FAITH AND BELIEF II
SOME CONSIDERATIONS FROM THE CHRISTIAN INSTANCE

It is modern Western civilization that has conspicuously held belief to be a basic religious category : has held that it is believing that religious people characteristically do. In challenging this notion, therefore—in contending that the significant issue is decidedly *not* belief, but faith, which is drastically different—I am criticizing my own culture, which I feel in this matter as in some others has misled itself and misled others. In suggesting two days back that the concept "believing" does not occur in the Qur'ān, and that it is a mistranslation in modern English to render any Qur'ān term so, I admitted that most English versions of the Qur'ān do in fact use the word. The reason is that it has become deeply embedded in modern English thought, in the religious field ; and it is certainly going to be extremely difficult to extricate ourselves from the resultant confusion. I personally am hoping that the Qur'ān case and the Islamic instance generally may help us in the West to recognize the true situation in these matters more clearly. I trust that you will agree with me that the spiritual crisis of the modern world is such that we must learn from each other, and help each other, in attempting to cope with it.

Not that Christians should need to look outside their own tradition to realize their recent aberration. For them also, faith has been the crucial issue. This was true originally; sad it was true for the classical and the mediaeval Church and for the Reformation. It is only in modern times that Christendom has tended to lose sight of this ; as we shall see.

I discern three reasons why "believing" has come to be thought of— in my view, wrongly—as central to religious faith in modern Western thought. One, you Muslims share with us : namely., the contemporary situation of the world ; including especially religious pluralism, but including also the powerful thrust of scientific thought and the powerful array of competing ideologies. The second matter is the special, and indeed rather peculiar, position of theology in Christian life. In the Islamic complex, it is the *sharī'ah* that holds pride of place : I think that you have never given *kalam* the same prominence that you have given to *fiqh*, nor that Christians have given to theology. This has to do in part with the massive influence of Greek thought on the Christian Church, for good or ill.

These two issues have received much notice from Western thinkers. My third matter is one to which little attention has been paid : namely, the history of the word "believe" in the English language. (There is a comparable, although perhaps less decisive, history of counterpart concepts in other Western languages ; but I shall leave them aside.) I intend to concentrate on this language matter in this present lecture. So far as I know, I am the first person to give this issue the importance and attention and interpretation that I believe it must have, and to which my recent studies have astonishingly led me. It is my conviction that the word and concept "believe" have radically changed their meaning over the centuries; to the enormous confusion of modern religious thought.

No one language in Christian life has played the role that Arabic has in Islamic life; and a history of Christian concepts of faith would involve a whole series of languages, notably Hebrew, Greek, Latin, plus at the very least German, French, and English. Obviously, in this lecture it would be neither appropriate nor feasible even to touch on these. Personally I have become convinced that it is possible, and requisite, to do with the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, the kind of thing that I attempted before you this week with the Qur'ān. Some day I plan to publish an argument that it is a mistranslation to render anything in the Bible by the modern words "belief" or "believe"—although the suggestion will certainly stir up controversy. This would not directly interest most of you, however. What I have chosen to do instead, and what I hope may prove of interest, is to show how the classical situation has shifted in modern times so that the notion of faith has become watered down and distorted into the notion of believing.

I begin, then, where two other presentations, if I were to give them, would leave off : namely, with the position that the Bible, like the Qur'ān, and the early Christian Church, like the classical Muslim community, set forth a particular view of the world and then designated within it the decisive quality of faith—as an orientation and commitment of the person, conceived and articulated in terms of that over-all view. I am not here concerned with whether their total understanding and interpretation of the universe were right or wrong ; all that I am saying is that, given that particular vision, they defined within it, and in terms of it, both faith and infidelity, both acceptance and non-acceptance.

By the way, I may remark in passing that it is no small achievement to generate a world-view, a comprehensive conceptual system, which

gives order to man's perception of the universe and within which man's destiny may be discerned and discussed. Nonetheless it is that destiny, and not that world-view, that is and always has been crucial.

It can be shown, for instance—I think, beyond question—that the Latin term *credo* did not mean "I believe" until at least the 18th century, and probably even the 19th. Spokesmen for the Christian Church held that God is, that he has acted in Christ, and so on, and they then expounded the act of faith, as they called it, in terms of a personal engagement, a recognition or encounter, a pledging of allegiance, in relation to these matters. There was a time when the declaration of faith in God, *credo*, meant, and was heard as meaning : given the reality of God, as a fact of the universe, I hereby proclaim that I align my life accordingly ; I hereby give to him my heart and soul. It has come to mean, with belief as now the issue, rather something of this sort : given the uncertainty about God, as a fact of modern life, a particular person proclaims that the idea of God is part of the furniture of his mind.

The difference is drastic.

It could be illustrated, I suppose, if you will allow me this liberty, by returning to our material of the last lecture. Would the difference not be dramatic, even shocking, between the classical *shahādah* on the one hand, and on the other hand a modern formula that instead might run something like :

<div dir="rtl">اَظُنُّ اَن</div>

aẓunnu an lā ilāha 'illā-llāh, wa-aẓunnu anna Muḥammadan rasūlu-llāh

Or in Urdū : the difference between

Khudā par īmān lātā hūn

and : Sochtā hūn ki khudā hay.

<div dir="rtl">خدا پر ایمان لاتا ہوں</div>
<div dir="rtl">میں سوچتا ہوں کہ خدا ہے</div>

Let us look then, at the process by which "believe", in English, has come to mean ẓanna, sochnā.

Things Change.

By now, most of us have become accustomed to the fact that all here on earth is in transition. The continents drift back and fotrth across the oceans, their mountain ranges—which look so solid and firm—in fact rising and falling. The Great Bear did not point to a Pole Star in the northern sky for the classical Greeks as it does for us. Social institutions, although

not always in such rapid flux as at present, have, we now know, constantly
been being transformed.

