

THE FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIANITY

CHAPTER 6:

THE ACT OF FAITH ACCORDING TO CATHOLICISM

IMPORTANT NOTICE:

This course is a revised translation of the work "I Fondamenti del Cristianesimo" written by Rev. Piero Ottaviano and Didaskaleion.

The course is divided into units with a logical sequence. Therefore we suggest you to read them following their progressive order.

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6 THE ACT OF FAITH ACCORDING TO CATHOLICISM

In this section:

- we shall expound what the Christian (Catholic) act of faith is
 - as for the apostles' first listeners;
 - as for today's people;
 - as for the apostles themselves, who made an act of faith in Jesus.
- we shall analyze the listeners' possible reaction to the preaching of Christian faith;
- we will deal with faith, considered as a gift from God.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Did Jesus rise from death or not? Can we now have our personal point of view?

Before getting at that, we believe it's useful to make some preliminary remarks about the so-called "act of faith".

Act of faith means to accept as true a statement which is not evident to us - and can neither be controlled nor demonstrated - by trusting in the reliability of the people who made it.

But in order to do so it is necessary that the statement's contents be not so absurd to us.

As a rule, the decision whether to accept something which is not evident is reached after putting the "witness" to the test, so as to make sure that he was offering enough "warranties" as for his reliability, namely, in order to ascertain that he knows what he is talking about and that he is honest.

In brief, "act of faith" can mean:

I believe, on the word of witnesses whom I regard as	competent	that the fact actually happened
	honest	an affirmation to be true

Appraising whether there are enough warranties is a subjective matter, depending on the individual.

Let us apply this to Jesus' resurrection: since we are no direct witnesses of it, we may wonder: "Are the ones who reported about it trustworthy people? What kind of evidence can they offer?"

MODERN PEOPLE => APOSTLES => WITNESSES? => RESURRECTION

Please note that the situation changes depending on the kind of listener:

- The apostles' direct listeners (the people who directly listened to the apostles' preaching);
- Today's people.

We shall deal with both groups, separately.

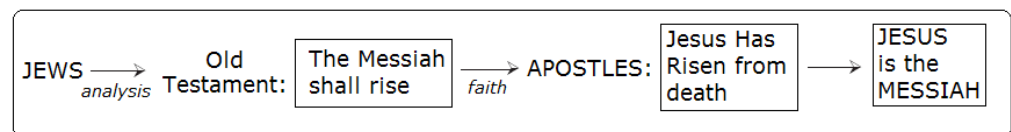
6.2 THE FAITH OF THE APOSTLES' DISCIPLES

As the apostles preached about Jesus' resurrection, their listeners would surely ask themselves:

"Are those guys telling the truth about Jesus? Are they reliable people? What kind of warranty are they offering?" (see Acts 2,37; 7,54; 8,6.12.34-37; 10,44-46; 11,20-24; 13-14; 16-19 ...)

The methods they used in order to get an answer were different depending on whether they were Jews or pagans.

1. **The Jews:** having heard the apostles claim that Jesus had died and risen from the dead "according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15,3-5; Acts 2; 10; 13; 17,1-4) and claim that he was therefore the Messiah they had been waiting for, they only had to check the Scriptures and see whether the apostles' statements were true (Acts 13,42-45; 14,1-3; 17,3-4.11-12). Since the Jews would (and still do) accept the Scriptures as Word of God, should their investigations turn out to be successful they would thus have enough clues to decide whether to join Christianity; and many among them actually did (e.g.: Acts 2,41; 5,14.28; 6,1-7; also Luke 24,25-27 and John 5,44).



2. **The Pagans:** as the pagans had no "Scriptures" to refer to, they could do nothing but try to ascertain whether the apostles deserved to be trusted or not through their actual preaching. Namely they would have to make sure that:
 - that they were not mistaken (science);
 - that they did not mean to deceive anyone (honesty)

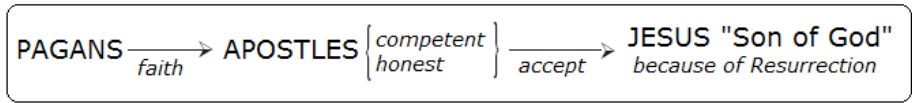
In order to do that, they had to analyze:

- coherence of the very message;
- coherence in the apostles' lives, their disinterestedness, their courage when facing persecution, and possibly get confirmation from some other witness as well.

