Foundations of Christian faith
an introduction to the idea of Christianity

Karl Rahner.

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OF CHRISTIANITY

KARL RAHNER

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM V. DYCH

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Preface

For whom has this book been written? That is not an easy question to answer even for the author. When one considers the depths and the incomprehensibility of the mystery that Christianity is all about, and considers the immense variety of people whom Christianity tries to reach, it is naturally impossible to say something about the idea of Christianity to everyone at the same time. To some people an "Introduction to the Idea of Christianity" will appear too "high," too complicated and too abstract, while to others it will appear too primitive. The author would like to address himself to readers who are educated to some extent and who are not afraid to "wrestle with an idea," and he simply has to hope that he will find readers for whom the book is neither too advanced nor too primitive.

The following reflections, then, are intended to proceed on a "first level of reflection." In this Preface I do not intend to offer any subtle epistemological reflections or explanations of what that means. The presupposition of this undertaking is simply this: I do not intend, on the one hand, simply to repeat what Christianity proclaims after the manner of a catechism and in the traditional formulations, but rather, to the extent that it is possible in such a short essay. I shall try to reach a renewed understanding of this message and to arrive at an "idea" of Christianity. Without prejudice to its uniqueness and its incomparability. I shall try as far as possible to situate Christianity within the intellectual horizon of people today. In doing so we shall not proceed as though Christians did not already know what Christianity is before reflections of this kind. Neither, however, will this book begin with a faith in which everything is completely settled and simply repeat what is said in every traditional catechism. To accomplish what we have in mind is going to require some rather strenuous thinking and some hard intellectual work.

On the other hand, however, such a first introduction cannot set out to work through all of the investigations and questions and problems which per se are pertinent in the philosophy of knowledge and the philosophy of language, in the sociology, history, phenomenology and philosophy of reli-

gion, in fundamental theology, exegesis and biblical theology, and finally in systematic theology. That is impossible for a book like this, and even impossible for an individual theologian today, and finally and especially it is impossible for the reader for whom this book is intended. To require this would be to make it impossible to give an "account of our hope," that is, an intellectually honest justification of Christian faith for those Christians for whom this book has been written. Such readers could only be referred to the church's catechism and told that they should simply believe what is taught there and in this way save their souls.

This book, therefore, proceeds from the conviction, and it will try to confirm this in the process, that between the simple faith of the catechism on the one hand, and on the other the process of working through all of the disciplines we mentioned and many more besides, there is a way of giving an intellectually honest justification of Christian faith, and this precisely on the level that we called the "first level of reflection." This has to be possible because even the scientific expert in theology can be competent in only one or the other of these disciplines at most. But he cannot be competent in all of the disciplines which per se would be necessary on a higher and second or further level of reflection if he had to confront his theology in an explicit and scientifically adequate way with all the questions and tasks of these disciplines.

In other areas of life too, of course, a person does not live the totality of his existence and the broad individual dimensions of it from out of a reflexive study of all of the contemporary sciences, and yet he can and must be responsible before his intellectual conscience in an indirect and summary way for the totality of this existence. From these insights comes the intention of this book: to express the whole of Christianity and to give an honest account of it on a "first level of reflection." The reader himself must decide whether this goal is reached. But he also has to be critical of himself, of course, and ask himself whether perhaps the real cause of a failure in this undertaking does not lie in himself. This to be sure is not inconceivable a priori.

Such an attempt to proceed on a first level of reflection and in this way to make the whole of Christianity thematic to some extent and to show its legitimacy can be labelled "pre-scientific." But anyone who does this must be asked whether anybody today can reflect upon the totality of his existence in any way other than this "pre-scientific" way. We would have to ask him whether it is very sensible to take a "scientific" attitude in an undertaking of this kind in view of the fact that no single individual can

any longer master all of today's sciences. We would also have to ask him whether such "pre-scientific" reflection does not demand so much precision and so much strenuous thinking that it may take its place confidently alongside of the many individual scientific disciplines. These disciplines are indeed relevant per se in such reflection. But they can no longer be made use of directly by the individual theologian and Christian if he is trying to address himself to the single whole of Christianity at a time when all of these individual disciplines must be further and intensively developed. But because of their complexity and because of the difficulty and the pluralism of their methods, they have moved beyond the realm within which an individual Christian and also an individual theologian must give an account of his faith. There is an "ivory tower" kind of specialization in the individual theological disciplines and in itself it is completely justified. But that is not what we are about here.

The topic, "The Foundations of Christian Faith," has occupied the author for many years. While he was professor in Munich and in Münster he gave such a course twice under the title, "An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity." Since this book had its origins in these courses, it has several characteristics which the reworking of it for publication did not intend to remove. For example, the individual sections, measured against the greater or lesser importance of their topic and in comparison with one another, might not always have the length which they deserve, since this "ideal" is very difficult to reach in class lectures. Secondly, if one begins with the general and abstract question, what all can and should be treated in such an "Introduction to the Idea of Christianity," the actual selection might appear somewhat arbitrary to some. Such selectivity, however, is unavoidable.