Languages, too, have histories; and words change their meanings
with the centuries, some more than others. "Manufactured" used to mean
"made by hand" ; and "villain" was once simply "rustic". And so on.
Most such changes are merely quaint and of passing interest: they matter
little. A major shift in the meaning of the English word "believe", how-
ever, not only has, I find , occurred over the centuries, as can be demon-
strated, but also has proven of massive consequence and fateful significance,
I shall argue—so deeply imbedded is the term in Christian usage, and so
central has it remained, until to-day.

Let us begin with etymology.

Literally, and originally, "to believe" means "to hold dear" ; virtually,
to love. This fact—and it is a hard, brute, fact—provides the force and
substance of my entire thesis. Let me emphasize it, re-iterate it. Let
me ask you to remember it, throughout the remainder of this lecture
and even, if you will allow me to plead, throughout the remainder of your
life. Literally, and originally, "to believe" means "to hold dear".

This is what its German equivalent *belieben*, still means to-day.
Die beliebtste zigarette in an advertisement signifies quite simply the
favourite among cigarettes; the most popular cigarette; the most prized.
Similarly the adjective *lieb* is "dear, beloved". (*Mein lieber Freund* is
"my dear friend"). *Die Liebe* is the ordinary German noun "love";
and *lieben* is the verb "to love" (*Ich liebe dich*: "I love you"). *Belieben*,
then, is to treat as *lieb*, to consider lovely, to like, to wish for, to choose.
This root survives in English in the modern-archaic "lief" as in Tennyson's
poem *Morte d'Arthur*: "As thou art lief and dear"—that is : beloved. One
finds it, too, in quaint phrases such as : "I would as lief die as betray my
honour".

This same root shows in Latin, as in *libet*, "it pleases" ; in the Latin
phrase used in English, *ad lib*. (for *ad libitum*) : "as one likes; at pleasure";
and in the noun *libido*, "pleasure", projected into modern usage by the
Freudians. *Libet* and *libido* are also found, although less commonly, in
the forms *lubet* and *lubido*.

Modern English "lief" (=dear, beloved) goes back to Old English,
leof, of the same meaning, with which there was a cognate and more-or-
less parallel form *lufu*, "affection, love". The latter is the form that has

come down into modern English in our word "love", noun and verb. This pair of related words, [lif, luf] with what the linguists call different grades of vowel but the same consonants, is widespread. Forms from a reconstructed pair of roots *libh, *lubh in proto-Indo-European are found widely in the Indo-European language family—Sanskrit, lubh, lubhyati, "to desire strongly, to be lustful", is the same root. I mention this in order to make the point, as with the Latin libet, libido, (or lubet, lubido), that the notion of passionate longing or attachment is also somewhere in the background. For the Teutonic languages, however, it is admittedly a matter usually of cherishing, rather.

In Old English, from leof, "dear, beloved", was constructed the verb gelefan, "to hold dear, to love, to consider valuable or lovely", later reduced to ilefen, ileven, with the same meaning. In Old High German it is the form with the 'oo' sound, as in the English [loof], love : namely, gilouben, again with the same meaning, that has developed into Modern German glauben, first "to hold dear, to regard as lovable, to attach oneself to", and now "to have faith in". Along with this is the noun der Glaube: the act of, if you will, endearing; nowadays, the standard German word for "faith". In Middle English it was rather the lighter of the two forms that prevailed, namely be-lēve(n), with the meaning "to hold dear, to consider lovely, to value, to love". This gave the early Modern English "believe" (which equals "to cherish" ; later, "to have faith" ; we shall explore its meaning in a moment). A verb "to belove" has not survived with us, except in the past participle : "beloved". محبوب

The word "believe", then, began its career in early Modern English meaning "to belove", "to regard as lief", to hold dear, to cherish. The object of the verb was for many centuries primarily, and often only, a person, as with the cognate term "love". All other meanings are derived. To believe a person, or to believe "in", or "on", or for a time "to" or "of", a person, was to orient oneself towards him with a particular attitude or relationship, of esteem and affection, also trust; and more earnestly, of self-giving endearment. The noun "belief", whose development accompanied that of the verb, similarly meant literally endearment, holding as beloved, and specifically then a giving of oneself to, clinging to, committing oneself, placing—or staking—one's confidence in.

If one looks at specific usages from past centuries illustrating these developments, one must remember that we of course approach any given passage or quotation in which the words "believe" or "belief" occur, by

bringing to it the connotations and clusters of meanings from our own century, our minds influenced by all the intervening evolution from the Enlightenment, the nineteenth century, and the modern world. The first hearers of the passage in question, on the other hand, of course approached it out of their own cultural inheritance, bringing to it the then *past* history of the terms, as we have just sketched this.

In other words, we tend to read, let us say, a thirteenth- or a sixteenth-century sentence in the light of the subsequent history of the words, while its contemporaries read it or heard it in the light of their preceding history. Especially when the believing is in or on or of a person, the passage may ambiguously lend itself to either interpretation. By quoting such a passage, therefore, one often cannot prove that this or that is the correct rendering. One can merely discover the possible illumination afforded by construing it in terms of its older meaning, instead of, or as well as, its newer.

Thus when we read from the mid-fifteenth century a sentence like this [and I quote]: "It is a grete merveile that ye have so grete bileve to this man", we are inclined to think of credence being given to his statements, whereas a fifteenth-century person hearing the words would more likely think in terms of his being treated with affection, trusted and esteemed as a person, his lead being followed. And indeed on scrutiny it turns out from the context that this latter seems in fact to be what the author had in mind. The sentence is from "*Merlin* or *The Eearly History of King Arthur* : a prose romance (about 1450-1460 A.D.)" No *statement* of Merlin ("this man") is adduced here; and the implication is that if any verbal matter at all is at issue, it is a question rather of advice than of propositions. It seems more probable, however, without being incontrovertible, that the speaker of the sentence, who is "one of the Barons" in Arthur's circle, was envious of the king's high regard for Merlin generally and his according him a major role at court and in royal policy decisions. The king's *bileve* here is his giving place of honour; it is a question of whose counsel he heeds, in the light of whose judgement he orders his behaviour, whom he operationally esteems. The other courtiers were jealous of Merlin's being the king's favourite (his most cherished).

