

Faith is not a virtue.

Faith is a strange thing. It is often associated with naivety and stupidity. It is said that everything has long since been scientifically disproved. In a group that strongly adheres to that line of thinking, you often come off worse. But such a conversation never gets to the heart of the matter, and you are often left feeling lost.

Many believe in nothing, yet in fact we believe in the most bizarre things and allow ourselves to be hugely influenced by everything that flows past us. 'I cannot bestow faith upon you,' my mother always said. That seems a simple statement, yet it is rather complicated. What, then, is faith, and is it primarily about facts and lies? If faith is bestowed upon you, it is a gift of the highest value. You are seen and you are credible. Is it a virtue? I doubt it. The risk of abuse is so ever-present that faith is always subject to challenge. That is a good thing; faith must always be open to criticism. Many of us were brought up with a rigid dogmatism and were often made to recite creeds at length. Things you usually didn't believe in for a moment. A carcass of constructs, until you discover that you have also turned your potentially new conviction into a carcass. That is inevitable.

What we go through and experience must settle and stand the test of criticism time and again. That takes time, but the Roman Catholic tradition, to put it mildly, takes a very long time to do so. And in its fanaticism, it is actually waging a kind of war against women and the LGBTQ+ community. That is why I do not regard that mix of faith and conviction as a virtue.

But there may be a deeper layer. For in faith, one must surely seek purity. That involves, amongst other things, recognising a driving force through which you come to know who you are. Sometimes a force that seems to come from outside and possesses mystical characteristics. It has taken us billions of years to become who we are today, and we still barely understand ourselves. I simply call that constantly renewing and evolving force 'God'. I know of no other word. It is more a matter of going with the flow than trying to hold it back; nobody can do that. We have ideas and thoughts, and sometimes we convince one another, but usually not. Yet we are far more determined than we think, and of course I believe in you.

Henk Baars for Mariënborg Vereniging