

The Faith of Unbelievers: Rather than Having Faith in Our Hearts, We Trust in the Institutions Committing Good

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Faith today, it seems to me, is not so much an interior matter, a matter of the heart, anymore. Rather, it is an external matter, involving the faith in institutions. There is much talk about a crisis of faith today. We are often told that we live in a post-ideological time and that people do not value spiritual realities as much as they did in the past when all shared the belief in a similar canon. We can hear and read the words telling us that our time is arrogant and that we have replaced the enchanted, mysterious, and numinous world of the surprised child for a world of analyses, scientific equations, and empirical studies. Above all, we hear that the West is decadent, selfish, quarreling, and faithless.

But what if the truth is that our personal faith, our Christianity, has become external? Today, to help one's neighbor the way the Good Samaritan did in Jesus's parable is not necessary anymore because we have emergency service, ambulance cars, and generally accessible health care (in the Czech Republic paid through the health insurance automatically deducted from one's salary). Should a similar scenario happen today and you would meet a person beaten and lying helpless on the street, the maximum possible care you could show that person would be calling 911. With such a call one activates an automaton and, in turn, institutions that act on our behalf, taking the best possible care for a person in need. One does not actually even have to solve a moral dilemma, whether or not help that person, because one's expression of solidarity, ethics, and humanity does not cost anything. It is automatic. All it takes is one phone call; one only needs to specify the problem and the place and the system takes care of the rest. Not only is our health service incomparably better than it was in the times of Jesus; it is also publicly accessible in the more or less same quality for both the rich and the poor. An entity that automatically commits good – without even being aware of it – is, to my mind, morally superior to one that deals with a moral dilemma (regardless of a possibly positive outcome).

We live in a society in which there is an agreement on these issues to such an extent that it found its expression in law, having become so automatic that it is no longer visible for us (as long as it functions properly). It is a kind of a moral exoskeleton that some animals have; that is, a covering for the body that is external rather than internal. Deep down in our hearts, we do not have to believe that helping one's neighbor is a right thing to do, thus providing even a broken drunkard with utmost health care. We do it automatically through the universally accepted institutions intended for this purpose.

When John Maynard Keynes, the most distinct economist of the last century, considered how the capitalistic West was developing and growing rich, he predicted that society would in a hundred years (his words were written in 1930) be so rich and ethics so inexpensive that it would almost be for free. In this process, the human heart itself would be changed. We would be freed from the needs and habits of the "old Adam" and his fallen and sinful nature. We would be transformed into something new. Paradoxically, this transformation does not spring from the human interior. Rather, it takes place by virtue of the institutions veiling it and the wealth thanks to which we do not have to fight or hate each other over a slice of bread. We can let everyone have bread because there is plenty.

It would be quite appropriate to think of Jesus's stories in this way since he identified himself as the second Adam and often used similar paradoxes. The first shall be last, the greatest shall be least, the humble shall be exalted, the poor (in the spirit) are blessed. And conversely, he frequently had harsh words for "pious" people. In his stories there often appears a motif that the righteous do not even know that they are righteous. And those who

think they are righteous (glorious Pharisees) will not pass the last judgment. It is as if he sought to say that sinners would paradoxically be saved and that the faithful would be faithless and vice versa. After all, the unbelievers who cannot believe in God for all the evil taking place in the world, do so paradoxically with the background image of a good God for whom such suffering of God's loved creatures must be unimaginable. But who did ever tell you that God should be good, loving, and caring? This is essentially the faith in the Christian God (pagan deities did not give a damn about people). Therefore, this form of unbelief actually believes in the ideal of a good God more than conventional Christians who suppress this question.

Our faith of unbelievers is so strong and natural that we have become oblivious to it. Our time is be-souled. This means that we are not necessarily more spiritual but our spirit and its expressions have become externalized.

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