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A Christian church is a paradoxical entity. All churches trace their origins back to Christianity's archetypal moment of inspiration, the day of Pentecost, when tongues of fire rested on the apostles and the Spirit stirred them into unexpected and turbulent life; and beyond that moment to Christ himself, who had much more to say by way of criticizing religious institutions than he did about establishing new ones in their stead. The Holy Spirit has remained at the heart of most Christian doctrines of the church ever since, and one of the Spirit's defining qualities is that the wind blows where it wills. And yet a church is and must of necessity be a human institution, with structures, traditions, laws, offices and finances. The story of Christianity's history is in large part the story of how these two threads – the inspirational and the institutional – have been woven together: sometimes one in the ascendant, sometimes the other, sometimes unravelling, but never parting company completely. A church which no longer seeks inspiration is merely a fossil. And a Christian community without institution is not merely doomed: it is an impossibility, since no human community can endure without *some* structure, however fluid or implicit.

One recurrent dynamic at work here is what Weber called the routinization of charisma, in which a community dominated by the personality of a founder or early leader is compelled, after that person's death or departure, to replace them with institutional forms that serve as a kind of effigy, filling their seat but doing so lifelessly. That process is matched by one of sheer scale, as communities are compelled to regularize their structures through numerical growth or geographical spread. And it is true that we can see these processes at work again and again in Christianity's history, as indeed in many other spheres of life. Contrast the freewheeling fluidity of the early Pauline letters, urging that the Spirit not be quenched, with the prudent legalism of the later Pastoral Epistles, a sign of what was to come.

Yet it is not enough to see this as a matter of relentless withering and ossification, for two reasons. First, most obviously, attempts to quench the Spirit or to routinize charisma generally fail. Sometimes fresh upsurges of inspirational religion take place within existing

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church structures, sometimes outside, and sometimes they cross from one to the other; some cultures and ages experience them more frequently than others; but they will come, sooner or later, as unpredictable as the weather and as inevitable as the climate. The instinct that institutional religion is a hindrance to true Christianity – perhaps even its opposite – is evergreen, whether it be the Desert Fathers shaking the dust of a supposedly corrupt urban church from their feet, or the medieval beguines who chose to bypass monastic establishments they no longer trusted, or the nineteenth-century Americans who wanted to rediscover or create a pristine, republican Christianity. Alexander Campbell, one of the founders of the Restoration movement, claimed that he hoped 'to read the scriptures as though no one had read them before me … I am as much on my guard against reading them to-day, through the medium of my own views yesterday, or a week ago, as I am against being influenced by any foreign name, authority, or system whatever'.[1]

But this rarefied anti-institutional purity eventually, and inevitably, ended the way countless other anti-institutional revolts had before: in the foundation of new institutions, in this case the denominations such as the Churches of Christ, into which the Stone-Campbell movement eventually splintered. The only alternative, as some of the radical anti-institutionalists of the 1960s discovered, is an institutional self-immolation so complete that a movement simply ceases to exist.

So Christianity's history is a recurrent spiral of inspirational outbreak, institutional containment and renewed inspiration. Martin Luther proclaims a gospel of Christian freedom; establishment Lutheranism settles into a static orthodoxy; Pietism challenges it with a religion of the heart; Pietism itself swiftly adopts surprisingly rigid norms; the Moravians challenge it in turn. 'A Pietist', the Moravians' founder Count von Zinzendorf observed wryly, 'cannot be converted in so cavalier a way as we can. … We ride, and the Pietists go on foot.'[2]

But secondly, and more interestingly, there is more to the institutionalization process than this. Sometimes – normally, indeed – it

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[1] Quoted in Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1989), 179.
[2] Quoted in W. R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge, 1992), 136–7.

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fails entirely. Sectarian movements collapse, wither or spin out of control as quickly as they had flared up: routinizing charisma is easier said than done. There was a moment when the Moravians seemed poised to inherit the whole evangelical movement, but, under-institutionalized as they were, they then blew themselves apart with financial scandals and a swerve into idiosyncratic devotional practices that most of their contemporaries found bizarre. Christianity's history is dotted with eras of inspirational creativity and sectarian formation, from the earliest church onwards: most of these new movements quickly gutter out, usually with a whimper, occasionally – especially in the case of certain apocalyptic movements, which use predictions of the imminent end of days to avoid institutional constraints – with a bang.

