

SHORT WRITINGS FROM TAIZÉ

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Brother John

Unfailing Faith

In these months that Pope Benedict XVI has declared a “year of faith” to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, it is particularly appropriate to deepen our understanding of this notion so central to our life as Christians.

Like many key theological terms, the word “faith” is employed in different ways. First of all, a distinction is commonly made between our faith as the realities we believe (*fides quae creditur*) and faith as the act of believing (*fides qua creditur*). This act was accorded a central place by the Reformers of the sixteenth century: “Faith is a divine work in us. It changes us and makes us to be born anew of God (John 1). It kills the old Adam and makes us altogether different people, in heart and spirit and mind and powers, and it brings with it the Holy Spirit” (Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*). Likewise, regarding this act, traditional Catholic theology states that faith, hope and love are *theological virtues*, in other words they are gifts from God “which adapt man’s faculties for participation in the divine nature.... They dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. They have the One and Triune God for their origin, motive, and object” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1812).

Now in the case of love, this is not hard to understand. The heart of the Christian message is the good news that “God loved us first” (see 1 John 4:10). When we were locked up in ourselves, incapable of a selfless love, God took the first step and showed his love for us by offering us a way out of our pre-

dicament (see Romans 5:8). Christians discover this divine activity paradigmatically in the history of the people of Israel, and ultimately in the life, death and resurrection of his beloved Son, in which we participate by the gift of the Holy Spirit. As we allow God's love to take hold of us, we are transformed into beings capable, in our turn, of a disinterested love for our fellow human beings. This love, divine in origin, ultimately makes us able to love like God, or better, to allow God to love through us.

With respect to faith, however, things are not so straightforward. Faith is generally viewed as an attitude of trust in God which causes us to accept as true what God has revealed. This may explain why God is the object of our faith, but it does not help us see how and why God is the origin of faith. Does God have faith, in the same way that God has love? If not, how can we say that faith is a "divine work," that it enables us to share in the divine nature, to become in some sense like God? And although we affirm in theory that faith is a gift from God, it is almost always treated in practice as a human attitude or activity ("you just have to believe"). The link between faith as a gift we receive and faith as human behavior is generally not very clear.

In all likelihood, the root of the difficulty has to do with the conceptual categories we use to give an account of the Christian and biblical message. As human beings we must necessarily employ such categories, but when applied to the realm of the divine they are never fully adequate. A given category can

help to illuminate certain aspects of revelation, but it can also obscure other aspects, and can even hinder us from perceiving connections between the different dimensions of the message.

In addition, there is the problem of translation. The transition from Hebrew to Greek was already a source of difficulty, and this was compounded by the shift from Greek to Latin and subsequently to our modern languages. In the case of love, for example, there is no exact Hebrew equivalent to the Greek word *agapē*, used by the early Christians to express the heart of their message. And in our contemporary world, the word "love" has connotations which take us far from the New Testament notion of *agapē*, whereas the older translation, "charity" (from the Latin *caritas*), has lost its rich meaning and has come to signify simply giving alms to the poor.

In fact, this linguistic problem is not insurmountable. Once we are aware of its existence, it can even turn to our advantage. As soon as we recognize that our human words are not absolute, that they are not perfectly adequate translations of a supernatural mystery, we are freed to attempt to grasp more and more clearly the underlying reality attempting to find expression in and through the words. In this endeavor, the diversity of the biblical vocabulary can be of help to us. In the case of Christian love, for example, it is significant that, among all the Greek terms at their disposal, the earliest disciples chose one which was not particularly important in the pagan world. Its indetermination made it ideal to acquire new connotations based on the life of

Jesus and reflection on his life and message. This means that, to understand better the significance of *agapē*, we must start from the life and teaching of Christ and not begin by examining the use of the word in classical Greek. In addition, since Jesus' message was founded on the revelation given to the people of Israel and set down in the Hebrew Scriptures, our "Old Testament," the meaning of *agape* can be enriched by examining notions such as *hesed* ("friendliness, loving-kindness"), *hēn* ("favor, kindness") and *rachamim* ("mercy"). Seeing how these concepts are used in the Bible helps to flesh out the generic and perhaps somewhat abstract notion of love.