Sometimes some "miraculous event" would intervene and help the pagans believe, which, according to Acts, would also help confirm what the apostles were preaching (e.g.: Acts 13,12; 14,8-20). The book of Acts often relates to some action by God (by the Holy Ghost) touching the listeners' heart and causing them to believe. To Christians this is God's actual intervention. Let us refer for instance to Acts 13,48 "...and the ones who were appointed for eternal life believed".

Anyway, since God's intervention cannot be historically demonstrated, no account of it should be taken under this context, if we want to keep to a mere narration of facts.

As a matter of fact, a great number of pagans were actually satisfied with the warranties as provided by the apostles and therefore chose to trust them and join Christianity.



To sum up, the act of faith made by the apostles' listeners was an act of faith in the apostles themselves, as far as their testifying to Jesus was concerned. They eventually got to know them and finally considered them reliable witnesses.

6.3 THE ACT OF FAITH AS MADE BY TODAY'S CHRISTIANS.

According to Catholics, the act of faith is first of all an act of trust in tradition (both written and oral), namely in the Christian community (the Church).

A Christian is a person who has decided to trust that the Church:

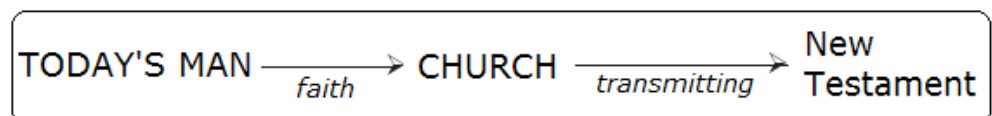
- has appraised with enough criticism both the apostles as individuals and their written and oral testimonies;
- has chosen the texts which were truly up to their preaching (the canon of the New Testament);
- has correctly handed on the texts over the centuries;
- has correctly interpreted them according to their actual meaning;
- has been continually handed down their interpretations, as well.

Please note that "*trusting the Church*" does not mean that one should accept that all Christians (and particularly the hierarchy) have always been living coherently with what they have been preaching: it just means subscribing to the fact that the Church has correctly preserved and handed on the true Christian tradition (both oral and written).

According to Catholics (and to other Christian groups, such as Orthodox and Anglicans) Christian faith cannot be considered an act of faith in the texts, but, above all, it has to be an act of faith in the Christian community which issued them.

In fact, Christianity arose about A.D. 30, whereas the first Christian records that we have date back after A.D. 50.

Therefore Christianity existed well before any document relating to it.



6.4 ARGUMENTATIONS IN FAVOR OF THE RESURRECTION

Christians (Catholics) had to avail themselves of the texts of the New Testament so as to first disprove the denials brought forward by the school of criticism and mythology and to subsequently bring positive reasons in favor of Jesus' resurrection.

6.4.1 REFUTING THE DENIALS OF THE CRITICAL SCHOOL

From a careful examination of the evangelical texts concerning resurrection it can be inferred that, in spite of some discrepancies and contradictions, they hold no account of the resurrection (none of the disciples actually witnessed it): they do nothing but report that some men and women disciples:

1. saw Jesus die and buried him;
2. found his sepulcher empty (but with the burial linen cloths still lying there);
3. saw Jesus alive (apparitions) and that they thereby deduced that he had risen.

The critical school tried to refute these data (but it has always granted the disciples' good faith by claiming that they had simply misinterpreted what they had seen).

1. As to **Jesus' death**: it would be hard to believe that it never happened, both because the Romans were experienced in crucifixions and because of the spear that pierced Jesus' side (the finishing stroke) (John 19,31-35).
2. As to the **empty sepulcher**: It would be also hard to believe that the women mistook the sepulcher. As a matter of fact, the evangelists point out that the women who found the tomb empty on that Sunday morning were the same ones who had looked at the tomb where Jesus' body was laid on the previous Friday. (Mark 15,47; Luke 23,55-56; Matthew 27,61). Besides, the gospels' mentioning some women (whose testimony was mistrusted by the Jewish law) as witnesses of the empty tomb should rule out the hypothesis of a tardy invention: in such case they would rather have reported that the empty tomb was discovered by men disciples. Furthermore, according to Matthew (27,64 and 28,13), even Jesus' opponents, i.e. non-Christian Jews, admitted that the tomb was empty: this is the reason why they spread the rumor that his disciples had come at night to steal his body (John 20,3-10).

