

## *The Great Partnership*

Faith is not a spurious knowledge of things we might be able to demonstrate through scientific means. Nor is it belief in the irrefutable, always insulated against the possibility of being proved wrong. Faith is the human response to the phenomenon that defines the human condition: the constitutive uncertainty of our lives as we walk towards the undiscovered country called the future.

We know much, but there is one thing we can never know: what tomorrow may bring. Faith is what allows us to face the future without fear: 'Though I walk through the shadow of death I will fear no evil for you are with me.' That was the faith that moved Abraham and Sarah to leave their land, their birthplace and their father's house, to travel to an unknown destination in response to a divine call. It moved Moses to abandon life as an Egyptian prince or a Midianite shepherd, to lead his people to freedom. Faith is what moves people to great achievement that defies probability and predictability.

*Faith is not certainty. It is the courage to live with uncertainty.* Faith is never easy. The great heroes of the moral life, like the great artists and scientists and thinkers, like anyone who has undertaken to live a life of high ideals, know failure after failure, disappointment after disappointment. What made them great is that they refused to despair. Like Jacob wrestling with the angel, they said to fate, 'I will not let you go until you

## *Finding God*

bless me' (Genesis 32:26). Judaism is built on that faith. Jews refused to let go of God, and God refused to let go of them. They wrestle still. So do all who have faith.

Science is about explanation. Religion is about meaning. To find meaning in life, as Viktor Frankl discovered in Auschwitz, is to hear a call. 'In the last resort, man should not ask, "What is the meaning of my life?" but should realise that he himself is being questioned.'<sup>18</sup> God is calling each of us to a task – asking each of us as he asked the first humans, 'Where are you?' – but to hear the call we have to learn to listen. We can never be sure that we heard correctly. We can never know that it really was the voice of God, which is why humility not arrogance, and risk not certainty, are the deepest marks of faith. Nor can we be sure in advance that the journey we take will lead to the destination we seek. That – the Gauguin problem – is why we need faith. I owe that discovery to my teacher, Bernard Williams, perhaps the greatest atheist of our time.

Everything I have learned about faith in a lifetime tells me that the science of creation – cosmology – wondrous though it is, takes second place to the sheer wonder that God could take this risk of creating a creature with the freedom to disobey him and wreck his world. There is no faith humans can have in God equal to the faith God must have had in humankind to place us here as guardians of the vastness and splendour of the universe. We exist because of God's faith in us. That is why I see in the faces of those I meet a trace of God's love that lifts me to try and love a little as God loves. I know of nothing with greater power to lift us beyond ourselves and to perform acts that carry within them a signal of transcendence. God lives wherever we open our eyes to his radiance, our hearts to his transforming love.