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March 3, 2013: What is the Meaning of Faith Today?

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Title: What is the Meaning of Faith Today?

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3/3/2013--In 1935, Martin Heidegger presented a lecture course entitled Introduction to Metaphysics. Heidegger considered this work to be the fitting companion to his master work Being and Time. In Introduction to Metaphysics, Heidegger grapples with the question, "why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" This question is the fundamental question for philosophy. But Heidegger asks whether "anyone for whom the Bible is divine revelation and truth" can really ask this question since such a person already has the answer. The answer to the question, why are there beings at all instead of nothing, is God. But then Heidegger seems to suggest that the kind of faith that answers this fundamental question so easily is perhaps not faith at all. He writes, "if such faith does not continually expose itself to the possibility of unfaith, it is not faith but a convenience. It becomes an agreement with oneself to adhere in the future to a doctrine as something that has somehow been handed down. This is neither having faith nor questioning, but indifference – which can then, perhaps even with keen interest, busy itself with everything, with faith as well as with questioning." (8) Thus Heidegger gives us a kind of hierarchy. There is the philosopher, who does not claim to be a believer. The philosopher can, perhaps, with great effort and discernment, engage in genuine questioning. Then there is the religious believer, the Christian, who has a ready answer from the tradition to any possible question. Heidegger suggests that this is not genuine religious faith because it never can question. In fact what looks like faith is instead indifference. Finally, there is genuine faith, which proceeds in effect only from the possibility of unfaith. Thus Jesus can ask, why have you forsaken me? The term that I have used, that for me points toward the lack of faith that masquerades as faith, is politicized faith. Politicized faith can be conservative or liberal. Politicized faith proceeds from pre-existing commitments rather than from an encounter with the living God. Almost everyone in America seems to manifest politicized religion. This is true of liberal religion that endorses the welfare state. It is certainly true of conservative religion that opposes the contraception mandate of Obamacare. As Heidegger says, it is an agreement to adhere to a doctrine in the future that has already been handed down. It is an open question whether genuine faith is even really possible today.