Again, to take a formulation two centuries later and indeed more explicitly proposition-linked: the poet Milton in Paradise Lost (X : 42-43) writes of man's "believing lies against his Maker". Now at first blush one could interpret this in either of two ways. It could be seen as mean-

ing in the modern fashion his imagining those lies to be true : that is, his gullibly but in good faith regarding as accurate statements that in fact are false (although this would underplay the moral quality of the term "lies"). Or, one may read it as suggesting, in more mediaeval mood (and more in keeping with the rest of the passage, and with Milton's voluntarism generally), that man here is depicted as opting for lies, and taking pleasure in them, clinging to them; deliberately choosing what is known to be false : a moral act, *not* an intellectual error. It is difficult, admittedly, for a twentieth-century reader not to feel perhaps that this latter interpretation is far-fetched and forced, so powerfully does the recent history of the word operate on our minds. Yet a study of the context bears it out; and I have put this to one of Canada's leading Milton scholars, and he assures me that this second interpretation is unquestionably right. This flavour is, indeed, discernible enough once the passage is read carefully in full.

Let me choose one more instance of this sort of manifest ambiguity. When John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, preached in St. Paul's Cathedral on May 10, 1509, the funeral sermon for Henry VII, he more or less admits that the king was pretty much of a sinner but hopes to prove that nonetheless he ended his life "in the Lord", and adduces in evidence four chief points, one of which includes Henry's "byleue of God". There is no way of showing indisputably whether this means that for all his sins Henry believed that God exists, in a modern fashion, or in the mediaeval fashion—it being taken for granted all round that God exists—that Henry directed to God a certain ultimate loyalty and allegiance, set his heart on Him, and put his trust and confidence there. In favour of the latter interpretation, however, is virtually the entire context. For one thing, Bishop Fisher characterizes this "byleue" as "steadfast" (not that this clinches the argument by any means : in modern times there can be wilful, stubborn intellectual belief against evidence; we shall return to this). There is the further point, however, that this "steadfast belief" is not simply "of God" but "of God and of the Sacraments of the Church" (there is the story of the twentieth-century Oxford Don who was asked if he believed in Christian baptism, and replied : "Believe in it? Why, I have actually seen it happen!") More telling is the surrounding material of our statement. This steadfast belief is, as I have said, one of four points that Bishop Fisher enumerates. "The first is a true turning of his soul from this wretched world unto the love of a Mighty God." We shall find subsequently that the notion of a turning of the soul

away from one thing and towards another runs rather persistently through these early discussions: it is very much the question of where one focuses one's attention; to what one directs one's concern; what one depreciates or values. Notice also the use of "true" ("a true turning of the soul") in the Platonic, rather than the propositional, sense of truth, comparable to our speaking of a true note in music, a true university, a man's being true to his word; not logically true, as a statement. The second of Bishop Fuller's four points is a "fast hope and confidence" ("fast" meaning firm, stable—"steadfast" as in the next item) in prayer. The third, already mentioned, was the steadfast belief of God and of the Sacraments of the Church); and the fourth, a diligent (again, that adjective is revealing) asking of mercy. Later on in the sermon, the Bishop elaborates these points, and remarks, for instance, that the cause of his hope was "the true *byleue* that he had in God, in his church, & in the Sacraments thereof'", and speaks of his receiving these "with meruaylous devocion". The nineteenth-century editor of the sermon (John E.B. Mayor) glosses "byleue" here as trust, and the Sacraments as "the Sacraments of penance". However that may be, the cluster of surrounding terms—diligence, devotion, steadfastness, confidence,—all make good sense along with an interpretation of *byleue* in the mediaeval connotation, of holding in high esteem, cherishing. There is the further point that if 'believe' were being used in the modern sense, it would necessarily come first, not third.

Now I have deliberately chosen these rather ambivalent passages, which continue on for many centuries, and indeed in some sense almost until yesterday, and which are not in themselves convincing, in order to make the point that this ambivalence or potential ambiguity in various passages has played an important role in what would be otherwise an almost incredible situation : namely that modern people can have failed to notice the radical difference of meaning that once underlay these terms. To misread into such writing as we have noted a twentieth-century notion of believing, although I personally think that it is wrong, nonetheless admittedly does not disrupt the sense so starkly or vividly as to make one consciously and conspicuously stumble. Let me turn now, however, to other early passages where the notion is quite inescapable that believing is a deliberate adherence: the idea is of committing oneself; of ordering one's behaviour in obedience, either to an authority deliberately accepted, or to a value personally recognized and deliberately pursued. The fact that *l ve* and 'love', believe and belove, were once varieties of the same word, as Latin *libet* and *lubet*, German *liebe* and *loube*, *belieben* and

glauben, then becomes transparent; as does the validity of the translation into English of the Latin *credo* in the sense of "I hold dear, I place my heart."

Indeed I have found reason to suppose that this ambiguity probably continues within certain Church circles even until to-day, in a way that I myself have found quite surprising. We shall be returning to this. I have chatted about some of these ideas of mine to various friends in the United States and Canada, have discovered that when they speak of believing religiously, it turns out that they mean something quite different, they say, from their use of the word in all other contexts. I find this astonishing. What is happening is that they are preserving an older usage. Let us continue to look at that former sense.