Yet some flourish. They tend not to be the movements that fossilize, or those that clamp down most effectively on the disruption of inspirational religion. They are the ones which learn to manage it. They build institutions which work with the grain of inspiration: to discipline, house-train and direct it, not to suppress it. They may even intensify it. They develop structures which are flexible enough to accommodate and benefit from inspiration but supple enough to contain it. The early church's development of episcopacy – a collective-security system in which authoritative local leaders could generally manage their own affairs but could also call on, or restrain, one another when necessary – is the archetype of such a system, an institution whose ability to manage the wildly fissiparous tendencies of early Christianity without squeezing the life from it gave it a totemic status that endures to the present. Or again, the Benedictine rule could hardly be described as *routinizing* charisma; we might rather say that, in the manner of monastic winemakers, it bottled charisma, to be laid down to mature and uncorked when needed. In the Reformation era, the primary reason why the diverse and quarrelsome family of the Reformed tradition has come to be known as 'Calvinism' is that Calvin found an institutional expression – the fourfold ministry, synodical government, cell-churches, endogenous discipline – which enabled the movement to spread like bindweed in the most inhospitable of environments. Mid-seventeenth-century England saw a surge of sectarian creativity: the Muggletonians, Diggers and Fifth Monarchists came to nothing; the Baptists and the Quakers found structures that endured, structures that governed them loosely enough for them to flourish, tightly enough for them to hold together. John Wesley came late to the

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revivalist party in the eighteenth century, but by using the established Church of England as a matrix on which Methodist movement's connexional system could be grown, he created an institution which outspread and outlasted most of its rivals.

This is not to suggest, like a low-rent management consultant, that there is an organizational secret sauce for ecclesiastical success: much less that this volume will reveal it. Plainly, institutional structures that have nurtured inspiration in some eras have choked it or been overwhelmed by it in others. The relationship between institution and inspiration in Christian history is not a formula, but a complex and unpredictable dance, in which neither dancer is particularly sure-footed but in which, for all the mis-steps, the show has – so far – kept going. This volume of essays consists of reports from the sidelines. Some articles consider cases where the dance has found its rhythm and flowed smoothly, even gracefully; some look at moments when the dancers have not been in time, or have indeed reached the stage of kicking each other in the shins or walking away entirely – only to discover, of course, that neither one can manage on their own. These are stories about how formal structures of authority have negotiated with the fluid reality of charismatic leadership; about how even institutions that have managed to absorb inspirational movements with delicacy and grace have nevertheless changed them profoundly in the process; about how institutional memory has meshed with inspirational revival, since both of our dancers are deeply aware of the depth of the traditions they follow. We read about how institutions have picked their paths between suppressing, ignoring, condoning, manipulating and celebrating inspirational movements; how inspirational movements have rejected, negotiated with, exploited, succumbed to or taken over institutions, or simply flourished safe within their walls; or, often, how they have whipped up new institutional structures of their own, which, in the way of things, mostly crumble or subside in a generation or two. Inspiration may feel more ephemeral than institutions, but in long historical perspective it may be that the opposite is true.

The two conferences from which these articles were taken were held – although we did not know it at the time – on the cusp of the COVID-19 pandemic which began in early 2020. Producing a volume under those circumstances has been a trial for the contributors, whose access to libraries and archives has been sharply curtailed, and for the Ecclesiastical History Society as a whole. The society has done what institutions do best when facing unexpected crises, that is,

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to adapt and press on: and we all owe a considerable debt to the society's officers and committee, who have ensured that, a year on, the institution is stable, financially sound and shaping itself to the emerging circumstances. As to whether its inspiration has deserted it, that is for readers of this volume to decide.

Alec Ryrie

Two Aspects of Early Christian Faith

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'Faith' is one of Christianity's most significant, distinctive and complex concepts and practices, but Christian understandings of faith in the patristic period have received surprisingly little attention. This article explores two aspects of what Augustine terms fides qua, *'the faith by which believers believe'. From the early second century, belief in the truth of doctrine becomes increasingly significant to Christians; by the fourth, affirming that certain doctrines are true has become central to becoming Christian and to remaining within the church. During the same period, we find a steady growth in poetic and imagistic descriptions of interior faith. This article explores how and why these developments occurred, arguing that they are mutually implicated and that this period sees the beginning of their long co-existence.*

The idea and practice of 'faith' have been central to Christianity for longer than its recorded history.[1] No concept or praxis is invoked more often by followers of Jesus Christ, from the earliest letters of Paul onwards. Within a few years of the crucifixion, what we now call Christians were referring to themselves as 'the faithful'. By around the turn of the first century they were calling their organization 'the faith'. Throughout their history, Christians have appealed to faith more often, in more varied contexts, than adherents of any other ancient or modern cult or religion.[2]

