

FAITH AND THE MULTIVERSITY

George B. Grant

Professor of Religious Studies  
McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

The Sixth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences  
San Francisco, November 25-27, 1977

## Faith and the Multiversity

"Faith and the multiversity" is a subject which could be tackled from many angles, both practical and theoretical.

The essence of the question is, however the relation between faith and modern science. You may well say -- not that terrible old chestnut once again! Hasn't there been so much discussion of that over the last centuries that there is nothing worth while left to be said about it? My answer is no. The relation between modern science and faith lies at the core of the relation between faith and the multiversity; and thought has not yet reached that core. Many Christians turn away from this relation because they want there to be no conflict here. Nevertheless it remains the fatefilled question of western intellectual life.

What is faith? "Faith is the experience that the intelligence is illuminated by love."<sup>1</sup> What is given in that definition of course requires a careful analysis of each of its terms: -- experience, intelligence, illumination, love. As that analysis is not possible here, let me quickly make four comments, particularly about the use of the word 'love'. This word has lost its clarity in contemporary language, particularly in theological usage.

(1) 'Love' is attention to otherness, receptivity of otherness, consent to otherness. Such an account sounds abstract until we give it content through all the occasions of life, from elementary human relations to the very Trinity itself. When we love other human beings,

we know those human beings because we have paid attention to them, have received something of what they are, and consented to what they are as good. Indeed in this example, consent is easily joy, because of our obvious need of people close to us; whereas consent may not easily be joy in the more difficult reaches of love. The interdependence of love and knowledge is most clearly manifest when we try to understand what it is to love justice -- (and it must be remembered that the love of justice is what all human beings are primarily called to.). We can only grow in our knowledge of justice in so far as we love what we already know of it and any new knowledge of justice then opens up the possibility of further love which in turn makes possible fuller knowledge. The road to this perfecting is what we mean by the lives of the saints. Most of us are at the most elementary level in this process, but we have to start where we are, paying attention, receiving, consenting to justice as it is required of us in daily life. In our daily attempts to be just the central fact about human love is made plain. Love is only love in so far as it has passed through the flesh by means of actions, movements, attitudes which correspond to it. If this has not happened, it is not love, but a phantasy of the imagination by which we coddle ourselves. As far as love is concerned, and particularly love of justice, "matter is our infallible judge."

(2) As the definition "faith is the experience that the intelligence is illuminated by love" is difficult to fathom, I will mention two writings, one a novel, one philosophy in which the sentence is clarified. In Simenon's account of one of Chief Inspector

Maigret's criminal investigations in Paris (which in English has the title "Maigret's Mistake") the meaning of this definition is beautifully illustrated. The definition is philosophically clarified at the centre of Plato's Republic. In Plato's account of the movement of the soul to perfection he speaks metaphorically in three images, known as the Sun, the Line and the Cave. In his account of knowledge he uses the metaphor of sight. What he is describing through that metaphor is what I mean by love. As would be expected from our highest philosophic authority, Plato hits the perfect note perfectly. Love and intellect must be in unity if we are to gain the most important knowledge. If we are ever to get near to understanding the Republic, we must recognise what is given in that metaphor. This is extremely difficult for us moderns because most German and English scholars have, for the last two centuries, read it through Kantian eyes (a great darkening) and Catholics through Aristotelian eyes (better, but still a darkening).

(3) Such an account clearly makes faith something open to all human beings at many levels and does not reserve faith to describe our responses to certain Christian teachings. The only claim of those of us who are Christians is that the unity between love and intellect can be seen in Christ. If I may speak technically for a moment as a theologian to those who study Theology, it is well to remember the universality implied in that definition of faith. We are bombarded by the works of German historical theologians, who have been defeated by the philosophers of their own country without even knowing it, and are trying to rescue themselves from that defeat

by making Christianity dependent on the particularities of 'history'. Faith properly defined is necessary both for philosophy and theology, whether they are practised in east or west.