I have only begun to explore this area, and much work clearly remains to be done. As some of you know, Middle English is by no means my special field of study. Yet what I have begun to find, after preliminary investigation, has proven momentous, and altogether entrancing; and indeed I am left amazed that so little attention, so far as I know, seems to have been paid to these matters. A few years ago, having ascertained that faith in other religious traditions around the world was perceived as much less a matter of believing than I as a modern Christian had been brought up to imagine, I began to develop the thesis, that the primary form of expression of faith tended in other instances to be something else—a dance pattern (tribal Africa), a moral-legal system (the Islamic, Jewish) and the like—whereas in the Christian instance the primary form of expression of faith, although not faith itself, has tended to be a belief system. I began to say that doctrine formulated and crystallized and symbolized for Christians what other communities formulated and symbolized in other ways. I was misled into this notion by the extraordinary prominence that Christians have given to the "I believe" formulae. Once I began to test this thesis, however, I discovered that I seemed to be wrong in thinking that Christians had made belief so central, except in quite modern times; and the problem was precisely that the word "believe" has changed its meaning so dramatically. It is this change of meaning that had misled me, and still, so far as I can see, misleads many. For once I began to test my hypothesis, as my investigations of the Hebrew, and especially the Greek and Latin, have made evident, I discovered that in earlier times Christians had not been talking about what we to-day mean by belief. They used comparable words but by them they not merely connoted, but denoted, something else.

So far as English is concerned, let me illustrate this from some of the passages that my inquiries quickly led me into.

Here are some where there is no ambiguity, I think you will agree, so soon as one approaches them with the background, etymological and the like, to which I have alluded.

I have hit upon a whole series of examples in a work a hundred years earlier : called "Lagamon's Brut or Chronicle of Britain, a poetical semi-Saxon paraphrase of the Brut of Wace", edited in 1847 from two surviving manuscripts, one from "the early part of the thirteenth century" and the other a little later, in Henry III's reign. The texts of the two manuscripts are quite close, but not identical. Interesting for our purposes is the apparent interchangeability still of "belove" and "believe"; or I should say, of their then counterparts. A certain King Bladud, for instance, has built a temple, perhaps at Bath, with fountains and the like, dedicated to Minerva. One of the manuscripts reads : "To hire he hefde love", while the other has "in hire he bi-lefde", which proves smartly, does it not, my contention that *bi-lefde* here means "he held dear"—virtually, he loved. In a later passage another king is being urged to honour his pledge; to uphold an oath that he has sworn; not to hold cheap a pledge that he has given. The wording is

" Bi-lef thene   aedh

(Second manuscript : "bi-lef thane oth

Nobody can believe his own oath, in the modern sense; but it makes good sense, and is indeed unavoidable, to translate "believe" here as "to value highly; to hold fast to, be loyal to, keep allegiance to". The modern phrase would be: honour thine oath. Just as the king honoured Merlin, to the irritation of his rivals at court, so here a man is being asked to hold his own oath in honour.

We may note in passing, also, that the English word "to honour" in such phrases means not merely to consider honourable, to hold in high esteem, at the theoretical level, but to add to this an active, operational thrust. In present-day English, "to honour one's word", "to honour one's bond", "to honour ones's pledge", signify not merely an attitude, mental or emotional or both, but a following through in practice. "To believe" in mediaeval English meant almost exactly what "to honour" means in these usages in modern English.

At another point in this poem the following lines occur :

Cnihtes ye beod me leofue ;
   ah thas tidende me beod lade.
     . . . ah ye ileoued a thene wurse

These are the first, second, fifth lines of a five-line passage.
(I have omitted two lines between the second and the last here). Literally,
this is : "Knights, ye be to me lief/But these tidings to me be loathe/. . .
But ye ileved the worse". Note the contrast, in the first and second lines,
between *lief* ("dear, beloved, cherished") and loathesome, repellent; and
the parallel between the first and the last line : you are dear to me, and
you have held dear—chosen, opted for, have elected to pursue—the worse.
Let me fill in now the missing spaces. The second line above is follow-
ed by the following :

   eower ileuen beod   vnwraste

"your choices (what you cherish; your commitments; your loves; or
we might say in the modern jargon : your values) are not good" (the
nineteenth-century editor translated this as : "your creeds"); and this line
was in turn succeeded by the following :

   ye ne ileoued noht an cristie

'Ye did not esteem—did not love, hold dear, give high regard to—Christ"
but, as the fifth line goes on them to say : "rather you opted for, gave your
allegiance to, something less good".
To summarize, and paraphrase, the whole :

> "Knights, you are lovable to me,
> But what you proclaim is unlovely ;
> Your supreme values are bad,
> You have not loved Christ,
> But hold beloved what is of lower value".

The only difference in manuscripts here is that the second has in the
second line *bilefues* for *tidende*, which transfers the third line to the second.
This makes it a bit more pithy : "You are loved, but what you belove is
loathe."

We have, however, shifted here to only partly secular, partly Chris-
tian, contexts. (The double usage of *leof* here is itself interesting: for
the speaker's cherishing of the knights, and the knights' cherishing of
Christ). Let us turn, then, to more strictly religious usage.

The earliest recorded use, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, of the word "belief" is in a homily from the late twelfth century, where it is averred that Christian men should not set their hearts, we might say, on wordly goods. The phrasing is " ... should not set their belief" on them. There is no suggestion here that Christians should regard the material world as unreal, illusory; should not believe in it, in that modern sense. On the contrary, it is implied that the mundane is concrete enough, but is not worth esteeming, should not become beloved. One is certainly expected to give it intellectual recognition, but should not give it one's allegiance, nor award to it one's reliance—and thus, one's soul. The question is not about what exists : rather, what is to be one's attitude and orientation to what exists. (This is exactly as we saw in the Qur'an case.)

It is assumed here that both God and the world exist. At issue is, which gets one's allegiance.