In this respect, first of all, some might miss an extended treatment of the possibility of religious and theological statements in general from the viewpoint of a theory of knowledge and a theory of science. Some might have the impression that important dogmatic themes are treated too briefly, perhaps the theology of the Trinity, the theology of the cross, the doctrine of the Christian life, and eschatology. Some might discover that the social and political aspects of Christianity's self-understanding in the area of social criticism are not developed. Some might think that especially the eighth and ninth chapters give at most a sketch of the topics treated there. With regard to these and similar assessments of the limits of this book, the author can say in its justification only this: every author has the right to be selective. He can also pose the counter-question: How can this

or a similar selection be avoided if a book of 470 pages, which is not all that long considering the topic, is to attempt to give a first introduction to the whole of the idea of Christianity? Such an attempt would have to be declared impossible or illegitimate from the outset if allowance cannot be made for such inevitable limits. To be sure more justice could be done to the topic than is done here. But even a more adequate performance of the task would presumably run up against the same limits which the reader of this book as well as its author will certainly notice.

In view of the origins of this book and its introductory character, the author considered it superfluous to add subsequently explanatory footnotes and references to literature. In the framework of this book that would seem to him to be a learned pretense to which he is not inclined. The author also decided to forego giving references to pertinent writings of his own, although not infrequently he had the impression that he has written more precisely and more extensively elsewhere on this or that particular topic. Hence texts which have already been published elsewhere have been incorporated into this book, extensively reworked in varying degrees and integrated into the larger whole. This includes the first section of Chapter Two (cf. the author's Grace in Freedom), and especially larger parts of Chapter Six on Christology, which are taken partly from my Theological Investigations, and partly from the Christology which I published along with Wilhelm Thüsing. Likewise an essay which appeared earlier in my Theological Investigations has been reworked in the final section of the book.

Perhaps one thing that will strike many readers most at first glance is that there are practically no references to individual texts of scripture in support of what has been said. This fact has several reasons which have to be seen together. First of all, the author wants to avoid at all costs giving the impression that he is an exegete and that he works as an exegete in the sense of a scientific expert. He hopes, however, that on the whole he has taken sufficient account of the problems and the results of contemporary exegesis and biblical theology. These have to be presupposed here given the nature and the purpose of this book. Besides, the reader has access to the exegetical material in both scholarly and popular literature that is readily available. This material can and must be presupposed here if this book is not to go beyond its limits or lose its character as an introduction to the idea of Christianity.

Christianity, to be sure, is a religion that is based upon very definite historical events. The length of the sixth chapter, which makes up almost a third of the book, gives witness in its own way to the fact that the author is aware of the historical nature of Christianity. Moreover, these historical events have to be gathered from the "sources." But this original and critical investigation of the sources can and must be presupposed in a first introduction to the idea of Christianity. We can and must limit ourselves to reporting briefly and as conscientiously as possible what this original work on the sources has produced as material for systematic reflection. If more were attempted here, the result would not be a solid work of exegesis, but only a pseudoscientific sham which benefits no one. Finally, a theology which works systematically and conceptually is not merely a problematical appendix to exeges is and biblical theology. If both of these cannot be done in a single book, then it is better and more honest to avoid even the appearance that one intends to do both at once.

If what is being offered here is an introduction, then neither should the reader expect that this book is a final summary of the previous theological work of the author. It is not that and does not intend to be. In view of its topic, however, this book on the foundations of the faith has a somewhat more comprehensive and more systematic character than one might be accustomed to in the other theological writings of the author.

At the end of the book a detailed table of contents has been added to the shorter one at the beginning. The short table of contents enables the reader to get a quick overview of the whole book. The long one clarifies in detail the course of the reflections and so is a kind of topical index.

In the long history of this work since 1964 the author has received abundant help. He cannot mention by name here all those who helped him during those many years in Munich and Münster. But in addition to my two fellow Jesuits, Karl H. Neufeld and Harald Schöndorf, there are two other names I must mention. Elisabeth von der Lieth in Hamburg and Albert Raffelt in Freiburg in Breisgau took care of a large part of the final editing of the text by organizing the original class lectures and shortening them. To both my sincere and cordial thanks.

Munich, June 1976

Karl Rahner, S.J.