(4) If faith is an experience, it is clearly not a matter of will or of choice or of merit. Experience is always something given us. Faith is a matter of luck or, if you prefer a slightly different language, a matter of providence. I prefer luck. Luther was often misguided, but he hit the nail on the head in his blunt way when he said that Christ had nailed merit to the cross. It is necessary to state this for the following reason. When a theologian such as myself defines faith as the experience that the intelligence is illuminated by love, I am making no claim for my own ability to love. To be quite particular, I spend a lot of my life in meetings with colleagues and to put it mildly, my intellect is not lit up by love. This side of the truth concerning the dangers of the intellectual life is very beautifully expressed in St. Francis' writings about the philosophers. When one says that faith is an experience, it is essential to emphasise that the possession of it, however limited, is in no sense dependent on willing. This is particularly necessary to say because nearly all western human beings are impregnated (whether they know it or not) by that account of will which was enucleated by Leibniz and Kant and Nietzsche. When one says that faith is the experience that the intelligence is illuminated by love, it must be made clear that we are talking about something concerning human beings at a higher level than that at which will as activity properly operates. It is essential to insist that love and will are different. Love knows itself as

needing; will now think itself as creating. As has been beautifully said: "One degrades the mysteries of faith in making them a matter for affirmation or for negation, when they ought to be matters for contemplation." <sup>2</sup>

Now to turn from Christianity to the multiversity. It is very important to be clear what is meant by the multiversity particularly because it is an institution which has only realised itself recently in Europe and the U.S., during this century -- although its coming to be was a slow emergence over the last four centuries. In Canada it has only been realised in the last thirty years. I often meet people of my generation who went to university in the 1930s, and who speak as if the institutions their children or grandchildren are now attending are really the same as those they went to. But this is simply an illusion. The names for these places are the same, but they are such different places that they should have different names. To say what they now are, it is necessary to describe the dominating paradigm of knowledge which rules in them and is determinative of what they are. Different civilisations and differing periods within the same civilisation have differing paradigms of knowledge, and such paradigms shape every part of the society and particularly its institutions of learning. The principle of any paradigm in any civilisation is always the relation between an aspiration of human thought and the effective conditions for its realisation.

The question then is what is given in the modern use of the word 'science'. This is the paradigm which has slowly reached

definition over the last centuries, and has since 1945 reached its apogee of determining power over our institutions of higher learning. Of course, it would be folly to attempt to summarise in a paragraph that brilliant progress of self-definition by philosophic scientists as to their activity over the last centuries. Suffice it simply to say that what is given in the modern word 'science' is the project of reason to gain objective knowledge. What is meant by objective? Object means literally some thing that we have thrown over against us. Jacio I throw, ob over against, therefore 'the thrown against'. The German word for object is Gegenstand -- that which stands against. Reason as project, (that is, reason as thrown forth) is the summoning of something before us and the putting of questions to it, so that it is forced to give us its reasons for being the way it is as an object. Our paradigm is that we have knowledge when we represent anything to ourselves as object, and question it, so that it will give us its reasons. That summoning and questioning requires well defined procedures. These procedures are what we call in English 'research', although what is entailed in these is more clearly given in the German word 'Forschung'. Often people in the university like to use about themselves the more traditional word 'scholar' but that word means now those who carry on 'research'. Those procedures started with such experiments as balls running down an inclined plane, but now the project of reason applies them to everything: stones, plants, animals, human beings, societies. Thus in North America we have divided our institutions of higher learning into faculties of natural science, social science and humanities, depending on the

object which is being researched. But the project of reason is largely the same, to summons different things to questioning. In the case of the humanities the object is the past, and these procedures are applied to the relics of the past. For example, I live in a department of religion in which much work is done to summons the Bible before the researchers to give them its reasons.

This paradigm makes it accurate to use the ugly neologism 'multiversity'. Each department of these institutions, indeed almost each individual researcher, carries on the project of reason by approaching different objects. The limitations of the human mind in synthesising facts necessitates the growing division of research into differing departments and further subdivisions. "[However] much use is made of algebra and instruments, science (as a synthetic activity) will always largely depend on man's intelligence and physique, which are limited, and do not become less so with the passing of centuries".<sup>3</sup> This paradigm of knowledge makes it therefore appropriate to speak of the multiversity.