It is often maintained, mainly by Jews (cp Matthew 28,13 and Justin's Dialogue with Tryphon) that the body had been taken away. Had it been so, nobody would any longer believe that the disciples (at least some of them) were indeed in good faith (as the critical school would have it).

- This hypothesis contradicts John's account. That morning he - as an eye witness - was able to tell by the way the linen were lying in the tomb that nobody could have stolen Jesus' body and that he had truly risen -. (John 20,1-11).
- Nobody could maintain that, unless Jesus' body was found. This never happened.
- Stealing a corpse was considered a serious crime by both the Jewish and the Roman laws. And yet there is no record whatsoever concerning any Christian having been tried for such a crime.

3. As regards the apparitions of Jesus resurrected, please notice:
 - Are we sure that they really happened? Could it not be the case of a collective hallucination, or hypnosis, or maybe of a double?
 - Records report that the apostles themselves wondered whether they were having some hallucination or the like (Luke 24,36-43; see Thomas' case in John 20,24-29) and that they finally pleaded resurrection.
 - It is no use objecting that the texts that we have were written by Christians; historically, a document is to be accepted as true as long as it is not refuted by another document.
 - Why should Christian authors not deserve to be credited with good faith, which is usually granted to all other historians? Oughtn't their bad faith first be proved?
 - In addition, let us consider the fact that the apostles became "Christians" (=followers of Christ) right as a result of having seen him risen.
 - The apparitions, reported by a lot of texts (the most complete list is to be found in 1st Corinthians 15,3-10), were unforeseen. The apostles themselves would not expect any, and they were actually doubtful and incredulous about them (Matthew 28,17; Mark 16,11.13.14; Luke 24,11.36-43; John 20,224-29).

6.4.2 REMARKS ABOUT THE MYTHICAL SCHOOL

- That the resurrection is just a "myth" - or an idiomatic expression used by the apostles to mean something else - has to be proved.
- It would also be necessary to demolish Paul's testimony (1 Cor, 15), which reads: "*He appeared to more than 500 brothers at a time, many of them are still alive...*" and then "*...he appeared to me...*". Is this not the way we currently follow when trying to prove a fact?
- Paul had a perfect knowledge of the Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic languages. We can hardly believe that he misunderstood what the early apostles meant to say.

6.4.3 THE REASONS IN FAVOR OF THE ACCOUNTS' HISTORICITY

1. Could it be that the resurrection was made up by the apostles in good faith?

This hypothesis clashes with some actual facts:

- Jesus' resurrection was unexpected. Jesus' announcements about his own resurrection would not cause any conscious expectation among the apostles: compare Mark 8,31; 9,9; 9,31; 10,34; 14,25-28-62; Luke 11,29-30; 13,32; 17,26-27; Matthew 12,40; 24,27-39; John 2,19... Let us sort just one text:

"Then when they came down the mountain, Jesus gave them (namely: Peter, James and John) orders not to tell anyone what they had seen, until the Son of man had risen from the dead. They obeyed his order, but wondered what 'rising from the dead' meant."

Within Judaism, in fact, the resurrection was indeed expected - though not by everybody (Matthew 22,23; Acts 23,6) - at the end of times, not immediately after death (John 11,24).

- How is it that the apostles, although they surely wanted the resurrection to be believed, never talk about it, unlike the (apocryphal) gospel according to Peter?
- Why do the apostles - and their disciples alike - not care about making their testimony credible, at least by trying and harmonizing the accounts of the resurrection, so as to possibly eliminate the most evident discrepancies and contradictions?
- Why do they report having found the tomb already open, thus letting suspicion arise that the body might have been stolen? Would it not have been far more spectacular to report that the stone was still there on the spot - maybe even still sealed - and that Jesus rose as the stone was being rolled back?
- What interest would they have in making up this resurrection? What would have been the use of all that toiling after preaching (2nd Cor. 11)? What would have been the use of losing one's fame, job, friends, wealth? Why risk to be excommunicated by the Jewish chiefs? Why go through trials?
- What more could they possibly do to testify to their belief in the resurrection? They actually left their job, their family and their country. They went out to preach all over the world (at least, the ones whose accounts we are sure of) and were persecuted, sometimes even to death.
- What made them do that? Just fanaticism? Then, why would they report having been doubtful, why report Thomas' wanting to see with his own eyes (John 20)?
- How can we explain the fact that they abandoned Jesus as they were younger, whereas they had the courage to lay down their life for him as they grew older?