Foundations of Christian Faith

1. General Preliminary Reflections

his book will try to give an "introduction to the idea of Christianity." It is meant, first of all, to be merely an introduction and no more. It is self-evident that an undertaking of this kind has more to do with a personal decision to believe than do other scientific or theological publications or academic presentations. Nevertheless, it is meant to be an introduction within the framework of intellectual reflection, and is not intended directly and immediately for religious edification, although it is clear that the relationship of a theology of the spirit and of the intellect to a theology of the heart, of decision, and of religious life poses a very difficult problem. Secondly, it is intended to be an introduction to the idea of Christianity. We are presupposing here the existence of our own personal Christian faith in its normal ecclesial form, and we are trying, thirdly, to reach an idea of this. This word "idea" is added in order to make it clear that we are dealing here with an idea and all that this demands in the sense of Hegel's "Anstrengung des Begriffs." Anyone who is just looking for religious inspiration and shies away from the demands of patient, laborious, and at times tedious reflection should not enter into this investigation.

By the very nature of the case this introduction is an experiment. One does not know in advance whether the experiment will succeed even to a limited extent, or whether it can succeed. For this also depends on the reader of these pages. In the subject matter of this book we are not dealing with this or that particular theological question, but for one who is a Christian and wants to be a Christian, we are dealing with the totality of his own existence. Of course we shall have to show, and this motif is present throughout, that a person can be a Christian without having examined the totality of his Christian existence in a scientifically adequate way. Since, moreover, this cannot and therefore need not be done, he does not thereby become intellectually dishonest.

For a Christian, his Christian existence is ultimately the totality of his existence. This totality opens out into the dark abysses of the wilderness which we call God. When one undertakes something like this, he stands before the great thinkers, the saints, and finally Jesus Christ. The abyss of existence opens up in front of him. He knows that he has not thought enough, has not loved enough, and has not suffered enough.

There have always been attempts like this to express the structure of Christianity, of Christian faith and of Christian life, as a single whole, even if only in theoretical reflection. Every profession of faith, beginning with the Apostles' Creed and continuing down to Paul VI's Creed of the People of God, is such an attempt at a summary expression of Christian faith and of Christian self-understanding, and hence, although very brief, is an introduction to Christianity or to the idea of Christianity. St. Augustine's Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Charity, St. Bonaventure's Breviloquium or St. Thomas Aquinas' Compendium of Theology to Brother Reginald are also basically such attempts to give a relatively brief overview of the whole and of the essentials of Christianity.

But there must always be new attempts at such reflection upon the single whole of Christianity. They are always conditioned, since it is obvious that reflection in general, and all the more so scientific theological reflection, does not capture and cannot capture the whole of this reality which we realize in faith, hope, love, and prayer. It is precisely this permanent and insurmountable difference between the original Christian actualization of existence and reflection upon it which will occupy us throughout. The insight into this difference is a key insight which represents a necessary presupposition for an introduction to the idea of Christianity.

Ultimately what we want to do is merely reflect upon the simple question: "What is a Christian, and why can one live this Christian existence today with intellectual honesty?" The question begins with the fact of Christian existence, although this existence looks very different today in individual Christians. This difference is conditioned by personal levels of maturity, by very different kinds of social situations and hence also of religious situations, by psychological differences, and so on. But we also want to reflect here upon this fact of our Christian existence, and we want to justify it before the demands of conscience and of truth by giving an "account of our hope" (1 Pet. 3:15).

2. Preliminary Remarks on Methodology

THE CALL OF VATICAN II FOR AN INTRODUCTORY COURSE

The external stimulus for our asking what is the nature and the meaning of an "introduction to the idea of Christianity" as a foundational course within theology is Vatican II's Decree on Priestly Formation. We read there:

In the reform of ecclesiastical studies, the first object must be a better integration of philosophy and theology. These subjects should work together harmoniously to unfold ever more deeply the mystery of Christ, that mystery which affects the whole history of the human race, is constantly at work in the Church, and becomes effective in a special way in the priestly ministry.

That this understanding may be communicated to the students from the very start of their training, ecclesiastical studies should begin with an introductory course of suitable duration. In this introduction the mystery of salvation should be presented in such a way that the students will see clearly the meaning of ecclesiastical studies, their interrelationship, and their pastoral intent. Then they will be helped thereby to root their whole personal lives in faith and to permeate them with it. They will be strengthened to embrace their vocation with personal commitment and a joyful heart. (Optatam totius, art. 14)

The decree calls for an intrinsic integration of philosophy and theology. The overriding thematic task of such a theology is to concentrate the whole of theology on the mystery of Christ. This whole of theology should be presented to the students in an introductory course of sufficient duration, a course in which the mystery of Christ will be presented in such a way that the meaning, the interrelationship, and the pastoral intent of theological studies will become clear to the student right at the beginning of his studies in theology. The course should help him to deepen the roots of his personal and priestly life as a life of faith, and to permeate it with this faith. Therein lies the meaning of this introduction for his Christian as well as for his theological and priestly existence.