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[1] 'Faith' is a placeholder for the complexity of Greek *pistis*, Latin *fides* and comparable terms in other languages of early churches, whose meanings include 'trust', 'trustworthiness', 'faithfulness', 'good faith', 'a pledge', 'a guarantee', a legal trust, a rhetorical proof, 'belief' and (among Christians) the 'new covenant', the content of doctrine and 'the faith'.
[2] Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith:* pistis *and* fides *in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford, 2015), 103. Why *pistis* language became so important to Christians so early remains uncertain. Calling people to trust in God may go back to Jesus himself: ibid. 350–2. Other Jewish groups in this period self-designate as

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It is therefore surprising how little detailed investigation there has been of how early Christians understood faith. In New Testament studies, certain aspects of *pistis* and its relatives – the lexicon we most often translate with the language of 'faith' or 'belief' – have been discussed extensively, including the meaning of the phrase *pistis Christou* in the Pauline corpus, and the use of *pisteuein* in the Gospel of John.[3] With a few exceptions, such as the relationship between *pistis* and *gnosis* in the thought of Christian Platonists, and some aspects of Augustine's thinking about *fides*, understandings of faith in patristic writings have received very little attention.[4] Until recently, there has been no historical study of faith in all its complexity at any period.

This article draws on a two-volume study, currently in progress, of Christian faith from the earliest Christian records to the fifth century. The first volume, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, investigates the treatment of *pistis* in the earliest Christian writings. The second traces the development of ideas and practices of faith from the second to the fifth century. What follows offers an overview of two strands in the evolution of faith which reflect the themes of institutionalization and inspiration, outlining how these strands develop over three centuries and how they are both distinct and interdependent.

The definition of faith most familiar to church historians and theologians is that of Augustine in *On the Trinity* (13.2.5). Augustine divides *fides* into *fides quae* ('the faith which is believed', the content of doctrine) and *fides qua* ('the faith by which it is believed', what

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(for example) wise, pure or faithful, so 'the [truly / properly] faithful' may have begun as a self-designation among Jewish Christians: ibid. 238–9. The absolute trustworthiness of God and Christ was part of early preaching at a time when trust, especially in people, was widely perceived as difficult and precarious: ibid. 36–122. *Pistis* language is unlikely, however, to have arisen to refer to believing in the resurrection (although it also came to mean that), because *hoi pisteuontes* and *hoi pistoi* are used interchangeably for 'the faithful', and the latter cannot mean 'believers': ibid. 239–41.

[3] Ibid., especially 262–306, 347–93.

[4] Notable exceptions include Oscar Cullmann's essay collection, *La Foi et le culte de l'église primitive* (Paris, 1963); Ignacio Escribano-Alberca, *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 1/2a: *Glaube und Gotteserkenntnis in der Schrift und Patristik* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1974); Mark Elliott, '*Pistis Christou*', in Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle, eds, *The Faith of Jesus Christ* (Milton Keynes, 2010), 277–90; Oliver O'Donovan, 'Faith before Hope and Love', *New Blackfriars* 95 (2014), 177–89. These make significant contributions on specific questions, such as the evolution of creeds, the relationship between *pistis* and *gnosis*, and whether Christians sought to imitate the faithfulness of Christ.

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takes place in the mind and heart of believers). This is not an ideal definition. It overlooks the meaning of *pistis / fides* (central in texts of the first and second centuries and still widely attested in the third and fourth) as the relationship of trust and faithfulness between God, Christ and the faithful. It elides the meaning 'the faith', in the sense of the new covenant or the cult as a whole, and glosses over the complexity of what both Christian and non-Christian writers describe as taking place in the mind or heart. In Augustinian terms, however, this article investigates two aspects of *fides qua*: the attitude of belief that certain doctrines are true (what philosophers sometimes call 'propositional belief'), and the varied and colourful imagery through which Christians explore what it means to have faith in one's mind or heart.

Between the second and fourth centuries, both propositional belief and the imagery of interior faith become increasingly important to Christians. Propositional belief gradually becomes institutionalized, in the sense that affirming publicly that one believes certain propositions to be true becomes central to becoming and remaining Christian. The imagery of faith, meanwhile, becomes increasingly inspired, in the sense that it becomes an ever more creative, varied, colourful and dynamic means to describe how people experience their interior life of faith. This parallel evolution, I suggest, is no accident, but constitutes part of the development and internal self-regulation of an increasingly complex and highly successful cult.

The Institutionalization of Propositional Belief

Belief that certain things are true has been part of Christian thinking from as far back as we can trace. In 1 Corinthians 15: 3–11, for example, written in the early 50s, Paul tells the Corinthians, 'I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures … so we preach and so you believed (οὕτως κηρύσσομεν καὶ οὕτως ἐπιστεύσατε).'[5] For very early Christians, however, it was not believing itself that admitted one to the community or kept one there. That took a further step: putting one's trust in God and Christ.

