

5. Faith, Plantinga Faith, and Warrant

Plantinga's account of **faith** gives us a good clue I think as to why he would gravitate toward a picture according to which Christian beliefs are properly basic. Following Calvin, Plantinga defines faith (or faith of the type he wishes to discuss) as a "firm and certain knowledge" of "the central teachings of the gospel" (pp. 244-249). This certain knowledge is not arrived at by the workings of any of the faculties we were created with, but is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit (p. 245), who "causes us to believe these great truths of the gospel" (p. 245). Let "Plantinga faith" be faith as Plantinga describes it, leaving out the part about the beliefs in question constituting knowledge. (I want to identify "Plantinga faith" in a non-evaluative way in order to leave as an open question the status of beliefs that are the result of "Plantinga faith.") Plantinga faith then is a very strongly held belief in the great truths of the gospel, produced in accordance with God's plan by the Holy Spirit in the way Plantinga describes. How strongly held? Very strongly: It is a "firm and certain" belief (p. 244), one finds the beliefs so caused to be "compelling" (p. 250).⁹ Would the fortunate recipient of Plantinga faith have properly basic beliefs? Even after reading Plantinga's defense, I don't find this matter nearly as clear as Plantinga seems to find it, but it does seem plausible to me to suppose so.

I, however, have not been blessed with Plantinga faith. I believe that I have been blessed enough to have had experiences that are in some ways like those Plantinga describes, but for me, the most I have received directly from the Holy Spirit have been gentle nudges toward belief, certainly nothing even approaching the firm and certain conviction of which Plantinga speaks. And if the people I've talked to are to be believed -- and they are -- there are many who would be thrilled to receive faith

⁹ I worry that I may be misreading Plantinga here. He does write, "This process can go on in a thousand ways" (p. 251), and approves of Aquinas's term (in translation, of course) of "invitation" to describe the work of the Holy Spirit. "Invitation" seems more fitting for the gentle nudge toward belief of which I'm speaking, and less fitting for the kind of firm, compelling, and certain belief that comes not through the workings of one's own faculties but is rather caused directly by the Holy Spirit about which Plantinga often seems to writing. (If some spirit were to so zap me with a firm, compelling, and certain belief that P, I certainly wouldn't be tempted to describe this as a case of a spirit "inviting" me to believe that P!) He does, however, define the kind of faith he is speaking of as a firm and certain knowledge that is caused by the Holy Spirit, so that's how I'll read him.

as Plantinga describes it, but who have not, despite Plantinga's claim that faith -- presumably as he defines it, as a firm and certain conviction -- "is given to anyone who is willing to accept it" (p. 244). Perhaps all will eventually be blessed with Plantinga faith, but I am here to report from personal experience that not everyone who has been willing to accept that gift, not even everyone who has been willing for many years to receive that gift, has received it. And from encounters I've had with others with many others, I think I can safely report to you that some who are willing to accept that gift never receive it in this life. Rather, we have to muddle through with a form of faith that resembles a leap in the dark (see p. 247) a lot more than Plantinga faith seems to. (Resembling more closely a leap in the dark, but still not a leap in the dark. A leap in the twilight, perhaps.)

Such faith can grow, however: The degree of belief can increase. It has in my own case. I think rationally so. But my best hope for such rationality is that I'm being appropriately sensitive to relations of mutual support that these Christian beliefs bear to one another, and to support they receive from how well they fit in with my warranted (sufficiently or partially) beliefs from elsewhere in my belief structure. It does seem to me that those gentle nudges toward belief play a crucial role -- both in an account of why I in fact believe what I do, but also in an account of why these beliefs are warranted, to whatever extent they are warranted. But, as you can gather, it's seeming to me that, as compared with the view that Christian beliefs are properly basic, the "foundherentist", "Direct Warrant Christianity" model of justification seems much better suited as an account of the justification of the Christian beliefs of one who, like me, God has chosen to experientially leave in the twilight.

Given time constraints, rather than arguing as best I can for the conclusion that the "DWC" model is superior for a wide range of believers -- those who have received weaker experiential "input" rather than a full dose of Plantinga faith -- let me instead close with two questions for Prof. Plantinga to see what he thinks. First, does he find a "foundherentist" account of the warrant of Christian beliefs of the type I've here sketched a (structurally and otherwise) coherent option? And, second, if so, would he find that coherent option to be an attractive one as an account of the warrant of the Christian beliefs of one blessed only with gentle nudges toward belief?