The achievements of the modern project are of course a source of wonder. The objects have indeed given forth their reasons, since they have been summonsed forth to do so over the last centuries. The necessities that we now can know about stones or societies surely produce in us astonishment in its beautiful sense. These achievements are not simply practical, but also have theoretical consequences. All of us in our everyday lives are so taken up with certain practical achievements, in medicine, in production, in the making of human beings and the making of war, that we are apt to forget the sheer theoretical



interest of what has been revealed about necessity in Einsteinian physics or in Darwinian biology. It is not my business here to speak of the appropriateness of these procedures in giving us knowledge of the human things through the social sciences and the humanities, or to raise such difficulties as that we cannot use experiment when the past is summonsed before us as object to be put to the question.

The purpose of this paper is to ask what is the relation of science to faith. The question is now defined as: what is the relation between this paradigm of knowledge and the experience that the intelligence is illuminated by love. Or to put the matter practically: how do those who know that the second statement is true live in institutions dominated by the paradigm?

The relation between the modern scientific project and what I have called love can only be clarified in terms of certain distinctions. For example, it is clear that from the earliest days of the modern experiment, the motive for mastering nature was often the desire to alleviate the human condition -- that is, it was undertaken from love of human beings. This was often the motive for the attempt to overcome chance by knowing the reasons why objects behaved the ways they did, because chance, whether in the form of hunger or disease or the necessity of labour, produced such agonies. Those who worked for the development of the new arts and sciences and their union (which we call technology) were spurred to their work by their hope of better human conditions. How can we not wish to interfere with chance in nature, when chance is the cause of so much suffering?

The new science was the intellectual underpinning of intelligent interference, and as such was motivated by love. This is, of course, true to this day. However much there may be good cause to fear certain researches, which are possible because of the discovery of the structure of DNA, there is no doubt that many who advocate the pursuit of such researches are doing so, not because of pure curiosity, but also because they think that such researches will lead to the overcoming of certain chances which have up to now plagued human existence. The same is clearly true of many who pursue the researches which are at the heart of modern psychology. The consequent sufferings of the dogs or rats or pigeons are justified by what may result to limit human suffering. Within a utilitarian calculus, experiment on human beings may be justified in terms of the greatest good of the greatest number. But it is clear that the love involved in the modern project here is not given to or received from the objects of the research, but to other beings who will be the recipients of the goods which result.

To go further: it is also clear that many people who have given their lives to the pursuit of the modern project have been held by the beauty of what they were studying and discovering. Beauty is the cause of love, and therefore one can say that their intellects were illuminated by love in what they studied. Can one read Heisenberg's books about his studies without becoming aware of that? There is a dear account of Charles Darwin by a friend who walked with him in the country. "Nothing escaped him. No

object in nature, whether Flower, or Bird, or Insect of any kind, could avoid his loving recognition." But the very dearness of the description must not prevent us from seeing its ambiguity, which lies in the use of the words 'objects' and 'loving recognition' in the same sentence. Darwin's loving recognition of the flowers, birds, insects, means that he was receiving them as more than objects. However, Darwin's most general scientific truths concerning animals are statements about them as objects, and are true whether or not animals are greeted or not greeted with loving recognition.

Indeed it is clear that the modern project of reason as projected towards objects summonsed before us to answer our questions is not an activity which depends on the love of the objects studied. Objects can be summonsed before us without love for the things summonsed. This is true, whether the object summonsed is a tree, a beast, a human being, a society or the past; that is, whether our researches fall under the natural sciences, the social sciences or the humanities. Therefore as this paradigm of knowledge becomes increasingly all pervasive, faith as the experience that the intelligence is illuminated by love, must have less and less significance in the central work of the multiversity. Indeed, what has happened in modern society as a whole is that knowledge qua knowledge is detached from love qua love. In this context it is impossible to avoid mentioning the "fact-value" distinction. Facts are now identified with objects and are abstracted from things in their wholeness. The rest is labelled 'values' and

is tucked away as part of 'ones own subjectivity. Values are detached from 'objective' being. But justice and beauty are not values which we subjectively 'create'. Nor are stones, plants, animals and human beings simply objects. They only become objects when they are placed in a certain relation to us -- that of being at our disposal.