Two contrasts are set up in this passage. First, one should set one's heart, one's *bileafe*, not on temporal possessions "but on God alone". Secondly, Christians, who hold not the world dear but God, are contrasted in the next sentence, in fact the next word, with *the zitsere*, which means : the covetous, the greedy, and this is followed by the phrase : "who sets his mind on his goods". The person who does this is said to be the devil's child. Thus the opposite of "believing in God" here is not not believing; it is thinking about, thinking highly of, material possessions and therefore being the child of the devil.

Now this is illuminating, if we consider it carefully. The preacher says that a Christian should set his heart on God, and that the person who sets his heart on things of this world is a child of the devil. Since this is so, we to-day would say that that preacher believed in the devil. In our modern sense of the world, undoubtedly he did believe in the devil ; but in his sense of the word it would be an insult and a libel to say this of him. He recognized the existence of the devil, right enough; but the whole point of his homily was that one should, partly for that very reason, "belieb"—that is : hold dear, love, give one's heart to—God alone. If he heard you speak of believing in both God and the devil simultaneously, he would think that you were mad—schizophrenic. To him, God and the devil were obviously both there : but you have to choose between them in your behaviour. The question of interest was: to which do you give your allegiance.

The situation here is once again like the Islamic instance at which we looked last time. What we would call believing in God, and what we would call believing in the devil, are *both* pre-supposed both in the case of a good Christian whose commitment is to the Divine, *and* in that of the covetous man whose heart is set on this world. Belief in the modern sense of the term is simply not at issue. In this sermon the word *bileve* serves to designate what we call faith, and what he in effect called loving, cherishing, holding dear.

Now a further refinement is instructive. When that mediaeval preacher says that the covetous or greedy man is a child of the devil, we can understand him perfectly well, and even be said to agree with him—*even if we ourselves do not believe in a devil*. Now this is quite curious, if you reflect upon it. In this instance we readily enough, and cheerfully enough, recognize his intellectual framework, his theoretical pre-suppositions; and we are ready enough cheerfully to move quickly beyond them, and in a sense to dismiss them, in order to deal with the substantive point that he was making. We do not allow the fact that our conceptual system is different from his, to stand in the way of our sensing and coping with his position. On the other side of these matters, on the other hand, most moderns are unwilling or unable to do as much with the mediaeval notion of positive faith. They can see that faith went beyond, and still goes beyond, belief; but insist that nonetheless it included it, and somehow must include it.

A belief in the devil is not necessary to a recognition of greed as devilish. Yet a belief in God is thought to be required for a recognition of faith as Divine.

I trust that that is not too poetic for you.

Another twelfth-century homily makes more or less explicit my point that the theoretical pre-suppositions of the theological system were indeed pre-suppositions underlying, as in the Islamic case two days ago, *both* faith *and* infidelity. In this case the anonymous preacher is holding forth on the Latin term *credo*; which, he says in the learned fashion of the day, may be understood in three ways (*credo Deum, Deo* and *in Deum*). To have faith in God, to God, towards God, we might say. The first two of these he explicitly says, and I quote: "all heathen men do : the third, only good Christians do, and the God-fearing and men of faith." يعنى ، المتقين والمؤمنين The first two, which are common to both sides, include, he says, the recognition that God exists. What only

the man of faith does is *credere in Deum*, which he renders both as *bileued in god* and as *to luuene ine god*. This involves, he says, five things: to acknowledge God as Lord over all things, to love Him over all things, to have awe of Him over all things, to value Him over all things, to obey Him over all things. In other words, belief in our modern sense characterizes, he is saying both Christians and non-Christians; both men of faith, and infidels. What distinguishes the latter is what he somethimes calls *ileve*, once or twice *bileve*, and sometimes *luve*. Explicitly, what He is saying is that faith is loving God, holding God dear. To believe in God, or to believe that he exists, he says in so many words, is netiher here nor there. All men do that—faith is holding God more dear than anything else. "To hold God dear", he affirms, "means to hold Him dearer than everything else" ; or, since he uses *leve* and *luve* more or less interchangeably, a more precise rendering is, "To love God is . . . to love Him over all things".

I could go on piling up the evidence for English usage in the Middle Ages, which in the end is overwhelmingly conclusive that words such as *bilefe, bileve*, and the like designated allegiance, commitment, the placing of one's heart, choice; and not propositional constructs. In Langland's *Vision of Piers Plowman*, for instance, there is many a passage where in quite bitter irony or blunt invective the poet denounces clerical learning as a substitute for charity (in the old sense). He has little use for clerics who talk about God much, but are mean men in their hearts—intellectuals, we might say, whose beliefs are fine but whose devotion, whose love, is wanting. None is so readily ravished, he says, from what a modern editor reads as "right doctrine", as "these cunning clerks who construe many volumes". "Doctrine", here is an absurd rendition, I would submit, for the original *righte byleue.*
I am sure that these many-tomed cunning intellectuals were at their best in doctrine. Their trouble was by no means that, but rather their faith, in the sense of their dedication to carrying out in practice what they talked about so glibly. It is this that the poem is all about.

Similarly the other poet, anonymous, who not many decades later wrote a work called Piers Plowman's Crede, a tale of a seeker who goes around asking about instruction in true faith, and meets with clerics who fleece him and live lives of hypocrisy, extravagance, and haughtiness, and embroider it all with refinement of theory rather than righteous living and meekness. Finally he meets a humble and poorly dressed peasant, Piers Plowman (a fictitious character recently made famous by the earlier

poem), who answers his request. Now it would be a ludicrous anti-climax if after all this morally oriented prelude the poem were to culminate in a plea to *believe* anything at all, in doctrinal theory. He has all this time been denouncing that sort of thing. The poem emerges as a significant work of art, however, as well as of genuine spirituality, if *leve* is recognized as German *Liebe*, English love, or perhaps more technically German *belieben* : "give your allegiance to", "attach yourself to sincerely". That is, the climax to which the poem rises at the end must surely be recognized as a kind of crescendo on *love*. The word *leue* occurs three times at this climax, as the opening word of each of five lines :

> "Leue Peres," quath y   .. (791)
> "Leue brother" quath he   .. (792)
> "Leue thou on ourre Louerd God that all
> the werlde wroughte   .." (795)

and it goes on a little later :" ... and on gentyl Jesu Crist ... ", and so on ; and ends with a disparagement of those masters of divinity who do not fully pratctice what they preach.