2. The testimony of Paul of Tarsus - formerly a persecutor -: he was converted as soon as he saw Christ risen (Acts 9,1-22; 22,6-16; 12-18; Galatians 1,11-24; 1st Corinthians 15,8). This is a heavy testimony - and not easy to demolish - for it is corroborated by Paul's entire life, by all he said and did and by all he suffered because of Jesus' name. Let us just quote one text:

"As for me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1,21).

Of course we have to admit that he was a very out-and-out Christian. Such a conviction could hardly be explained through a mere sunstroke on the way to Damascus!

Please note, however, that these (and many more) arguments, strong as they may be, are **not enough to prove** the resurrection. Were it not so, then all sensible people would be Christian and all fools would not!

- As for the resurrection, no evidence can be produced - only clues, warranties -. As a result, the act of faith is, and will always be, a free act (=not induced by evidence), but not a foolish one (because there surely are warranties!).
- Ascertaining the apostles' trustworthiness remains a very complicated act, both because the details to be analyzed (all the records of the early churches and their transmission) are many and, mainly, because when it comes to establishing the

importance that should be attached to each and every element, the person appraising it plays a decisive role, which also implies, other than personal experience, a great deal of subjectiveness. This is the reason why no element will ever be decisive enough to cause any conviction, for with a little bit of fantasy it can always be misinterpreted.

- On the other hand, no-one will possibly ever produce undisputed evidence whether the reasons for trusting a person are false.
- The "strength" of the arguments adduced does not depend on each one of them (should they be appraised separately they could easily be refuted), but perhaps on their actual "convergence" (Cardinal Newton, late 1800's).

This last statement should not raise much surprise, although it conveys that the sum of more uncertain details can make up one certainty. It actually seems to be the case of all historical debates; one single reliable witness in himself is as reliable as one thousand: yet one thousand witnesses, each among whom may be wrong, supply more guarantee than a single one, particularly if it is clear that they are mutually independent.

From what has been said so far, it can be inferred that faith cannot be "demonstrated". In the positive, could we possibly still call it faith? Within an act of faith some irrational factors actually play a main role, thus deeply affecting one's judgment. Believing will never be a rational act (i.e., a rationally demonstrable one), or an irrational (absurd) one: it will simply remain a reasonable act, just as reasonable as not believing at all. B. Pascal would say that "Sometimes a heart knows some reasons that reason does not know".

To sum up: nowadays an act of faith implies two further steps:

1. Trusting that the **Church** has been handing on the **apostles' genuine teaching** and that it guarantees its preservation in the New Testament as being correct.
2. Trusting that the **apostles** told the truth as they **reported** about **Jesus' resurrection** and that they actually reported about the **things he said and did**.

TODAY'S MAN => trusts => THE CHURCH => transmits => NEW TESTAMENT

NEW TESTAMENT => trusts => THE APOSTLES => declaring => JESUS HAS RISEN

6.5 THE ACT OF FAITH IN THE APOSTLES

The Christian act of faith in the apostles implies:

- acknowledging that they are trustworthy people;
- accepting what they have told about Jesus.

Among their statements let us quote this one: "*Jesus is the Son of God*". Therefore all the words he says are true. He gives us, in God's name, the answer to the question concerning the meaning of life.

Not that the apostles actually ascertained that; we should rather say that they would believe it all the same, upon Jesus' word.

Therefore theirs was an **act of faith in Jesus**, too! Let us get deeper into it.

According to what is written in the New Testament's accounts, the apostles heard Jesus say:

"I am the Son of God" (Matthew 16,16-17; Mark 14,61-62; John 10,36)

"Before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8,58)

"I am the way, the truth and the life" (John, 14,6)

and many other affirmations like these.