In these pages, we shall employ a similar method to clarify the notion of faith, in Greek *pistis*. We will look at the use of this word and its cognates in the New Testament, discovering how they are rooted in the Hebrew understanding of God. This will enable us better to realize how *pistis* is operative in the life of Jesus and how it is communicated from God, through Christ, to us.

God Is *Pistos*

A good place to start is not with the noun *pistis* or the verb *pisteuō* but with the corresponding adjective, *pistos*. In the parables of Jesus, this adjective is often used to describe good servants (Matthew 24:45; 25:21,23; Luke 12:42; 16:10), and in the New Testament letters it is employed by exten-

sion for Christian ministers (Ephesians 1:1; 6:21 [Tychicus]; Colossians 1:7 [Epaphras]; 1 Peter 5:12 [Silvanus]). It refers to someone who is reliable, trustworthy, dependable, who can be counted on to put into practice his or her employer's wishes. But it may surprise us to learn that, for the inspired authors, it is above all God who is *pistos*:

[God] will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is *pistos*, and through him you have been called into the communion of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:8f)

And God is *pistos*; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

As surely as God is *pistos*, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." (2 Corinthians 1:18)

May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is *pistos*, and he will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:23f)

The Lord is *pistos*, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. (2 Thessalonians 3:3; see also 1 John 1:9; 1 Peter 4:19)

The most reliable being of all is not a creature but the Creator, the Source of all that exists, the One "who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). Here we approach the very heart of the conception of God in the Hebrew Scriptures. In fact, the Hebrew equivalent of the notion of *pistis* is the Semitic root *aman*, which gives rise to two nouns, *emunah*, often

translated as “faithfulness” or “faith”, and *emeth*, rendered as “faithfulness” or “truth”, as well as the exclamation *Amen!* (“So it is!”). Behind all these words is the notion of a reality which is firm, solid, stable, unchanging in its essence, and which therefore can be counted on come what may. As opposed to the Greek notion of truth, which was taken up by Western civilization and which emphasizes the rational dimension, the relationship between mind and object (*adaequatio intellectus et rei*), for Semites something is true if it is what it claims to be, if it never shifts like the sands but is utterly stable and dependable. The opposite of truth in this sense is not error but rather hypocrisy or falsehood. One could also use here the adjective “authentic,” something that truly is what it is. This is of course eminently a characteristic of the living God, and it is recapitulated in the image of the Rock:

The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
 my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,
 my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. (...)
 And who is the Rock except our God?
 It is God who arms me with strength
 and keeps my way secure. (Psalm 18:2,31f; see also
 Psalm 62; 71:1-7)

In the Scriptures, this is what distinguishes God from all else, and especially from humans:

The life of mortals is like grass,
 they flourish like a flower of the field;
 the wind blows over it and it is gone,
 and its place remembers it no more.
 But from everlasting to everlasting

the Lord’s love [*hesed*] is upon those who worship him...
 (Psalm 103:15-17; see also Isaiah 40:6-8)

In short, “[God’s] *emunah* is from generation to generation” (Psalm 119:90; see also 90:1f).

These characteristics of solidity and authenticity lead directly to the notion of *faithfulness*. Here it is important to note that the God of the Bible is faithful first of all with respect to himself: since God is fully himself, always true to who he is, he inevitably acts in the same way in all his outward relationships. *Pistis/emunah* as faithfulness or trustworthiness thus follows from a characteristic basic to God’s identity – as opposed to human beings, who do not possess themselves fully and are thus at the mercy of influences from without, God is simply who God is (see Exodus 3:14 ‘*ehyeh asher ‘ehyeh*), the utterly simple Act of being, the undivided Source of all his acts and choices:

If we are *apistoi* [undependable, faithless],
 he remains *pistos*,
 for he cannot be untrue to himself.
 (2 Timothy 2:13)

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the God of the covenant is characterized by the binomial expression *hesed w'emeth* (Exodus 34:6; Psalm 86:15; 103:8 etc.). *Hesed*, often translated by loving-kindness, describes a readiness to go out of oneself and create relationships. *Emeth*, truth or faithfulness, expresses the fact that God’s relationships are made to last, because God always possesses and gives himself fully.

This examination of the biblical background of the vocabulary of faith leads to a preliminary conclusion which is far-reaching, and perhaps unanticipated. We are not dealing in the first place with a human attitude or possibility, but with something that belongs by its very nature to God alone. Strictly speaking, *we* do not “have faith.” *Pistis* is therefore a gift from God, but it is much more than that: it is a characteristic of God’s own being and identity. Only the unchanging Source of all things has the solidity and the authenticity that make for total dependability and trustworthiness.