This raises the question whether there is a theoretical foundation for such an introductory course as a special, independent and responsible theological discipline, and hence not just as a pious and general introduction to theology. If there is such a foundation and if there are reasons for

it, then the specific direction and the concrete shape of such a fundamental course must follow from them, and this would have significance not just for the education of priests.

THE "THEOLOGICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA" IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The encyclopedia as it was originally conceived in the nineteenth century is still of interest in this context. It was not only meant to be a collection of the contents of all the theological knowledge that was then known, but was also to be a reconstruction of this knowledge from its origin and in its unity. We can recall here the Tübingen theologian Franz Anton Staudenmaier. According to his "encyclopedia" of 1834 this discipline offers the "systematic outline of the whole of theology," the "compact sketch of its concrete idea according to all its essential determinations." He writes: "For just as the human spirit is organic and is a system of living powers, so also in scientific knowledge it wants to see an organism, a system, and it does not rest until it has produced by its organizing activity a systematic interrelationship among the essential parts which form the content. This systematic interrelationship among the different parts of a science in accordance with its essential and basic concepts is presented in the encyclopedia." According to him, the encyclopedia develops the necessary and organic interrelationship of all the parts of theology, and thus it presents the parts as a real science by grasping them in the unity and the totality of their interrelationships. It is a real organism and bears its life principle within itself.

Hence the encyclopedists wanted to understand the different disciplines in the light of the original unity of theology, and they wanted to make the difference between theology and philosophy and between reason and revelation intelligible in the light of their equally original interrelationship. In fact, therefore, a philosophy of revelation is antecedent to all of this. Proceeding in this way the encyclopedists wanted to reach the real subject matter of theology itself and to offer thereby an introduction that did justice to this subject matter.

Something similar could be found in Johann Sebastian Drey, for example, or also in Schelling's "Lectures on the Method of Academic Study" of 1802.

Admittedly the execution of this encyclopedic introduction to theology betrayed this basic grand conception. For the subject matter of theology was explained objectively and the content of revelation was assigned accordingly to the material disciplines of theology. But there remained to be treated in the formal foundations of theology only the manner and way the material is acquired, is structured into a science, and is subjectively interpreted. To the extent that the encyclopedia did this, it led to absurdity, for it had now lost any real contact with its content. Basically it was given only as a kind of introduction to all that was actually going on in theology, as an overview and an introduction for beginners. But such an encyclopedia is basically superfluous, for it speaks to some too much in inconsequential generalities, and it offers to others nothing which did not have to be said again by way of introduction at the beginning of the individual disciplines.

Hence to explain and justify an introductory course one can indeed legitimately appeal to the original intention of the theological encyclopedia of the nineteenth century. Its actual execution, however, offers no points of contact. Moreover, the question of its theoretical foundation will have to be approached differently in view of the contemporary situation of theology and its addressee.

THE ADDRESSEE OF CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY

The average person who comes to theology today, and this includes not only those who are preparing for the priesthood, does not feel secure in a faith which is taken for granted and is supported by a homogeneous religious milieu common to everyone. Even the young theology student possesses a faith which is under challenge and is by no means to be taken for granted, a faith which today must ever be won anew and is still in the process of being formed, and he need not be ashamed of this. He can readily acknowledge this situation in which he finds himself because he is living in an intellectual and spiritual situation today, or is even coming from such a situation himself, which does not allow Christianity to appear as something indisputable and to be taken for granted.

Just thirty or forty years ago, when I studied theology myself, the theology student was a person for whom Christianity, the faith, his religious existence, prayer, and firm intention to serve in a quite normal priestly activity were all things to be taken for granted. In those days he perhaps had certain theological problems during his studies. In theology he reflected perhaps very basically and in a precise and penetrating way upon all the individual questions of theology. But still this took place on the foundation of a Christianity which was taken for granted, and which existed by means of a religious education which was taken for granted and in a Christian milieu which was taken for granted. Our faith was partially and essentially conditioned by a quite definite sociological situation which at that time supported us and which today does not exist.

Now this means for the study of theology that academic instruction must

take this situation into account, that it is ridiculous for theology professors to set up as their highest ideal the attempt to demonstrate before the young theologians right at the beginning their scholarliness in the problematic of their learned discipline. If theology students today live in a situation of crisis for their faith, then the beginning of their theological studies must help them, so far as this is possible, to overcome this crisis in the situation of their faith honestly. If we consider the two aspects just mentioned of the personal situation of today's young theologian, and if we are convinced that theology itself must respond to this situation right at the beginning, then we have to admit that in the concrete theological disciplines as they are offered today do not accomplish this by themselves. They are too much scholarship for its own sake, they are too splintered and fragmented to be really able to respond in an adequate way to the personal situation of theology students today.