But such statements concerning Jesus' self awareness will never be proved to be true, being not evident.

In addition, they are not acceptable to the Jews: as a matter of fact, the Jews had sometimes been about to stone Jesus for blasphemy. See, for instance, John, 10.31.

This is why, as they heard him say this, the apostles wondered: "Is he telling the truth? Or is he just a fool? Or a blasphemer?" and so they once asked Jesus, "What kind of sign will you give us as evidence of your saying and acting in God's name?"

Jesus answered by giving two additional guarantees:

1. The sign of Jonah (Gospel according to Matthew):

"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the cetacean's belly, so the son of man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matthew 12:40; Luke 11:29)

- The son of man is Jesus himself.
- Notice, however, that the gospel according to Mark (8,11-13) reports Jesus refusing to give any sign at all.

2. The sign of the temple (cp. the gospel according to John):

"Destroy this temple and I will raise it (literally awaken) again in three days" (John 2,19),

while the author thus comments:

"But the temple he had spoken of was his body. Therefore, after he had risen from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said and believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken" (John 2,21).

Both guarantees would concern his resurrection. At first, the apostles would not believe him. As a matter of fact, as Jesus was arrested and crucified almost everybody forsook him. But then, after seeing Jesus risen and making sure that it was really Jesus:

- they were satisfied with the sign of his resurrection;
- they believed that he really was the one he said he was, namely, the Son of God;
- decided to trust him and to accept him as Master of their life.

That happened also as a result of their reading the Old Testament (which they believed to be the word of God) under the new light thrown on the resurrection and of their finding

therein the confirmation that Jesus was the Messiah: 1 Corinthians 15, 3-5; John 2, 22; 20, 8-9; and so on.

Let us consider the typical example of Thomas, who after seeing Jesus resurrected, concluded:

"My Lord and my God"

This was Jesus' comment:

"Because you have seen me you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John, 20,28)

From then on the apostles committed themselves to live according to Jesus' teachings.

To sum up:

The apostles accepted the fact that Jesus was the Son of God because he had risen from the dead, just like he had said before being put to death.

THE APOSTLES => heard => JESUS => saying => "I AM THE SON OF GOD"

THE APOSTLES => saw => JESUS RESURRECTED => and believed => GOD IS JESUS' FATHER

6.6 HOW ACTS OF FAITH ARE PRESENTLY STRUCTURED

According to what has been said so far and in order to make a resume, we will say that nowadays the act of faith develops through the following phases:

1. act of faith in the Church, i.e., in its having correctly preserved the apostles' teachings - by selecting and handing down the relevant books without manipulating them - and in its interpreting them according to what their authors meant to say;
2. act of faith (through the Church) in the apostles and their handing on correctly what Jesus said and did - particularly Jesus' resurrection -;
3. act of faith (through the apostles) in Jesus and his being the one he said he was - namely the son of God and the Christ - having proved it by rising again; 4) act of faith (through Jesus) in God - Jesus' Father and Father of all mankind - and in His answer to the question concerning the meaning of life. As you can see, none of these passages can be proved rationally.

PERSON => trusts => CHURCH => transmitting => NEW TESTAMENT => trusts

=> THE APOSTLES => trust => JESUS = THE SON OF GOD => trust => GOD = FATHER

This is a theoretical scheme of a correct Christian act of faith, according to Catholicism.

However, many Christian people actually never achieve this kind of faith in Jesus by consciously following this sequence, but rather through a "trusting chain".

Let us consider the typical case of a child trusting his mother trusting her parish priest trusting his theology teacher.

As you can see, each one trusting the testimony of someone whom he/she trusts.

What about this kind of situation? It is indeed the case of a true act of faith, and it is often the only possible way of getting at it; but just one breaking ring of this "chain" is enough to cause faith to collapse.

It very often so happens that some Christians actually reject faith after having had an argument with some priest. In order to avoid such inconvenience, and in order to save as much faith as possible, it pays to study the documents of the New Testament, so that faith can be grounded on the Apostles, not on go-betweens.

Only in this way can one get to believe that Jesus is the Christ, without possibly getting troubled because of the behavior of certain Christians (whether contemporary or ancient ones), which might often be not so coherent.