Discovering the Treasure

But where in all this is the reality that Christians are accustomed to refer to as “faith”? In most of its uses in the New Testament, the word refers to an act of believing or trusting. Put simply, this more common meaning of *pistis* in Christian theology is the natural corollary of the primary meanings of solidity and reliability. When we come upon a reality which is *pistos* in the sense explained above, we are drawn, almost unthinkingly, to rely on it. Already on a material level, we look for solid ground upon which to take a stand; we sink into a comfortable and well-built chair. And, more importantly, when we encounter a person who is dependable, we spontaneously tend to entrust ourselves to him or her. As time passes, we lose our fear of being disappointed

or betrayed and become less watchful, more trusting. In a relationship with such a person or thing, we can let down our guard and relax.

Here we see a parallel between faith and love which is not usually perceived. When someone loves us truly, accepting us as who we are, we are instinctively drawn to open our hearts to that love, and we then find ourselves able to love that person in return. In a word, love engenders love. In the realm of the Gospel, God’s unconditional love shown to us through Jesus Christ transforms the core of our personality and turns us into beings who are capable of loving God and consequently all those whom God places on our road. Analogously, encountering someone who is authentic, dependable and faithful awakens in us the desire to trust, to believe in that person: faith understood as the act of putting our trust in a trustworthy being is thus equivalent to letting ourselves be loved by someone who truly loves us. For the parallel to be complete, trusting should then turn us into beings who are trustworthy in our turn.

Pistis as trusting, as believing, thus draws its energy from a prior manifestation of *pistis* as stability and reliability. We are “naturally” attracted to something or someone who offers us a place to rest our hearts. When we think of the divine gift of faith first and foremost as a kind of infused power or ability, we are inevitably confronted with those unanswerable questions: Where does this gift come from? Why do some people have it and others

apparently not? Viewing faith as a divine gift should instead start with a consideration of God's manifestation of himself through events and persons in the world, which by their very nature have a power of attraction and offer a safe shelter.

Does this mean that faith is automatic? Is it not obvious that we can mistake the object of our faith and place our trust in persons or things which are not in fact trustworthy? Of course, but the possible perversion of the act of believing does not invalidate the process itself; it merely points up the fact that divine gifts are entrusted to fallible human beings. Just as we can imagine wrongly that someone loves us when he or she is simply trying to seduce us, so too we can place our trust in realities which are ultimately deceiving. In the language of one of Jesus' parables (see Matthew 7:24-27), we can build our house on sand and not on rock. But sooner or later, Jesus tells us, the truth of the matter will be revealed: true faith and love will finally prevail.

Another parable of Jesus uses a different image to illustrate the link between the manifestation of a desirable reality and the human response to it:

The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When someone found it he covered it up, then in his joy went and sold everything he had and bought that field. (Matthew 13:44)

This parable describes the discovery of something so valuable that it leads to a dramatic change in the behavior of the one who discovers it. His life is divided into a "before" and an "after." Everything

else becomes secondary when compared to the new reality he has found. He does not go and sell his possessions out of a sense of duty or guilt; his focus is uniquely upon the treasure. The joy he feels is the "echo" of that treasure within him, which takes over his entire being.

In the same way, the discovery of something which is *pistos* leads to having *pistis* in that reality: we rely on something reliable; we put our trust in what is trustworthy. Note that here too it is possible to err. What seems to be a treasure may not be *pistos*, in other words authentic; instead of real gold it may only be something that glitters and has no value. Likewise, a person may be so deluded that he considers as a treasure what is only rubbish. But the possibility of being deceived or of making a mistake does not change the basic structure of believing. *Pistis* as belief is first and foremost a response to what is worth believing in. The pearl of great price, once discovered, inspires in us the longing to have it.*

What we are describing here is in fact the logic of the *kerygma*, the basic proclamation of the Chris-