In addition to this reason for a "foundational course" prompted by the external situation, there is a still more basic reason for undertaking on a first level of reflection what a "foundational course" is supposed to accomplish. Such a first level of reflection, and we shall clarify what this means, is necessary because of the pluralism of theological sciences which can no longer be completely unified and integrated. But here we run into a dilemma. This first level of reflection has the task, in a kind of legitimate flanking maneuver, of avoiding having to conduct a scientifically exact and complete investigation of all the theological disciplines, an undertaking that is not practically feasible, and of arriving nevertheless at an intellectually honest affirmation of Christian faith. But the intellectual and scientific rigor which such a first level of reflection demands is no less than that which an individual theological discipline requires of its students. The scientific and theoretical demands of a foundational course are not easily reconciled with the fact that on the practical level it must be structured according to the actual situation of a theological beginner. The title "foundational course" very easily gives the false impression that we are dealing with an introduction which cheaply absolves the beginning theologian of any rigorous thinking. On the other hand, however, it should and must recognize that it is trying to help the beginner to get his start in theology as a whole. It is naturally very difficult to satisfy both of these demands at the same time. But in any case, it is the scientific and theoretical grounds for the foundational course and not the pedagogical and the didactic that are decisive.

PLURALISM IN CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

Theology has in fact become fragmented into an immense number of individual disciplines, with each individual discipline offering an enormous amount of material, employing its own very differentiated and difficult methodology, and having very little contact with other related or neighboring theological disciplines. We must acknowledge this situation of contemporary theology soberly, and we may not build up our hopes that it could be changed by the theological disciplines themselves. There is indeed an effort being made in theology to bring dogma and exegesis closer together, for example, or to do more theology in canon law than was the case twenty years ago. Such efforts to establish contacts are obviously useful but they can no longer overcome the pluralism in theology today.

Nor can this pluralism be overcome by the much-celebrated practice of teamwork. There is, of course, too little of the kind of cooperation that is necessary and sensible. But in the human sciences all cooperation has very clear limits. In the natural sciences exactly proven results can be taken over from one specialty to another and from one researcher to another. They can be understood to some extent, and in any case they can be made use of without having to evaluate the method and how it was acquired and the certainty of its results. But in the human sciences the real understanding of an assertion and the evaluation of its validity depend upon one's personal participation in the discovery of what is asserted. And it is precisely this which is no longer possible in theology for the representative of another discipline.

A second aspect of this whole situation follows from a similar pluralism in contemporary philosophy. The neo-scholastic school philosophy which we older theologians learned after a fashion forty years ago does not exist any more. Philosophy today has become fragmented into a pluralism of philosophies. This irreducible and insurmountable pluralism of philosophies is a fact today which we cannot evade. Every theology, of course, is always a theology which arises out of the secular anthropologies and self-interpretations of man. These latter as such are never entirely absorbed into these explicit philosophies, but they are to some extent. Hence this situation too necessarily produces an immense pluralism of theologies.

Further, we must be clear about the fact that today philosophy, or the philosophies, no longer represent by themselves the only and obvious and adequate juncture where theology comes into contact with man's secular knowledge and self-understanding. Theology is a theology that can be

genuinely preached only to the extent that it succeeds in establishing contact with the total secular self-understanding which man has in a particular epoch, succeeds in engaging in conversation with it, in catching onto it, and in allowing itself to be enriched by it in its language and even more so in the very matter of theology itself. Hence today we have not only an interdisciplinary fragmentation in theology, we have not only a pluralism of philosophies which can no longer be integrated by a single individual, but in addition to this we have the fact that the philosophies no longer furnish the only self-interpretation of man that is significant for theology. Instead, as theologians today we must necessarily enter into dialogue with a pluralism of historical, sociological, and natural sciences, a dialogue no longer mediated by philosophy. These sciences no longer bow before philosophy's claim that they are to be mediated by philosophy or clarified by philosophy, or even that they are able to be clarified by philosophy.

This makes the difficulty of a scientific theology very evident. Theology itself has become a vast number of individual sciences. It must be in contact with so many different philosophies in order to be able to be scientific in this immediate sense. But it must also have contact with the sciences which no longer admit of philosophical interpretation. Finally, there must be added all the various non-scientific manifestations of the life of the spirit in art, in poetry, and in society, a variety which is so great that not everything which appears there is mediated either by the philosophies or by the pluralistic sciences themselves, and yet it represents a form of the spirit and of human self-understanding with which theology must have something to do.