As a matter of fact, Jesus has indeed risen (or not risen), no matter how yesterday's or today's Christians' behaved or are behaving.

What happened two thousand years ago cannot be erased by anything happening thereafter.

But since what happened two thousand years ago has been reported to people by the authors of some not-so-edifying facts occurring thereafter, then some people might reject or refute the more ancient fact.

6.7 THE LISTENER'S REACTION

How is it that some people believe the preaching about Jesus' resurrection and some do not? In order to be able to answer this question, we shall analyze the listener's possible reactions:

1. I DON'T CARE / I'M NOT INTERESTED
2. I'M INTERESTED AND THEREFORE I WANT TO KNOW MORE
 - concluding that:
 - I HAVE TO BELIEVE (gift from God - enlightenment)
 - I WILL NOT BELIEVE
 - doubting:
 - justified
 - unjustified (fear)

Let us see each one in detail:

1. "I do not care / I am not interested":

Those who give this kind of answer may be acting out of pride (they want to accept only what is rational) or maybe they just want to "be trendy" or maybe they do not want to get involved in a research that might lead them to change their easy life, or maybe they were brought up with an anti-clerical bias, or maybe they cannot see how Jesus' resurrection could possibly influence their life. Anyway, the case is filed for the time being. People of this kind might study Christianity only out of cultural interest.

2. "I want to know more / I want to get deeper into it":

In this case the person thinks the whole question over, so as to take a decision, thus either reaching a conclusion (no matter whether a decisive one) or remaining in doubt.

a) "coming to a conclusion...":

Anybody thinking he/she has acquired enough data to take a decision has finally stopped searching, at least until some new facts in his/her life leads him/her to reconsider the whole question. This could be their conclusion: "I understand that I must believe", or "I see that I must not believe".

- "I understand that I have to believe"

Many ethnologists (including St. Thomas Aquinas) call it "enlightenment" or a "gift from God" (see further). Then, it's up to the individual to live accordingly, by his/her conversion.

- "I understand that I have not to believe"

According to Christianity this attitude is also correct, provided that it results from good faith (Romans, 14) and that the individual lives according to the truth he/she has found, even if it does not coincide with Christianity. This is the case of implicit faith, or good faith.

b) "Remaining in doubt"

Such is the condition of those who cannot decide whose side they should be on, for either they believe that the clues acquired are still not enough for them to take a decision and they are subsequently waiting for still other - possibly more convincing - ones, or they fear that they have not yet analyzed them sufficiently.

Let us point out that:

- it is no use expecting any better evidence to be produced sometime in the future: an act of faith in the witness will always be absolutely necessary, and such act will always be a free one (i.e., not caused by evidence);
- Remaining in doubt may be an easy way to avoid having to take a binding decision;
- Any decision (whether positive or negative) may be reconsidered at a later time, should some more mature experience, or reflection, suggest the opposite choice;
- persisting doubts may be nothing but the rejection of one's freedom to express one's act of faith: in such case one would expect evidence to be so convincing that one should be "forced" to believe.
- That's expecting reality to change according to one's will. What nonsense! This is actually the attitude expressed by those who wonder: "If Jesus has truly risen, why does he not appear here, now? Only then would I believe".
- This could be the answer: "Should anybody actually appear before your very eyes, how would you know that it is Jesus?"
- We have no right to insist on miracles to believe.

Doubts can be either justified or unjustified.

A justified doubt arises when for some reason judgment has to be suspended. Otherwise it is the case of **an unjustified doubt**: it arises when there are no reasons to be doubtful, mainly as a result of the fear of taking the wrong decision, or of "leaving it up to God", or of committing oneself to live a life with no absolute or rational certainty. What about this

status? This is a possible and human situation, and, according to Christianity, it can be acceptable only provided that there is also the will to remove - or overcome - the doubt. In practice, however, whoever finds himself in doubt cannot snap out of it; as long as he does not say "yes" (thus making an act of faith) he is actually saying "no".

Now we can answer the former question: *"Why do some believe whereas some others do not?"*

This is why some people who have been preached about the resurrection still do not believe:

- either they were "mis-evangelized" (there was something wrong with either the preaching or the preacher);
- or they did not realize the gospel's credibility;
- or, although they have indeed realized the gospel's credibility, they simply do not want to change their easy-going lifestyle.

