keeping me from being faithful are beginning to reassert my faith. I am coming to know that I cannot know anything for certain. No one knows of an absolute truth. With that in mind, I need to do best with what is at hand. Why not join in a communal celebration of faith? Why not ask questions? I thought my intense questioning was revealing a lack of

faith, when it was actually benefiting my search for just that. There is so much out there to be discovered and some that never will be. Accepting that statement is not unfaithful or sacrilegious. I am finding out who “I” am, and with that search for identity, came the search for true faith. Faith is knowing that I can believe in something greater than myself, while at the same time accepting that I could be wrong, at least about what I have faith in. Judging from experience, I can only move forward in my stages of faith.

In the end, I have come to see that faith is subjective. That each and every one of us endures our own journey in search of faith and arrive at different understandings. Brother Roger notes, “today, more than in the past, we enter into the faith by going forward in stages” (Roger). Regardless, faith is that belief in something so much greater than humanity, so much more perfect than us, that we cannot even begin to fathom or imagine it. As worldly conditions change, faith changes. Perhaps I will never move beyond Fowler’s fifth stage of faith, but I am at peace with my understanding. It has been an immense journey and I am left with one piece of advice for everyone: have faith.

Bibliography

Conn, Joann Wolski. "Stages of Faith." [<http://faculty.plts.edu/gpence/html/fowler.htm>]. 1986.

"Faith." The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. [<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=faith>]. 2002.

Hill, Brennan R., Paul Knitter, and William Madges. Faith, Religion, and Theology. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2003.

Roger, Brother. "To the Sources of Faith." [<http://taize.fr/en/ensrctop.htm>]. 1998.