This is luckily not the place to discuss the disunity between love and intelligence, as it affects the destiny of western civilisation as a whole. It must be remembered also, that those who partake in the truth of the Vedanta have not dissimilar problems in relating to that paradigm as those who would partake in the truth of Christianity. My task is confined to Christians in the North American multiversity. For many generations youngsters have been coming into the universities which were fast becoming multiversities, and those who came from one or other established religious traditions have faced the complexities of that relation. There was no escape from the multiversities, for those institutions were made to serve the social purpose of imposing the standards of professionalism and professionalism is the very fabric of our American society. (Fabric in the sense that there is no successful life outside its borders. Successful in the sense that what is deemed successful by the dominating classes is just that professionalism.) If I were going to describe that past history as comedy one could start from that description of the personnel of the YMCA: "People went into it to do good and then used it to make good." The problem of working through the relation between faith and modern knowledge at an earlier time was easier, because the

established Protestant Churches were still socially powerful, and the institutions of higher learning had not yet been thoroughly integrated into the new paradigm of knowledge. But it seems to me more useful to forego history and to talk about today. It is always easier to be more certain about the past because we have had time to contemplate it, while the present is difficult to fathom, particularly in a quick changing technological society like ours, in which the unchanging is hard to apprehend.

The difference between my generation and the young people today is that the latter come to institutions of higher learning from schools which are already integrated into the modern paradigm of knowledge. They have been taught at school by people who have themselves been taught within that paradigm. The teachers may not have been taught well within that paradigm, but they have been taught within it. Those youngsters who wish to go on with higher education come to the multiversity not to learn some new paradigm, but to become professionals within the same. Most of such students have practically no relation to any religious tradition, and the relation of the intelligence to love is not a question which will ever arise for them, except perhaps at some half-conscious level of remembrance. If they are clever and ambitious, most of them will become professionals in the outside world, and some within the multiversity itself. These days of course the possibility of that professionalism presents problems for many, because of the diminished North American position in the world. This is particularly pressing in Canada since, because

of our strange relation to the North American economy, we are integrated to it as very very very junior partners. There is a minority of students who have passed through school with a continuing relation to some religious tradition. The members of this minority vary very greatly according to what tradition they come from, and its degree of religious and/or theological vigour. From those who come from a tradition of some religious vigour, (often Catholicism or some form of fundamentalism), the relation between faith and the technological paradigm may continue to be an issue of intensity. The question is more often ~~to be~~ practical, rather than theoretical. For example, one of the great agonies which is going on today is among those young people who want to be gynaecologists; and who cannot be admitted for such training unless they are willing to take part in the full work of their teachers. As the full work requires that they take part in a steady programme of foetuscide, they are not in a position to gain admission to the training which they desire. That agony and exclusion is not much publicised by the medical profession. As is to be expected in such a situation, many give way to the demands of professionalism. [A distinguished neuro-surgeon has alerted me to this situation.]

There have been, there are and there will be attempts within the fabric of the multiversity to live in ways of learning that are outside this paradigm of knowledge. These appear particularly in those areas we call the humanities and the social sciences, because in studies which deal with the human things the project of objectivity

most obviously shows its limitations. Some of these minority voices in the multiversity, which stand outside the dominating stream, have their roots in the continuance of the truths of religion, others come forth from the radical tradition in politics. But it is clear that these minority voices will not turn the multiversities from their determined end. Civilisations are destinies, and the destiny of western civilisation, as far as learning is concerned, is the project of researched objectivity. The possibilities of living outside it within the multiversity are limited. If I may be allowed an example of those limitations from my own life, I will speak of the attempt to build a department of religion within a secular multiversity. The original intuition from which that attempt came was the recognition that the theological colleges had been forced out of the mainstream of the multiversity by their secularised colleagues, and by the secular governments. There was therefore need for an institutional framework in which people could think carefully and freely about religious questions which are part of the western tradition, and could think about these questions not simply in a western context, but with all the stimulus which could be thrown into them from the truths that had been received and thought about in other great civilisations. As these truths are not by definition objective, nor for that matter subjective, (the opposite side of the modern coin), the hope was to make a situation in which the study would be made neither a matter of technical skill nor an exploration of personal eccentricity. The attempt to do that has been beset by

one overwhelming failure. It is caused by the fact that the spirit of the multiversity is just too strong to allow the study of religion to transcend the modern project of reason, as producing objective knowledge. Our modern institutions have their carefully worked out reward systems for professors and students; they also have their particular prestige granting systems. The reward system is geared towards the production of objective scholarship; the prestige system is geared to the international market, and international in Canadian terms means chiefly the big American multiversities. There is no alternative for any department but to live within these reward and prestige systems. The result is that the study of religion increasingly tends to become objectified into antiquarianism. The religions become like flies caught in amber, worthy objects for libraries and museums, but not living realities in a living culture.