Only in the latter case, according to Catholicism, is the listener morally guilty (acting out of bad faith).

FURTHER NOTE: Faith and salvation according to Catholicism

In order to reassure those who fear damnation just because they do not believe in the apostles (provided that their deciding not to believe is grounded on good faith), let us specify the relationship existing between faith and salvation - according to Catholicism - :

- all men are called to be saved by God, namely, to live eternal life with Him (1 Timothy 2,4): "God wants all men to be saved";
- not all men are expected to have an explicit faith in Jesus:
 - the ones to whom the Gospel has not been preached;
 - the ones to whom the Gospel has been preached in a bad or incomprehensible way. Actual salvation depends on good faith (Romans 14), namely on one's living according to the truth one has found.

In fact, you cannot expect people to behave according to some truth they have not found, or recognized.

6.8 FAITH: A GIFT FROM GOD

It is often said that faith is "a gift from God". What about this statement?

One might thus believe that God gives faith to some people and does not give any to the rest, according to His unknown schemes. But that would be contradictory.

As a matter of fact:

- If it is true that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrew 11,6) - it could be then inferred that God actually gives faith only to the people He wants to save (predestination and denial of man's freedom);

- If it is true that "God wants all men to be saved" (1 Timothy 2,4), then He should have given faith to everyone. How is it then that not everybody has faith? (John 6, 64: "There are some of you who do not believe").

These remarks lead us to assume that the concept that "faith is a gift from God" has to be understood in a different way. Let us try.

It is a gift from God that:

1. He Himself sent Jesus and raised him from the dead;
2. Somebody saw Jesus risen and gave the news to someone else, otherwise no-one would ever have known about this;
3. Someone has been handing on the unabridged testimony as given by the the first witnesses;
4. The one who is being evangelized gets to know about Jesus' deeds.
5. The preaching, like a seed, has been sown and landed on a soil having already been prepared through prior education, so that the individual involved:
 - realizes how this would affect his/her life;
 - ascertains the preaching's credibility ("I can/could believe");
 - acknowledges that he/she has to believe ("I must believe=enlightment).

But, in spite of this series of gifts from God, the decision whether to live coherently is up to the individuals, and is free.

God has nothing to do with it. If abiding to the preaching was also a gift from God it would not make sense, within Christianity, to talk about either prize or chastisement/punishment. This would mean predestination to perdition and would not comply with 1 Timothy 2, 4.

To sum up: saying that faith is a gift from God is the same as saying that God gives certain people the opportunity to make an explicit act of faith. If they do not, they are found guilty.

And what about those whom God does not grant such an opportunity, namely, such gift? Are they lost? Some theologians think so, and quote Jesus' words:

"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16,16)

However, since Catholicism has condemned the theory according to which God predestines some people to perdition, the passage from Mark 16,16 has to be intended as follows:

- *Whoever realizes that he has to believe...*
 - *...and actually believes and is baptized will be saved.*
 - *...but does not believe will be condemned.*

So, we could resume the **relationship between god and man within the act of faith** according to Catholicism in this way:

- God makes the act of faith possible through enlightenment (*I see that I have to believe*)
- It is up to the one who received enlightenment to accept it or not (*personal responsibility*)

6.9 HERESY

Whoever chooses to trust some witness is implicitly accepting as true anything the witness regards as essential for his testimony.

Therefore, whoever chooses to believe only some of the witnesses' accounts while rejecting the rest (Greek: *Æresis* = choice, hence the word heresy) is acting according to a subjective criterion as for what is plausible and what is not. In this case the truth is not measured by the witness' word but by one's own meter. This is no act of faith in the witness.

Therefore it is no faith at all. Plucking from apostolic testimony - and, indirectly, from Jesus' word - only what is more convenient is just the same as rejecting Christian faith.

In fact, anybody choosing to trust the apostles' accounts as regards such an astonishing fact as resurrection should not find it difficult to accept all the rest that Jesus said and did - which the apostles passed on as true - even though that is indeed a leap in the dark.

Choosing only what is agreeable and rejecting the rest is no trust in Jesus, but only in oneself: that is therefore no Christian faith.