Now it is quite clear that the first two of these three *lief's* mean "dear" : "Dear Piers", quoth (the enquirer). "Dear Brother", quoth Piers.

"Leue thou our Lord ... "

Obviously the third *leue* here, the verb, also means *belieben*, to hold dear, and in fact simply to love. (In this case the actual form is *leue*, not *bileve* ; though modern translators, with modern notions of creeds in their minds, mistranslate it as "believe".) The poet avers : "This is thy holy *beleue*"—that is, creed not in the modern sense of statement of belief but in the classical sense of *credo* as : this is where one's heart is to be put (*credo* literally means 'I give my heart') ; this is the sacred reality to which one's allegiance is to be actively given.

This sort of thing is the thrust also of the preaching of the mediaeval Church reformer Wycliffe. I have unearthed many a passage in his sermons where the word *bileve* designates that dedication by which one follows through on what one affirms. Explicating Christ's saying : "By their fruits ye shall know them", he preaches that false prophets—and Wycliffe adds : false priests, false friars—false mullas, you would say— are distinguished from true *by their fruits* : by their actions and lives, not by their words. "Men do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of

briars", he quotes from the Injil ; and these false ecclesiastics, whatever their theoretical preaching, live evil lives. They evince neither the grapes of devotion—that is : of devoting themselves to what they preach—nor the figs of what he calls *bileve*, which he might translate here as dedication to the Gospel that they profess. "And *it sufficib* (sufficith?) *not to seie*, Lord, Lord", he goes on, "but it redith to lyve wele to a mannes lyve ende".; "...preestis...mut (glossary : "must") seie wele...and lyve wele, for ellis a man shall not be saved." In other words, he is saying—he is preaching a sermon on the point—that what we to-day call "belief" is in Christian matters not enough. A true Christian, he proclaims, is known by his works ; one of these works Wycliffe called *bileve* or consecration.

Again, from Wycliffe, here is a passage where the notion is clearly one of obedience, along with what in modern terms would be called disbelief at the theoretical level. It describes a situation where one follows, and patterns one's behaviour upon, here under force, what one explicitly rejects with one's mind. "They made us *beleue*", he writes, "a false law". Obviously no one can compel us to believe, in the twentieth-century sense of the word, what we deem to be a false proposition; this would be meaningless. We can be compelled to serve, however, to act in terms of, what we regard as a wrong injunction.

In the same fashion Wycliffe used "belief" for "obeying" when in his translation of the New Testament into English he rendered Acts 26 : 19 ("I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" as; "I was not unbileefful to heuenly visioun"—that is ; I did not fail to act out in practice what I saw to be God's will for me.

The two versions of Wycliffe's translation into English of the Bible illustrate, however, a shift that was beginning to take place. In the earlier one he uses *bilefe*, but in the later this is replaced at many points by the new word "faith", which was then just beginning to come into use as the Englsih form of Latin *fides*, through the French. The transition is described in the Oxford English Dictionary as follows :

"Belief was the earlier word for what is now commonly called faith. The latter originally meant in Eng. (as in O. French) 'loyalty to a person to whom one is bound by promise or duty, or to one's promise or duty itself,' as in 'to keep faith, to break faith,' and the derivatives faithful, faithless, in which there is no reference to 'belief' ; that is, 'faith' was equal to fidelity, fealty. But the word faith being, through. Old French fei.

feith, the etymological representative of the L. fides, it began in the 14th c. to be used to translate the latter, and in course of time almost superseded 'belief', esp. in theological language, leaving 'belief' in great measure to the merely intellectual process or state in sense 2 (below). Thus 'belief in God' no longer means as much as 'faith in God' (and there then follows a reference to a 19th century quotation). (Oxford English Dictionary, s.v.)

These developments can continue to be traced ; we do not have the time to follow much further. Let me simply say that by 1611 this transition was virtually complete, so that in the King James version, of the Bible, the word "faith" occurs 233 times, the word "belief", once.

That is, for the noun. There is, however, no verb in English connected with faith, as there is in Greek or Arabic   ; and therefore the translators kept *believe* as a verb, meaning what it had meant before : to love, to hold dear, to cherish ; and conceptually, to recognize. In a sense, my thesis to-day is simply that the time has come to complete the transition also with the verb. In the three and a half centuries since the Authorized Version, the word "faith" has not altogether lost its original religious meaning, but the words "believe" and "belief" have. I am therefore suggesting that we drop "belief/believe" as religious terms since they no longer refer to anything of spiritual importance. We have to rediscover what "faith" means, and then to begin to talk about that : and as a verb, to discover what to have faith (to be faithful) means, and what to commit oneself means ; to rediscover what "believe" *used to mean,*

in the Middle Ages, and as recently as 1611, in the English Bible.

It is fascinating to trace the further developments of the meaning of this verb, and to watch it making the transition from the older sense of having faith to the present-day sense of holding an opinion : from *īmān lānā* to *sochnā*. To trace this, however, would require a book, on which I am working, and not simply one lecture. In very brief summary let me say that the changes can be seen to have taken place most significantly, I find, in the 17th and early 18th centuries, with shifts in meaning of religious writing on the whole following a century or so behind the shifts in extraecclesiastical usage (the distinction between religious and secular is not so clear early on as it later became). Hobbes. Locke, and Hume are among the illuminating representatives of usage, and for the 19th century

John Struart Mill and John Henry Newman ; though I have more work to do on all this.

