We could say that our generation of Christians is undergoing a shift in articulating how we experience ourselves in reading Scripture. From understanding Scripture as propositional truth in search of a conceptually coherent doctrine to which we can intellectually assent, many of us are moving toward an interpretation of the Bible’s narrative in our search for a journey in which we can participate with trust. In this shift, how does knowing as understanding in search of doctrine differ from knowing as interpretation in search of a journey? Or, to put it in terms of faith, how does faith as trusting a direction we are shown on our journey differ from faith as assenting to a belief system we are urged to hold true?

In both cases faith, as I understand it, is a way of knowing. So, I do not regard faith as something that takes place in the absence of knowing, as a sort of poor substitute for what we would rather know. Instead, faith is itself a way of knowing. That connection is an old one, which persists in our modern speaking of faith as belief. But the two ways I mentioned do differ. Does the difference mean that we know the Scriptures less as we move from one way of knowing to another? Is this a matter of orthodoxy? What is orthodoxy? Does the difference I have in mind have anything to do with the difference between orthodoxy and orthopractice?

I readily connect faith with the Scriptures of the Jewish-Christian tradition in this discussion simply because in that tradition, these Scriptures play an enormous role in faith. They are a source for faith, they are taken as normative for faith, examples taken from them speak more easily to adherents of the tradition, and if two discussants agree on matters under discussion in this chapter from the point of view of Scripture, such points of agreement play an unusually helpful role in carrying the discussion forward.

All of these matters will, I trust, surface in more detail in the course of this chapter’s development. But let me, from the outset, briefly indicate why I speak of faith as a way of knowing. This is important, because my views will puzzle readers who also note my saying that faith as knowledge differs from the knowledge of conceptual-propositional cognition. The puzzle will dimin-
ish when I make clear that, as I refer to it, knowing is a much broader human experience than that related to propositional attitudes, or conceptual awareness, or definitional understanding, or reasoning-governed explanation. I also take skills to be ways of knowing (know-how), as well as acquaintance and recognition, memory, sensitivity, and awareness. All of these are quite widely acknowledged as ways of knowing. But I want to make clear that I use knowledge and knowing in a very wide sense, namely as pointing to the fruit born by any intimate experience that enhances our readiness to live awarely and responsibly in this world as God’s creatures.

One way of putting this is that I am talking of knowledge in a “neo-pragmatist” sense, that is, knowledge as a disposition to find our way in our acting. In that sort of context trust is knowing that reveals our way, a disposition to move into the desired direction; cognition is knowing that shapes a well informed disposition; perception is knowing fed by feeling our way with our bodies, and so on. Knowing in this sense brings together the best of the Hebrew, Greek, and Christian traditions of knowing the truth as keeping faith in all that we relate to, of conceptual insight that reveals to us what boundaries surround us, and of love as the fullness of knowing face to face.

Knowledge in this sense is the fruit of having lived, of experience, of exposure, of relations to ourselves, our neighbors, the world around us, and God. When the experienced fruit positively increases, develops, modifies, influences, or otherwise affects our humanly responsible readiness to live our lives as well, as happily, and as fulfilled as we are able before the face of God, we have knowledge. We can then knowingly live in ethical communion with our neighbor, and with a sense of kinship with all creation. Knowing as I speak of it here is well modeled in how Mother Teresa knew her surrounding world, how in faith she knew where to direct her redemptive energies, how perceptively she knew how to be in touch, how cognitively she understood what to do about her suffering neighbors.

So, I talk of faith as a way of knowing—just one of the many ways of knowing. It is, in my view, a form of trust in which we reach out to the mystery that surrounds us at the boundaries of our experience and by which we learn to trust whatever guidance comes to us regarding all of life in relation to these boundary experiences. These boundary experiences raise questions about our origin and destiny, about life and death, about evil and happiness, and about other perplexities that exceed almost every kind of grasp we can muster. Since the trust in which we reach out to the mystery gives rise to a faith that is rooted in storied traditions of fundamentally life-orienting experiences, faith sheds light on our lives and is thus in a very profound sense a way of knowing even when it is characterized by taking us beyond conceptually controlled and logically coherent propositional configurations. We experience such light as revelatory when it lights up our darkness. In such contexts, the trusted stories of faith function as a hermeneutic to making sense of our lives.