[5] Biblical quotations are taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition.

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This distinction should come as no surprise. Under the Roman empire, almost everybody believed in the existence of a vast number of gods, heroes, divine men, spirits and demons. Nobody worshipped them all, not only because there were so many, but because many were specific to a particular locality or family or had a limited sphere of action.[6] In Christian contexts, the distinction between belief and religious commitment is less obvious in Greek than in English, because the verb Christians most often use for committing to God and Christ, *pisteuein*, can mean both 'to believe' and 'to trust'. In context, however, it is normally clear which meaning is in play. Paul and other early writers undoubtedly expect members of their communities to believe certain things about God, Jesus Christ and God's action in the world, but when they call them to commit to Christ, they use *pistis* language in its sense of 'trust'.[7]

Early Christian writing, in general, has limited interest in belief. Gospels, sayings collections, acts, apocalypses, letters, hymns, prayers, spells, oracles and sermons all use *pistis* language, but nearly always in a relational sense. From around the turn of the first century, however, some writers become increasingly interested in belief, in two contexts: internal wrangles among the faithful about what to believe and debates between Christians and outsiders.

Even in these contexts, before the fourth century Christian writers do not typically discuss what they or others believe using *pisteuein* or *credere.* They prefer the language of thinking or knowing: *nomizein, dokein, doxa, gnōsis, phronēsis, putare, noscere, opinio.*[8] It is only in the fourth century that Christians begin regularly to use *pistis / fides* language to refer to right belief. There are two likely reasons for the shift. The first is what we might call 'concept creep': Christians are so invested in *pistis / fides* language that, over time, they apply it to more and more aspects of the cult, and since 'belief' is a possible meaning of *pistis* and *fides*, it is there to be used. The second is the influence of Platonism.

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[6] Whether all Jews were strictly monotheistic in this period is debated, but believing (for instance) that multiple supernatural powers existed or that Elijah or Enoch was taken into heaven by God did not necessarily entail worship: Carey C. Newman, ed., *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism* (Leiden, 1999); Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, 3rd edn (London, 2015).
[7] Morgan, *Roman Faith*, especially 212–443.
[8] This is why historians speak of 'orthodoxy' (right opinion) rather than 'orthopisty' (right faith or belief).

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Among Greek speakers, Plato and his followers use *pistis* atypically, to refer to beliefs which are based on the evidence of this world, which in their view are unreliable compared with knowledge of the world of ideas.[9] In the late Roman republic and early principate, however, we encounter a number of intellectuals (including Cicero, Plutarch and Origen's Celsus) influenced by Platonism who are also deeply and explicitly interested in the nature and validity of mainstream cult. Plato's specialized usage of *pistis* creates a difficulty for them, because mainstream cult involves beliefs about the gods which are based on this-worldly evidence, such as the fulfilment of prophecy and the recorded successes of the gods in healing people or ending wars. Many middle Platonists are concerned to defend this-worldly reasons for believing certain things about the gods. Probably because of their debt to Plato, they often use *pistis* / *fides* language to do so.[10] Early Christians, some of whom are also much interested in Platonism, are also keen to defend their cult against accusations that it is irrational. Some of these discuss Christian *pistis* in terms which are increasingly influenced by Platonism.

A few examples must suffice. Justin Martyr was born about 100 CE. In his *Dialogue with Trypho* he describes how, as a young man, he investigated several schools of philosophy, including Platonism, before discovering and converting to Christianity. During the 150s Justin composed an apology, addressed to the imperial household, defending Christianity against contemporary accusations that it was immoral, irrational and seditious. Most of his defence of Christianity's rationality is couched in the language of thought and knowledge, but occasionally he uses *pistis* language, in very much the way that religious middle Platonists use it, to suggest that there are this-worldly bases on which it is rational to believe:

> We have received, by tradition, that God does not need the material
> offerings that human beings can give, seeing that he himself provides

[9] I am indebted to Mark Edwards for sharing his unpublished essay, '*Pistis* and Platonism'.
[10] For example, Plutarch, *Moralia* 165b, 359f–360b, 417a; idem, *Life of Numa* 4.3–4, Lucian, *Icaromenippus* 10; idem, *Alexander* 38, cf. Teresa Morgan, '*Doxa, praxis* and Graeco-Roman Religious Thinking', in James Carleton Paget, Simon Gathercole and Judith Lieu, eds, *Christianity in the Second Century: Themes and Developments* (Cambridge, 2017), 200–13; John Wynne, *Cicero on the Philosophy of Religion:* On the Nature of the Gods *and* On Divination (Cambridge, 2019), 50–82.