

(92) DOUBT AND SPIRITUAL REALITY

Doubt and spiritual reality belong in our life together. This is already clearly the case in the gospel. Cf. Marc 9,24 (JB): "I do have faith. Help the little faith I have". In fact the disciples, always being with Jesus, are in the same predicament. They believe as non-believers, they are non-believers who believe.

Believing is about spiritual reality, the reality of the Holy Spirit, the reality, the space of freedom and peace, the end of the desiring, the end of all fears. Believing means that we have said yes to that reality, with our very being. Maybe our intellect, even part of our feelings is protesting, but nevertheless by believing we choose with our very being to belong to that reality. And anyway, if we do not believe, if we only believe very hesitantly, if we would like to believe, when we get or have been in touch with the gospel, if we know something about the reality it brings, we know that we all are, that the whole of creation (cf. Rom.8, 22 – 23) is longing for it. To be at rest, at last. To have space, to live in abundance.

And nevertheless and very clearly we doubt. Doubt originally comes from Latin *dubium*, English *doubt*, from *dubitare*, English *to doubt*. In the *dubium* is the word *duo*, two. Doubting in fact always is a wavering between only two very important possibilities, doubting means the impossibility to choose for one of the two. It is a wavering between the reality of daily life, life of culture, the so well known, so well loved and now and then so well hated every day's normal life, and the spiritual reality, the reality of the Kingdom, represented by, brought by Jesus.

Of course it is puzzling indeed that if the choice between two so different realities is in a sense so clear (but of course it might be that clear after all...), we in the same time are so doubting. Even the presence of Jesus himself did not help them around him to save them out of their doubt. Even in his presence they remained in their doubt all too often. This in a sense is the more remarkable because being in doubt is hardly less than being tortured. Before the English word *doubt* got its present-day meaning, it meant "fear", which it still means in some dialects. The two meanings, *doubt* and *fear*, belong together. Doubting we are in fear. We are a thorn between two possibilities and the thorniness makes us afraid. In a sense we cannot stand to be unsure about realities which decide over the whole of our life. So in fact being in doubt is a very unhappy situation to be in. And although this is a clear fact, we are so often if not always in doubt... In doubt to make a so obvious choice. In fact the prisoner of our doubt. So there must be very important reasons that we are imprisoned in our doubt. Of course if we choose for the Kingdom, choose to follow Jesus, we choose for a reality which fills us with joy and happiness, but of which we in fact know very little. We have in the same time to give up many things which are important for us and which we have in our hands, of which we are sure or think we are sure. Jesus already warns us against this feeling of security (Cf. Luc.12,16ff), as the prophets of the Old Testament did, but when we see the choice and feel very uncertain of the reality of the spiritual world and of what it brings us, then very easily we stick to the securities we have. We have a strong feeling that if we make this choice in a sense we don't even have to give them up, they simply are away and that is true, although it is true in the same time that we have to give them up.

Nevertheless, there is another factor, which has a big influence on us and which has to do with mimesis. We are all living with people around us, nice, agreeable, serious people, people we honour or are afraid of, people anyway who are important for us. They are a big mass, both in numbers and in importance. They are in all meanings very near. So their influence upon us is very big. This mass is constantly saying to us, in many, many manners: Don't do that! Don't make that choice! Stay with us, as normal people. Don't make life too difficult for us by making this choice! Leave us in our common, normal world and don't make havoc. This is the cultural knowledge of the ages, a knowledge which is in us and which is continually renewed in us by the mimesis with the people around us, at home, the relatives, the friends and colleagues, the groups we belong to. So in fact we ourselves too send these, exactly these messages around which we receive from others, certainly not to do such foolish things...

So we are afraid. We are already afraid because we doubt, but this fear which is in us when we are doubting is nourished by another fear, the fear that we will be scapegoated, that in one manner or another we will be punished because of our choice. By making this choice we become exceptional people in the statistical sense. Being exceptional brings the wrath of all those who complain that they are so normal, not special enough, in the same time never taking risks and so always being normal. We are doing what scapegoats always did if we believe the myths. They always destroyed in the normal order, so making people unsure about how things and even who they themselves are. All these feelings and convictions are in us as they are in everybody. It just is one of the reasons that we are so doubting. So by choosing, leaving all this behind us, we become designated scapegoats. Very probably in this Western world we won't be martyrs in the old sense and nevertheless we are afraid.

So in a sense doubting means that we are cowards. We fear the eyes of the scapegoaters, who are all around us. We fear our own eyes when we look in a mirror, the fearful eyes of the scapegoater, we ourselves. Our own eyes are saying to us: How can you do that? How do you dare? To leave behind you the desiring, the beautiful excitements of life...? You are still young, there are so many chances yet ... How can you make yourself an exile?

And of course there is this other aspect: The reality of the gospel, of the Kingdom, is not clear enough for us. We doubt because we do not know. The mimesis with which Jesus attracts us is too weak, because we know too little of him, do not get along with him. We are lazy, not being busy with the matters of Scripture as this Ethiopian was (Acts 8, 26ff) or, another possibility, in our case Philip simply did not turn up.

It might be that thinking about all this anyway our fears and maybe too our doubt is, even if only a little bit, waning away. It might be that after all everything is not that difficult, although we are doubting so much and have so good reasons to do so. When it really becomes clear, if we meet Philip, as the Ethiopian did, then we make the step and choose, leaving behind us the eyes of the scapegoaters, our own scapegoating eyes, then we might do, without further thinking, just trusting our legs who carry us in the direction. In theology this choosing often is described as something like jumping over an abyss. It might be not so dramatic. Just looking to another side, only moving our eyes a little bit, may do.

This is about doubt and about spiritual reality. Our doubts and the doubts of others. How can we stand beside each other in our doubts and go a piece of way together? It anyway has to do with “complete Freedom” (Acts 28, 31 JB), the translation of a beautiful Greek word, *parresia*, something like frankness, candour. Paul had that frankness and candour after a long life of struggle and suffering, as a gift. He may in this be the friend, the brother on our journey, travelling with us.

And in the same time, more could be said. It could seem if in the end all depends on us and on what we do, doubting and helping each other to doubt and to overcome the doubt. That is not true. In fact we are called. “I have called you by your name, you are mine” (Isa.43,1 JB). Jesus is with us, he looks at us, he calls us. We are called by our names. Being called by our name, recognized and being called by our name means that at last we are able to say “I”. By being called by our name, we are really a person, an “I”, really somebody on our own. By hearing the calling of our name and overcoming our doubt we step out of the crowd, out of anonymity, into the day, into real life. This is the reason that already when we are baptized, we are called by our name, our first name, our Christian name, the name of the personal relationship. Of course, we are afraid just of that, not any longer to belong to everybody, being another than the others, being “visible” (see Matth.5, 13 – 16!). In the same time it is our deepest longing to be at last with ourselves, being totally accepted. That is happening when we are called by our name. We are called to overcome our doubt, to be a person, to be free, with our new family (Marc 3,31 – 35) with all human beings in need, in fact everybody, with whom who calls us, Jesus, God.