There are at least three transitions that can be observed as gradually occurring : one towards the impersonal, and two towards the non-committal. The first has had to do with the object of the verb. That object begins by almost always being a person; it ends by almost always being a proposition. This signifies a shift from an interpersonal relation to a theoretical judgement : from an action of the self, in relation to other selves, to a condition of the mind. In between the two came an intermediate stage : between believing a person (in the sense of trusting him, having faith in him) (I-Thou), and believing a proposition (in the sense of agreeing with its ideas intellectually) (18th and 19th centuries) came a phase of believing a particular person's state-ment (in the sense of trusting that person to be honest and telling the truth) (17th and 18th centuries). This still persists among some Roman Catholics.

The distinction between believing a person, and believing a proposi-tion (the former in the sense of entrusting oneself to him, little or much) survived into the early years of this present century, in a differentiation between "believing in" and "believing that". Indeed there are to be found a few apologists among whom this still, but rather ineffectively, survives.

The second transition that can be documented has been one in the form of the verb. It signifies a shift from existential to descriptive : from "I believe" to "he believes" or "they believe"—the first involving self-engage-ment, commitment, the last simply reporting a fact. In Shakespeare, for instance, "believe" can be shown to be one of his favourite verbs—the incidence of occurrence is statistically very high ; and yet I find that the great majority of these are in the first person singular. Less common is the second person imperative : "believe me", in the sense of "trust me" ; while it turns out that third-person usage is surprisingly rare.

The third transition that can be detected has been from believing what is true (like the Arabic word *taṣdīq* تصديق, which involves adding something to a true statement, by way of recognizing and acting upon it), towards utter neutrality, so that one may believe equally what is true, what is false, and what is uncertain. (*Āmana* امن is seldom used in relation to what is *bāṭil* باطل and there was a time when "believe" was not, also). On this last point, I have even come up with evidence strongly suggesting that this transition has continued in motion right into our own day, with momentum, so that in the middle and latter part of the 20th

century there is material to indicate that the words "belief" "believe" now carry for many speakers and writers, and probably for all in certain contexts, an implicit though perhaps unconscious preference for designating the holding of an opinion that is in fact false; or at the very least, dubious.

Let us consider the three propositions :

   (*i*) he recognizes that A is B ;
   (*ii*) he is of the opinion that A is B ;
   (*iii*) he imagines that A is B.

In the first case, the wording shows that he is right; in the last, that he is wrong; in the middle case, no stand is taken. Now I have discovered a tendency in English usage over the centuries for the word "believe" to shift from number (i), where it began (once it got diverted from persons to propositions), through number (ii), before, during, and after the 18th century, towards number (iii), incipiently at the present time.

One of the differences between secular and religious people nowadays in the English-speaking world is that the word "believe" means different things to each. Religious persons have participated in all these developments undoubtedly less than have secular persons. Yet unquestionably they have participated ; and certainly have been influenced by them. Let me re-iterate the three trends. The object of faith used to be a person (God and Christ in the Christian case : Muslims must remember that in Christian understanding God is personal) ; the object of believing has come to be an idea, a theory. Secondly, the *act* of faith used to be a decision, the taking of a step, of cosmic-self commitment ; the state of believing has come to be a descriptive, if not passive, condition. Thirdly, the mood of faith used to involve one's relation to absolutes, to realities of surpassing grandeur and surety ; the mood of believing involves one's relation to uncertainties, to matters of explicitly questionable validity.

The statement, "I believe in God", used to mean : "God is there; and I hereby give my heart and soul to him. He gave me existence ; and I offer my life to be judged by him, trusting his mercy". To-day the statement, "I believe in God", can be understood as meaning : "Since there is a serious question as to whether God is there or not, I hereby declare that my opinion is in favour. I judge him existent". And in so far as a moral commitment or life behaviour is involved, it would add "And I trust my judgement".

It is sometimes said these days that faith in God, in the sense of surrender, trust, engagement, requites a prior belief in God. Might we

not be inclined to turn this upside-down : without faith, it is impious to believe ? Might one almost wonder whether someone would be willing to go beyond this and to say dramatically : if one does not have faith, belief is blasphemous; if one does have faith, belief is unimportant?

. . . . .

Actually, I myself would not be willing. It is dramatic, and suggestive ; but I fear that it is not quite true. Beliefs *are* important ; especially for those of us who are intellectuals, whose commitment is to the life of the mind, to the use of reason, to intellectual understanding of the world, including its religious life, including even faith.

Where, then, have we arrived, in the course of these two evenings? I have suggested three things : that for the classical Islamic outlook, and for the classical Christian outlook, the crucial question was that of faith; and that in modern Western culture, attention has been shifting from that to the quite different question of belief. I personally hold that the ultimate, and urgent, and decisive, human question still is faith, in the sense of a total, personal, positive relationship to al-Ḥaqq الحق ; and that in comparison with this all other issues are secondary. Nonetheless, the recent Western emphasis on belief, although it may be misplaced, and dislocative, yet is hardly either fortuitous or silly. We have traced the shift of attention from faith to belief (in English, from "believing" in the classical sense to believing in the modern sense) ; but we have not yet explained it. I suggest, in conclusion, that an explanation emerges from the very matter that we have uncovered : namely, that classically, religious beliefs used to be not emphasized but presupposed.

The religious crisis of the modern world has arisen in that presuppositions, which had been virtually unconscious, or at least had been accepted as manifest and stable, were raised to the level of consciousness. Or perhaps we should speak not of levels, up or down, but of horizontal distance from the perceiving self ; should speak not of raising ideas or patterns of patterns of ideas to consciousness, nor even, maybe better, of lowering them to such a level, but rather of objectifying them and removing them to a distance : the transforming transition in the realm of religion from consciousness to self-consciousness.