At a time when knowledge is not known as related to love, and when the official churches seem complicit in the civilisation that has brought about the disunity, it is bound to happen that many young people seek that unification in new forms outside formal education. The desire that there be something eternal which is loveable belongs too deeply to human beings for it to be put aside, just because it has been put aside in the multiversity. People seek the fulfilment of that desire outside the established forms. This can be seen in the strength of Christian pietism and fundamentalism in North America, and in the strength of new religious organisations, some of which have their origins in Asia. The response of the multi-



versity to these happenings is the following. At the level of study they will be objectified under the sociology of religion; in general they will be ridiculed as outside the stream of established western rationality. I will not speak here of the more brutal public response of deprogramming. I think those of us who are Christians should be very suspicious of this hostility by the established bastions of western rationality to the new forms of religion or the revival of old forms. The recognition that the intelligence is illuminated by love is the recognition (however dim) that there is a loveable eternal. And in the light of that recognition by ourselves, we should turn with the greatest sympathy to young people, who finding that the official organisations have become oblivious of eternity, seek to partake in that eternity in ways that are unexpected to us. Let me put the matter in a cold light. I often find myself rather alien intellectually when I meet members of some of the new religions or some fundamentalist Christians. But then when I talk to them about such matters as mass foetuscide for convenience, I find myself at home in a way which is rarely the case concerning such matters with most of my colleagues in the multiversity, or as far as that goes with members of the larger official Protestant bodies. Not to be close concerning questions as to the way faith is formulated is a small thing compared to the absence of faith itself. To repeat: when the eternal is concerned, matter is our infallible judge.

Finally — In saying a strong word of praise for those who try to live faith outside the paradigm of the multiversity, I do

not want in any way to downgrade the intellect. What has been learnt through our paradigm of knowledge -- in its mathematics, its physics, its biology, its anthropology, etc. -- is a great achievement of the intellect. It is always the job of the intellect to teach us of the order of necessity, and the details of that order given us in modern science are amazing to contemplate. To speak of faith as the experience that the intelligence is illuminated by love is in no way to imply that love could try to bypass the full knowledge of the order of necessity reached by intelligence. The reason why love knows that such a bypassing is futile is of course that only the intelligence, by the exercise of that means that are proper to it, can recognise its own dependence on love for the highest knowledge.

Indeed it may be the case that the enormous web of necessity given in the discoveries of modern science will be just the cause of some human beings rediscovering what was given in the word "love". Both the divine love and our consent to it has under any conditions to cross that order of necessity which separates them from each other. Is not the crucifixion the crossing of that implacable distance? I do not much like to criticise Christianity in public these days when every Tom, Dick and Harry makes cracks at it. Nevertheless it seems true that western Christianity -- both in its Protestant and Catholic forms -- became, as it established civilisation in the West, a religion which simplified the divine love by identifying it with power, in a way which failed to recognise the distance

**SIXTH ICUS \* San Francisco \* 1977**

between the order of good and the order of necessity. Western Christianity became exclusivist and imperialist, arrogant and dynamic by the loss of this recognition. It is now facing the public results of that failure. Perhaps, the scientists by placing before us the seemingly seamless web of necessity, which itself excludes the loveable, will help to reteach us the truth that the orders of good and necessity are different. One of Nietzsche's superb accounts of the modern world was that Christianity had produced its own gravediggers. It was out of the seedbed of western Christianity that modern scientists had come, and the discoveries of science showed that God is dead. In that sense Christianity had produced its own gravediggers. Perhaps we may say that that formulation gets close to the truth of history, but is nevertheless not true. The web of necessity which the modern paradigm of knowledge lays before us does not show us that God is dead, but rather reminds us of what western Christianity seemed to forget in its moment of pride: that necessity through which love must cross. Christianity did not produce its own gravediggers, but the means to its own purification.

George Grant,  
McMaster University.  
Hamilton, Ont. Canada.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 S. Weil, La Plesanteur et La Grâce. Plon, Paris, 1948.  
p. 148. My translation.
- 2 S. Weil, La Plesanteur et La Grâce. p. 149.
- 3 S. Weil, Sur la Science. See "la science et nous".