*The parables of the treasure and the pearl describe the essential structure of faith as a response to the inbreaking of the divine into a human existence. They are not, however, empirical and exhaustive descriptions of how one comes to believe. Not everyone remembers one particular event which they can date as the moment when they "found the treasure." Raised in a Christian milieu, many may have assimilated by stages the gift they received in baptism. Others, like the disciple of Emmaus (Luke 24), may only have realized the true significance of their discoveries when they looked back at a later date. Still others may have had several successive conversion experiences. The journey of faith necessarily heads towards a greater understanding and integration of the Gospel message, towards a (more) personal relationship with Christ which reorients one's existence. But this life-changing process need not be – and usually is not – the work of a single moment.

tian faith. It is expressed in the first words attributed to Jesus in Mark's Gospel, which function as a kind of recapitulation of his entire message:

Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the Good News from God: The time has come and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Change your outlook and believe in the Good News! (Mark 1:14f)

Jesus starts by announcing some "good news": God is entering the world in a brand-new and unprecedented way. Realizing this and taking it seriously leads to a *metanoia*, a radical change of one's entire outlook and behavior. In the face of all the temptations to turn away Jesus does of course urge his hearers to "believe" – and the gospels are filled with this call to have faith – but it remains true that faith, though it calls upon human intelligence and will, is not something that has its origin inside the person. It can only be a response to "good news," to the discovery of a treasure that in the end revolutionizes a person's entire life.

My Rock, My Stronghold, My Deliverer

Faith thus begins with the discovery that God is the Rock, the one absolute Reality that stands firm when all else fails. The people of Israel did not acquire this conviction overnight, but in the course of a centuries-long pilgrimage, primarily and paradoxically

through the experience of their own faithlessness. However often they abandoned the road or forgot the meaning of their existence as a nation, they were always offered a new beginning, one which came from beyond their own horizon. God's faithfulness to them was expressed most often as forgiveness. They thus learned the hard way to place their trust in "the everlasting God... who does not grow faint or weary, whose understanding is inscrutable" (Isaiah 40:28). Their entire existence as a people was thus suspended upon an invisible Reality never at their disposal. Trusting in this Reality meant not being misled by the appearances of a world in which the unscrupulous seem to prosper and being sure of an ultimate vindication:

Do not fret because of those who are evil
or be envious of those who do wrong;
for like the grass they will soon wither,
like green plants they will soon die away.
Trust in the Lord and do good;
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.
The Lord makes firm the steps
of the one who delights in him;
though he may stumble, he will not fall,
for the Lord upholds him with his hand.
(Psalm 37:1-3,23f)

Relying on God's stability enables one to share in that stability, to become unwavering and firm amidst the uncertainties and trials of existence (see Psalm 112:7f; 40:2; Isaiah 50:7).

It is nonetheless not easy, indeed almost impossible, for humans to rely on a support that is invisible and intangible. Like any nation, Israel needed points

of anchorage in the world here below in which to root its trust in the unseen God. The prophet Isaiah in particular was attentive to this need. For him the city of Jerusalem, its Temple, and the royal Davidic dynasty were signs of God's faithfulness to his promise to be with his people for ever:

This is what the Sovereign Lord says:
"See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation;
the one who relies on it
will not be disappointed. (Isaiah 28:16)

But the day would come when Jerusalem and its Temple would be destroyed, and the king sent into exile. The community of believers eventually managed to survive this unprecedented crisis by rooting its faith in the Torah, God's revealed Word, and in practices such as circumcision and the keeping of the Sabbath, realities which in addition had the advantage of not being linked to a particular spot. Another part of God's people, however, found a different way forward. In an itinerant preacher who appeared in Galilee two thousand years ago and was put to death in Jerusalem after a short ministry, Jesus of Nazareth, his disciples did not just see a man inspired by God but the divine Presence itself in the midst of human history. If Jesus is indeed the incarnation of the invisible God, then the whole dialectic of *pistis* that we have been examining should be exemplified in him.

The True Witness

We have seen that *pistis* in the Bible has two sides: it refers, first, to the solidity that belongs eminently to God and, second, to the act of seeking and finding support in that solidity. It is both the unshakeable rock and the act of building one's house on that rock; it is both faithfulness and faith. It is not surprising that Jesus, an authentic human being yet someone truly divine, shows us both of these dimensions in exemplary fashion.