THE JUSTIFICATION OF FAITH ON A "FIRST LEVEL OF REFLECTION"

In dogmatic theology there is in the dogmatic treatise "De fide" (on faith as such) a so-called analysis fidei. This analysis of faith considers the inner structure of fundamental theology's arguments for the credibility of faith, and considers the significance which these have for faith and for making an act of faith. It says there that in the Catholic understanding these arguments or proofs of credibility do not intrinsically establish faith in its properly theological character as assensus super omnia firmus propter auctoritatem ipsius Dei revelantis (as a firm and indubitable assent because of the authority of the revealing God Himself), but that they belong to faith nevertheless, and that such arguments of credibility have their function in faith as a whole. But it is assumed in this context that under certain circumstances and for theologically uneducated people or the rudes, an

entire reflexive fundamental theology, or even an abreviated form of it, is not necessary as a presupposition of faith. Faith is not thereby made impossible for them, for it is possible in other ways. The old theology of faith always knew that for the *rudes* or the uneducated, coming to faith through an adequate reflection upon all of the intellectual grounds of credibility is not possible and is not necessary.

So I would like to formulate the thesis that in today's situation all of us with all of our theological study are and remain unavoidably *rudes* in a certain sense, and that we ought to admit that to ourselves and also to the world frankly and courageously.

Such a statement is not a permit for laziness, intellectual sloth, or intellectual indifference with regard to reflection upon propositions of the faith nor upon their foundation in fundamental theology. It is not a permit for laziness and indifference with regard to that responsibility for our hope and for our faith which in the concrete is necessary and possible for each particular person in his own particular situation, and is available to him there. But with regard to many theological reflections I can say: "I cannot accomplish it and therefore I need not be able to." Obviously I can still be a Christian who lives his faith with that intellectual honesty which is required of every person. There follows from this statement the theoretical possibility of giving a justification of the faith which is antecedent to the task and the method of contemporary scientific enquiry, both theological and secular. Thus this justification of the faith includes fundamental theology and dogmatic theology together. It takes place on a first level of reflection where faith gives an account of itself. This level must be distinguished from faith's second level of reflection, where the pluralistic theological sciences, each in its own area and each with its own specific method, give an account of themselves in a way which for the whole of the faith is inaccessible to all of us today, and all the more so to beginners in theology.

This scientifically first level both of reflection on the faith and of giving an account of it in an intellectually honest way constitutes a first science in its own right. As the individual theological disciplines are understood today, they are so constituted in their content, in the length and the breadth of their problematic, and in the differentiation of their methods and the difficulty in learning them, that they can no longer offer to a concrete person a basic understanding of the faith and a foundation for it. On the one hand he needs this understanding and this foundation and as an intellectual person he requires them, but on the other hand he cannot acquire them through these sciences as such. It must be theoretically

possible to ground faith in a way which is antecedent to the legitimate tasks and methods of these contemporary disciplines.

This other way of grounding faith, which does not take upon itself all the tasks of the theological disciplines, nor examine all of the metaphysical presuppositions upon which faith is based, nor go into the introductory sciences, exegesis, the theology of the New Testament, and so on, cannot be for this reason unscientific. The unscientific nature of this different kind of discipline which we are striving for lies in the object, not in the subject and his method. I recognize that I cannot work through the whole of theology today because it has become fragmented many times over and is contained within a pluralism of philosophies and other sciences. But I also know as a Christian that I do not have to take that path in order to reflect intellectually on the justification of my Christian situation. So I reflect now with all exactness and rigor, and hence in a scientific way, upon that mode of justifying the faith, and of course also upon the content of the faith, which saves me from having to take the other path through all of the theological and secular sciences in order to give the first intellectual justification of my faith. I am spared this at least provisionally at the beginning of studies, and for most theological problems I am spared it permanently.

There is an "illative sense," as Cardinal Newman puts it, precisely in those areas which imply a decision affecting the whole person. There is a convergence of probabilities, a certainty, an honest and responsible decision which is knowledge and a free act together. It makes possible, to put it paradoxically, the scientific nature of being legitimately unscientific in such vital questions. There is a first level of reflection which has to be distinguished from the level of reflection of science in the contemporary sense because life and existence require such a level. It is this first level of reflection that is intended in a foundational course that is the first step in theological studies.

THE CONTENT OF THE INTRODUCTION

In a first reflection upon one's own Christian existence and its foundation such as the introductory course intends to offer, we are to be sure still on the level where there is a unity of philosophy and theology, for we are reflecting upon the concrete whole of the human self-realization of a Christian. That is really "philosophy." We are reflecting upon a Christian existence and upon the intellectual foundation of a Christian self-realization, and that is basically "theology." We are theoretically, practically, and didactically justified in philosophizing here within theology itself, and this

"philosophy" need not have any scruple about the fact that it is constantly stepping over into areas that are properly theological.

This original unity of course is already present in the concrete life of the Christian. He is a believing Christian, and he is at the same time, indeed as a requirement of his own faith, a reflective person who reflects upon the whole of his existence. Here there exist both philosophical and theological objectivity, and in his own life both realities enter from the outset into a unity at least in principle. It is characteristic of this unity that in the appropriate place explicit reference is made to theological data which possibly cannot be reached by a secular philosophy as such.

