

Faith, Act of Faith, Belief

Edited by Richard Lake

This piece is taken from one of Raimon Panikkar's in his books: "The Experience of God," (pages 29-32). Since "Faith," "Act of Faith" and "Belief" is sometimes used interchangeably, I find this explanation of distinctions helpful.

Most of these words are Panikkar's. My thoughts or interpretations are in italics. Enjoy.

Faith

Panikkar says, "The word 'faith' has many meanings. We have faith in something; we give testimony of our faith, and so on. And to increase the ambiguity, the action expressed by the substantive faith is spread out in at least three verbs: to have confidence, to put it in the hands of, and to believe. . ."

"By faith I mean the capacity of opening to something "more," a capacity not given us either by the senses or the intelligence. This openness to a more could be called openness to transcendence. Through faith, people are capable of transcending themselves, of growing, of opening themselves to a more; they are capable of making a leap toward what is neither justified by their senses, nor proved by their reason; faith is inscribed in the heart. Faith is that capacity, faculty, or supplementary possibility of transcendence, of God, for the infinite, for things having no frontier."

I come to Panikkar's words with the notion that the word "God" is but a symbol that points to a reality beyond any category of thought. So I tend to agree with what Panikkar says is the fallacy in a statements of faith that include such clauses as "to believe in God," to believe God," or "believe that God is." "For faith has no object, says Panikkar, "if it did, it would be, (instead), an ideology, which is a fruit of thought. God is

not an object. God is not a being, nor even the Supreme Being, Divinity surges forth beyond thought." *But, such could be included in statements of beliefs, I am guessing.*

An Act of Faith

"An act of faith is that activity by which we put our faith into practice.

- It surges from the heart as a symbol of the whole person through which we make a leap to the third dimension, in which the human being is realized.
- It is a free act that does not cut us off from the human condition but allows us to attain its plenitude."

Belief

"Belief is the formulation, the doctrinal articulation.

- It is more or less coherent symbolic expression of the faith, often formulated in conceptual terms.
- Doctrinal articulation and conceptual expressions are accompanied by institutionalization.
- Institutionalization is a necessary human process.
- The purpose of the institution is to make transparent the experience that establishes it.
- Dogmas and doctrine (*i.e. the doctrine of the Holy Trinity*) are channels, instruments, through which we try to spy out the mystery (of this reality that is beyond all category of thought – 'God').
- In brief, the experience of God generally occurs through the mediation of a belief but we should not be identified with it. For example:

Other points I find useful

- The Buddhist tradition says, the finger of Buddha points to the moon, allowing us to discover it; but we should not be petrified while looking at the finger.
- Constellations changes are a fact of life" ***Our own growth can impede our capacity to capture the mystery by means of existing channels. This demands growth in institutional ideologies for them to remain effective.***