Let us begin with the second dimension. Despite the New Testament affirmation that Jesus is "the one who initiates *pistis* and brings it to completion" (Hebrews 12:2), theologians have traditionally been hesitant to affirm that Jesus had faith, because they have considered it a lesser form of certainty than knowledge or sight. From our point of view, however, the contrary is true. Jesus exemplifies authentic trust because his entire existence does not have its source in itself but in a relationship with the one he calls Abba. His faith is in fact greater than that of any other human being: whereas in us trust inevitably exists in tandem with an inability or a refusal to trust (see Mark 9:24) – part of us stubbornly maintains that we know better than God what is best for us – Jesus for his part has no such misgivings. His existence has no other meaning than that of constantly discovering and putting into practice what his Father wishes.

It is John's Gospel that expresses this truth most succinctly. It is recapitulated in Jesus' two favorite titles for God: "the One who sent me" and "the Father". Jesus' entire identity consists in being the One sent by God, in being the Son. He can do nothing on his own (John 5:19,30), but seeks only to do the will of the One who sent him (5:30; 6:38), to accomplish that One's works (10:37f). That is the nourishment that keeps him going (4:34). He did not come from himself, in his own Name, but from the One who is true (7:28; 5:43), and so his words are not his own but come from the Father who is true (7:16; 8:26,38; 12:49f; 14:24); in him the Father is accomplishing his own works (14:10).

And this second aspect of *pistis*, being rooted in and relying totally on the Source of all life, leads directly to the first. Because Jesus does nothing on his own, he shares in the dependability, the solidity, of the One who sent him. The Father has entrusted all things to him (Matthew 11:27; John 3:35; 16:15). He receives from the Source his being (John 8:42; 10:36), life (5:26; 6:57), the authority to judge (5:22,27), and glory (8:54; 13:31f; 5:41,44). And so he can say: "Who sees me has seen the Father" (14:9).

This identity of Jesus is summed up by a title given to him at beginning of the Apocalypse of Saint John (1:5): Jesus is *ho martus ho pistos*, the authentic and faithful witness to the invisible God. He is pure transparency, pointing not to himself but directly to the Father with whom he is one (see John 10:30; 14:10f). At the same time, this limpidity makes him

utterly reliable, trustworthy: in him, the radiance of divine Love shines through with no admixture of human self-seeking to lead our eyes astray.

Jesus' trust in the Father has a further consequence: he sees the world and its inhabitants not in function of their this-worldly appearance (see John 8:15f; 7:24) but as they were intended to be by the Creator; his eyes penetrate the masks and reach the core. Specifically, he does not view human beings as divided into different categories, but as women and men all called to friendship with God and thus meant to be friends of one another. Jesus shows trust to everyone because he sees the best in them; they were all created to be members of God's family. In Zacchaeus he sees not the dishonest tax-collector but a "son of Abraham" (Luke 19:1-10); in Levi, another tax-collector, a man worthy of being his intimate companion (Mark 2:13f); in a woman of bad reputation, someone who "has loved much" (Luke 7:36-50); in an indigent widow, the one who has given more than all the others (Mark 12:41-44). Jesus' trust and hope in people arises not out of ingenuousness (see John 2:24f), as is shown by his clear-sighted analysis of the motives and behavior of his adversaries (see e.g. Matthew 23), but in his total confidence in the loving designs of God, which he is sure will come about whatever happens.

Living in such trust is anything but easy. Evaluated in the light of so-called human realism, such behavior can only lead to disaster, certainly not to success in this-worldly terms. And the life of Jesus

was emphatically not successful in that way. A few early conquests, enthusiastic crowds who clamored for superficial advantages and were easily swayed when things became tough, well-placed opponents able to manipulate public opinion... the earthly story of Jesus ended with betrayal, desertion, torture and an ignominious death. Only faith in a God whose foolishness was wiser than human wisdom and whose weakness was stronger than human strength (1 Corinthians 1:25) could keep Jesus going. This faith was revealed in all its nakedness shortly before his death, in the Garden of Olives (see Matthew 26:36ff). At that moment, Jesus had nowhere to rest his head but in the (momentarily indecipherable) will of the Father, and there indeed he ultimately found refuge – not without an inner combat – and the courage to continue on his way. By this he showed us the deepest meaning of *pistis* – not something we possess, but God’s utterly dependable Providence, accessible to us only if we abandon our own attempts to see clearly and to determine the way forward by ourselves. By his living and his dying Jesus set this *pistis* squarely in the midst of the human condition, opening a road to life we could never have found on our own.