The Islamic and the Christian world views used to be the conceptual frame-works, the intellectual systems, patterns, within which thinking was carried on, and within which faith and infidelity were conceived and articulated. These coherent systems of ideas had been not some-

thing at which men looked, but through which they looked—at the world, at themselves, at their neighbours. Or, changing the metaphor, and speaking of Western Christendom, may we not assert the following : that what had been taken for granted, and had formed the basis for the superstructure on which our particular drama was mounted, was brought out into the open, for critical intellectual scrutiny, and therefore could no longer serve as presuppositional base on which our faith, and our whole religious and indeed social life, could rest. When that happened, we unwittingly shifted our categories. (And that "unwittingly" is crucial.) We diverted our attention from the meaningful question of faith (the question of what one does, given the symbol system) to the modern question of belief (the question of whether to have that particular symbol system or not).

For a time we took the two questions to be synonymous. This meant that many ostensibly religious men urged that it was important to say "yes" to the belief question ; and many critically thinking men, that it was important to say "no" to the faith question. Both were wrong. The confusing of the two questions was our undoing—substantially before, but conspicuously since, even religious men have been finding that when it comes down to it they do not, in fact, believe the erstwhile presuppositions. Fortunately, however—though it may prove painful—the synonymity can no longer be maintained. I would suggest that rather, a sophisticated modern position is to recognize the presuppositions as, classically, presuppositions, now seen to have been obtaining on earth in a great variety of forms, and to recognize, modernly, the symbol systems as symbol systems—with the significant question having always been, as it is still today, what one does within the symbol system of one's choice, what response one makes in terms of it.

It has always been significant, what symbol system one chose; and will continue to be. Yet the central religious question has always been not that, but another; the final religious category, as the Qur'ān well illustrates, and as the Church once proclaimed, is the category of faith, of response.

From this angle, might one not conclude by suggesting that the significant questioon for today, or at least for tomorrow, has become new. Not, for others, what do men believe; but rather, with what symbol system do they choose to operate, and, given it, what does each do within it. And for ourselves : not what do we, or shall we, believe; but rather, with.

what symbol system shall we operate, and now that we self-consciously know that it is that, so that we cannot naively presuppose it nor perhaps for some *believe* it, what does it mean to have faith in terms of a symbol system that qua system is anthropogenetic, and historical, although the life lived in terms of it may be, as it was designed that it should be, theo-centric, and eternal.

Many of you may not wish to go so far ; especially, for one's own beliefs. At the least, I suggest that this offers a significant key for an interpretation of *other* men's faith : the faith of those whose beliefs may differ from one's own. Let me close on that note, developing for a brief moment, for your criticism, a proposal concerning the faith of Muslims and Christians—whose beliefs, we know well, diverge, but whose faith, I suggest, may nonetheless be seen to converge more than one might imagine if one focussed on beliefs rather than on faith.

But first, let me return to the point where we began : with a reference to Iqbal. It would be presumptuous of me to claim that he would have been intrested in these considerations; although his concept of مؤمن *mu'min* in his poetry has encourgaged me along these lines. This much, however, I can affirm : that he did much to introduce me to جلال الدین رومی Jalalu-d-Din Rumi, by whom and by other Persian Sufis I have been profoundly influenced. The mystics, including Iqbal though he was chary of the name, have taught me that all mundane forms can be pointers to the divine, and despite their diversity have served men as the channel through which their own encounter with the divine is mediated ; that there are diverse forms for faith. Alas, I am no poet, but a plodding intellectual; yet perhaps the poet and the Sufi would tolerate, even if not applaud, an intellectual's attempt to see beliefs also, conceptual systems, not as faith but as mediators of faith, forms and systems in terms of which our forefathers found their way to God—and indeed, more boldly, as forms and systems in terms of which God, Truth, الحق al-Haqq, found His way into the lives of men in divers communities. Belief has not been faith. But God has been able, and willing, to use beliefs—of more than one sort ; but reasonable, sincere—as a matrix for men's faith, men's life in Himself.

I close, then, on a theological note, if you will allow me. In classical *kalam* كلام the question was discussed as to whether one should say, *Ana mu'min, in sha' Allah* أنا مؤمن، ان شاء الله or whether it is proper to affirm, rather : *Ana mu'min, haqqan* أنا مؤمن حقا

—"I am a man of faith, if God will", or : "I am a man of faith, in truth."

On the one hand, the person who hopes that he has faith, but knows only that it is God who decides, and it is his grace, with human presumption ruled out. On the other hand, the one who proclaims in joy that he has indeed made his commitments, and he knows that God's mercy has received him. Like most theological probelems, this one fascinates me. Not being an "either/or" sort of Person, I prefer to try to appreciate the issue ; and I tell my students that their understanding of Islamic religious life will be rich only if they can feel the force, can feel deeply the mighty force, of both positions. May be you will wonder if I am taking too great advantage of my not having to choose.

However that may be, I have a novel solution to the problem (and its close Christian counterpart) to propose to this gathering, as my final conclusion to these lectures. It is this : that I choose to affirm :

Ana mu'min, in sha' Allah   أنا مؤمن ان شاء الله

Nahnu mu'minun, haqqan.   لحن مؤمنون حقا

So far as concerns my own personal case, I prefer diffidence and leave the issue in God's hands ; but so far as concerns our two communities, Muslim and Christian, I affirm with conviction that corporately we both have faith. The systems in which we conceptualize our relation to God, formalize it, moralize it, differ ; but that relation itself, I make bold to say, obtains in both cases, and is sure.

Our beliefs differ, and that is important. But it is not ultimately important ; it is not what God Himself is finally interested in. The cosmic issue is faith. And faith, I submit, we both have. *Ana mu'minun in sha'a llahu*   أنا مؤمن ان شاء الله

Nahnu mu'minuna haqqan   لحن مؤمنون حقا

I am a man of faith, I hope that God will grant ; we are people of faith, in very truth.