If we wanted to formulate the unity between philosophy and theology in this foundational course somewhat differently, we could say that in the foundational course we must reflect first of all upon man as the universal question which he is for himself, and hence we must philosophize in the most proper sense. This question, which man is and not only has, must be regarded as the condition which makes hearing the Christian answer possible. Secondly, the transcendental and the historical conditions which make revelation possible must be reflected upon in the manner and within the limits which are possible on the first level of reflection, so that the point of mediation between question and answer, between philosophy and theology, will be seen. Thirdly and finally, we must reflect upon the fundamental assertion of Christianity as the answer to the question which man is, and hence we must do theology. These three moments mutually condition one another and therefore form a unity, a unity that is of course differentiated. The question creates the condition for really hearing, and only the answer brings the question to its reflexive self-presence. This circle is essential and is not supposed to be resolved in the foundational course, but to be reflected upon as such.

By its very nature the foundational course must necessarily be a quite specific unity of fundamental theology and dogmatic theology. The usual fundamental theology, which really misunderstands itself in its normal self-understanding, has a particular characteristic which cannot characterize this foundational course as foundational course. This particular characteristic of the traditional fundamental theology from the nineteenth century until our own day consists in this, that the facticity of divine revelation is to be reflected upon in a purely formal way, as it were, and, in a certain sense at least, is to be proven. As fundamental theology is in fact usually understood, it does not consider any particular theological data or any individual dogmas, except when it becomes dogmatic ecclesiology. But that

brings it into a noteworthy difficulty, at least from the viewpoint of the purpose of this foundational course. The point of our foundational course in theology is precisely this, to give people confidence from the very *content* of Christian dogma itself that they can believe with intellectual honesty. In practice it is the case that a fundamental theology of the traditional kind, despite its formal clarity, precision, and cogency, very often remains unfruitful for the life of faith because the concrete person, and indeed with a certain theoretical justification, has the impression that the formal event of revelation is not really all that absolutely clear and certain.

In other words, if this introductory course does what it is supposed to do, then we must strive for a closer unity between fundamental theology and dogmatic theology, between the fundamental foundation of faith and reflection upon the content of faith than was the case in our previous theological disciplines and their divisions.

Nor can it be objected against this that the central truths of the faith are mysteries in the strict sense. They are that of course. But mystery is not to be identified with a statement which is senseless and unintelligible for us. If, moreover, the horizon of human existence which grounds and encompasses all human knowledge is a mystery, and it is, then man has a positive affinity, given at least with grace, to those Christian mysteries which constitute the basic content of faith. Besides, these mysteries do not consist in a rather large number of individual propositions which are unfortunately unintelligible. The only really absolute mysteries are the self-communication of God in the depths of existence, called grace, and in history, called Jesus Christ, and this already includes the mystery of the Trinity in the economy of salvation and of the immanent Trinity. And this one mystery can be brought close to man if he understands himself as oriented towards the mystery which we call God.

Hence there is really only one question, whether this God wanted to be merely the eternally distant one, or whether beyond that he wanted to be the innermost center of our existence in free grace and in self-communication. But our whole existence, borne by this question, calls for the affirmation of this second possibility as actually realized. It calls out to this mystery, which remains a mystery. But it is not so distant from this mystery that this mystery is nothing but a sacrificium intellectus.

In view of the subject matter, then, an intrinsic unity between fundamental theology and dogmatic theology is altogether possible. This is especially true if we begin with the good Thomistic presupposition that fundamental theology is done under the "light of faith," and is a justification of

faith by faith. It is in faith's behalf and in faith's presence. But how is this to be done unless one reflects upon the very reality that is believed in, and not merely upon the formal event of revelation as such?

The third thing which seems to be important in connection with the content of a foundational course is to mention a few rather concrete cautions and requirements with regard to what does not belong in such a foundational course. First of all, great caution seems to be called for against taking a too narrowly Christological approach. The decree of the Second Vatican Council that we have already mentioned does say of course that the theologians should be introduced to the mystery of Christ right at the beginning. But if it says at the same time that this mystery of Christ affects the whole history of the human race, and indeed in all times and places, then a too narrow concentration of the foundational course on Jesus Christ as the key and the solution to all existential problems and as the total foundation of faith would be too simple a conception. It is not true that one has only to preach Jesus Christ and then he has solved all problems. Today Jesus Christ is himself a problem, and to realize this we only have to look at the demythologizing theology of a post-Bultmann age. The question is this: Why and in what sense may one risk his life in faith in this concrete Iesus of Nazareth as the crucified and risen God-Man? This is what has to be justified. Hence we cannot begin with Jesus Christ as the absolute and final datum, but we must begin further back than that. We have several sources of experience and knowledge, all of which have to be explored and mediated. There is a knowledge of God which is not mediated completely by an encounter with Jesus Christ. It is neither necessary nor objectively justified to begin in this foundational course simply with the doctrine of Jesus Christ, even though this foundational course is called in the conciliar decree Optatam totius an introduction to the mystery of Christ.