We Walk in *Pistis*

Utterly transparent as he is to the Absolute of God, Jesus becomes a “translation” of this Absolute in a

human existence. So it is not surprising that those he encounters see in him someone unlike any other, the bearer of a Reality alongside which everything else pales by comparison: “We have never seen anything like this!” (Mark 2:12).

Jesus is thus the treasure for the sake of which a person sells everything they have. Ordinary fishermen, surprised in the midst of their work, leave home and family to follow him (Mark 1:16-20). Though they can have no idea of what lies in store for them, they feel more confident in his company, heading into the unknown, than in a well-regulated life of their own choosing. Step by step they learn to walk in trust – the trust that their Teacher is opening God’s master-plan to them and that his Way is the road to true life (see John 14:6).

The disciples’ trust in Jesus is deepened by means of successive trials, moments of incomprehension and even doubt followed by new beginnings. The hardest of these trials is undoubtedly his arrest, condemnation and death, which seemed to define his life as a total failure. Here, the disciples’ faith seems to come to a brutal end, leading to their “scattering” (Matthew 26:31,56; John 16:32) and return to their previous occupations (see John 21:3). Were faith a merely human act or attitude, the story would end here. Their faith in Jesus would indeed have been reduced to nothing were it not for *his* faithfulness, in its turn rooted in the *pistis* of the Father, the inexhaustible Source of a life stronger than death. God’s act of faithfulness to his life-giving designs, shown

eminently in the act of raising his son from the dead, means that Jesus in fact never deserts his followers, but remains with them “until the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). And now, the *pistis* that he has constantly taught and shown them comes fully into its own: through this faith, revived by an encounter with the Risen Lord, they live in the certainty of his presence despite all appearances to the contrary.

When Saint Paul speaks of the *pistis* by which we are justified, in other words brought into a life-giving relationship with God, he is not referring in the first place to a human act of believing, a more effective “work” than those of the Jewish religion. He has in mind God’s *pistis* (Romans 3:3), manifested to us in the *pistis* of Christ (Galatians 2:16; 3:22; Romans 3:22; Philippians 3:9), which awakens and undergirds our own believing. Our translations do not always provide the necessary nuances. In the much-quoted text Galatians 2:20, for example, Paul does not say “I live in faith in the Son of God” but rather “I live in the faith which is that of God’s Son” in other words the *pistis* which characterizes and comes from the Son, which is his. Paul is able to believe and live in faith because he has been taken hold of by Christ (Philippians 3:12); his former self has died with Christ and Christ now lives in him (Galatians 2:19). To “believe in Christ” means to abandon our own human certainties and rely on the Rock of Christ, but it also means to be able to live in faith because we are “in Christ.” This is sacramental logic, utterly different than our human linear logic:

if on the one hand baptism is a concrete expression of our faith, our yes to Christ, it is even truer to say that we are able to believe because we have been baptized, in other words immersed, in the divine *pistis*. God’s *pistis* manifested in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit comes first, not in time but in being: the Treasure is there with its power of attraction before it can be found, and even desired. Only later on, when they look back, do the disciples on the road to Emmaus realize that the Risen Lord was with them all the time and their hearts were burning on the way (Luke 24:32).

And finally, when we rely on God’s *pistis* manifested in Christ, we become witnesses in our turn to the one Reality that remains when all else fails (see Mark 13:31). This is shown emblematically in Peter’s confession (Matthew 16:13-19): when he comes to discern in Jesus God’s Anointed, Simon receives a new name: “Rock” (*Kephas*). And he receives it not as an individual, but as the spokesman for the community of believers, the Church. To the extent that this community lives not according to its own human standards (“flesh and blood”) but by following the promptings of God’s Spirit, it makes present a new way of life that has an unprecedented power of attraction. In the lives of ordinary women and men brought together by Christ and the Gospel, people discover the hidden Treasure, the Pearl of great price, the Rock upon which a life can be built which gives lasting happiness. As we learn to walk in *pistis*, and not by following our own vision

(cf. 2 Corinthians 5:7), we become trustworthy witnesses to the power and beauty of divine love. In and through our human weaknesses and limits, God's *pistis* enters into the warp and woof of human history, making possible an ongoing continuity in space and time, a Life of communion that will never disappoint or fail.