The same thing is also true about formal hermeneutics: to do this exclusively is too narrow an approach. There is certainly something like a formal theology of fundamentals, as distinguished from fundamental theology, and it belongs in this foundational course if used in the right way and from the right point of view. But it would certainly be false to think that we are dealing here only with a formal hermeneutic of theological language after the manner of post-Bultmann theology, or only with proving the legitimacy of any theology at all from the viewpoint of a theory of knowledge or a philosophy of language. This is so simply because, given the structure of man as seen in divine revelation, the concrete, a posteriori experience of

salvation and of the historical facts of salvation cannot be turned into a purely transcendental, formal structure without Christianity ceasing to be Christianity.

We must also include a caution against a mere biblicism. Because of the way theological studies were done, Evangelical theology structured the whole of theology to a large extent from exegesis and biblical theology, including the introductory sciences and so on. Philosophy and systematic theology were frequently a very secondary matter, a subsequent superstructure, a summary of biblical theology. If we were to imitate something like this, which is basically obsolete, we would rob the foundational course of its real essence. The foundational course is not an introduction to sacred scripture. In the appropriate places and in the proper way, of course, we shall also have to do some exegesis or biblical theology in this foundational course. But in reflecting, for example, upon the historical credibility of the resurrection and upon the self-understanding of Jesus that is ascribed to him by dogmatic theology, we can make use of only as much scriptural data here as is sufficiently certain today from an honest exegesis. By the very nature of the foundational course, as distinguished from later and necessary biblical theology, fundamental theology, ecclesiology and dogmatic theology, we may include only as much exegesis and biblical theology in the foundational course as is absolutely necessary. Then later exegesis and biblical theology can gather, organize and incorporate the rest of the positive, biblical material which must also be included in the church's theology.

3. Some Basic Epistemological Problems

THE RELATION BETWEEN REALITY AND CONCEPT, BETWEEN ORIGINAL SELF-POSSESSION AND REFLECTION

We are calling this essay an introduction to the *idea* of Christianity in order to indicate that our concern here cannot be a mystagogical initiation into Christianity, but is an inquiry on the level of conceptual thought in theology and in the philosophy of religion on the first level of reflection. We are dealing with the idea, not with the reality immediately; here as nowhere else idea and reality are incommensurate with each other, although, on the other hand, nowhere does the idea require turning to the reality itself in order to be understood as much as it does here. Even if *our* attempt should founder, it must be possible

in principle according to the claim of Christianity. For, on the one hand, Christianity exists in the individual person in his concrete, historically conditioned finiteness only if this person accepts it with at least a minimum of knowledge that he has personally acquired and that is encompassed by faith, and, on the other hand, this knowledge is what is understood of Christianity as something that is in principle accessible to everyone and can be grasped by everyone.

Not everyone can be an expert in theology in the strict sense. But if, nevertheless, Christianity is to be able to be something which can be grasped personally by everyone, then in principle there must be an introduction to Christianity on a first level of reflection. In other sciences it might be the case that the more specialized something becomes, the more inaccessible it is for the non-specialist, and the more it becomes important and becomes precisely the real truth of this science. This cannot be the case in theology, because in its scientific pursuits theology does not just turn its attention subsequently to a knowledge which is salvific for all, but it intends to be this salvific knowledge which is for everybody. For reflection upon one's prior understanding of existence belongs in some form and to some degree to this very understanding of existence, and is not merely a supplementary luxury for specialists.

There is in man an inescapable unity in difference between one's original self-possession and reflection. This is disputed in different ways by theological rationalism on the one hand, and on the other by the philosophy of religion of so-called classical "modernism." For basically every rationalism is based upon the conviction that a reality is present for man in spiritual and free self-possession only through the objectifying concept, and this becomes genuinely and fully real in scientific knowledge. Conversely, what is called "modernism" in the classical understanding lives by the conviction that the concept or reflection is something absolutely secondary in relation to the original self-possession of existence in self-consciousness and freedom, so that reflection could also be dispensed with.

But there is not just the purely objective "in itself" of a reality on the one hand, and the "clear and distinct idea" of it on the other, but there is also a more original unity, not indeed for everything and anything, but certainly for the actualization of human existence, and this is a unity of reality and its "self-presence" which is more, and is more original, than the unity of this reality and the concept which objectifies it. When I love, when I am tormented by questions, when I am sad, when I am faithful, when