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A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

WHAT IS CHRISTIAN FAITH? ¹

1 Cor. ii. 4-5: "And my word and my preaching were not in the persuasive words of wisdom; but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." Rom. x. 17: "So faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ." John i. 12: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to be sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." Heb. xi. 1: "Faith is an assurance of things hoped for, a certainty of things not seen."

Faith is the attitude of consciousness which lies at the basis of the whole physical life. "Our science is as much 'founded on faith', as our holy religion." Science is based on causal thinking; and yet, as Hume has shown, the law of cause and effect can never be proved, it must be received *by faith*. "The mind must *accept* something before it can have anything to reason about." "Faith receives what is given; reason clarifies and interprets what is given to faith."²

Christian faith is the foundation of life, the inspiration of devotion, the invisible chain which links this temporal existence with eternity. Serene amid the screaming hurricane of time faith supplies the steel girders for the structure of the soul. As "the light of the Eternal lingering in the soul", faith carries in her bosom promises for this life and for that which is to come.

The Federal Council of Churches recently initiated a Preaching Mission with "the re-establishment of faith" as a primary objective. This action is a pleasing contrast to the youth crusade inaugurated by the same organization a few years ago. The programme then, presented in the pamphlet, *Youth for Christ*, was to enlist young people in almost any good or supposedly good task in the assumption that they were thereby being linked to Christ. The word faith was scarcely to be found in the pamphlet and one of the so-called good works

¹ An Address delivered to the League of Evangelical Students meeting at Queens-Chicora College, Charlotte, N.C., February 20, 1937.

² So Hume, Whitehead, A. E. Taylor and D. Lamont in the latter's *Christ and the World of Thought*, pp. 133-36. Cf. Girardeau, J. L., *Discussions of Philosophical Questions*, p. 26.

was to break down the creeds and amalgamate the denominations. Possibly the Federal Council did not realize that the creeds were not on trial. At any rate Protestants rejoice in a turn from works to faith. And even though the true meaning of faith be oft smothered 'neath erroneous definitions, we may still thank God for a beam in darkness and pray Him to make it grow. When John Wesley, doubting whether he had real faith, asked advice of Peter Boehler, he received this wise reply: "Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith." And we earnestly hope that the ministers who have the ear of America will continue to preach "faith" until they all have adequate conceptions of faith and then continue to preach faith because they have a consciously Christian faith. Only one must remember that "the *fides quae creditur* precedes the *fides qua creditur*".¹

I

HUMANISTIC CONCEPTIONS OF FAITH

The current difficulty, then, is that the whole glorious heritage of faith is being jeopardized by inadequate definitions of faith. Pragmatism in philosophy and Ritschlianism in religion have begotten an American modernism which glories in the flimsiest possible conceptions of faith. John Dewey defines faith as "trust in the possibilities of experience itself". Entirely rejecting "religious supernaturalism", or any support "above and beyond experience", he insists that "experience itself is the sole ultimate authority", furnishing to man both "organizing principles and directive ends".² This "faith has no *beyond*". Indeed, for Dewey "God" is only a symbol for the ideas presented by human imagination.³ This is, of course, the humanistic conception; for humanism "is the direct opposite of supernaturalism, which separates God and man to such an extent that man is considered helpless, save as he is the recipient of truth, virtue, and happiness from above".⁴

The marvel is not that Dewey should use faith in this humanistic sense; but that so many ministers whose heart faith must rise above humanism's limitations should be advocating

¹ A. Lang, *Evangelical Quarterly*, January 6, 1931.

² Dewey, John, *What I Believe*, *Forum*, March, 1930; *The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy*, p. 17.

³ *A Common Faith*.

⁴ Richards, G. W., *Christian Ways of Salvation*, p. 222b.

such depotentiated concepts of faith. Professor Lamont points out that the conception of faith as a vague conjecture is a reversion to the old Greek usage of the term, that neglects the great meaning which Jesus poured into it; and that it is an exclusive attention to the psychological or *formal* aspect of faith which disregards the theological or *material* aspect. "From Feuerbach, onwards, faith has often been represented as a projection of our own thoughts and desires upon the screen of the Eternal."¹

Representative members of the Preaching Mission undertook to re-establish the foundations of faith by advocating the conception thereof found in the volume entitled, *Christian Fact and Modern Doubt*. There faith is defined as "the soul's invincible surmise", a euphonious phrasing of the older definition, "a betting one's life that there is a God". This volume is the best evidence of how little such a conception can advance a groping mind. The brilliant author ends his discussion of Christian fact with the doubter still in utter uncertainty as to God. He cannot say either that God is, or what God is. His closing chapter carries the reader to the abysmal agnosticism of a "Grand Perhaps". "If God there be," He is "an Unknown", or "the Unknown". Lamont's remark is apropos. "Thus faith, in spite of the New Testament and Christianity, is relegated to the sphere of vague conjecture or of feeling which may or may not be useful, but which has nothing to do with what is true. This naïve and mischievous assumption, when logically pursued, leads straight to scepticism in everything."² Occupying a very different position, Troeltsch frequently spoke of the "agnosticism" of this theology of experience. Even such a worldling as Peer Gynt recognizes:

"One needs in days of trial
Some certainty to put one's trust in."

In the apostolic writings,³ great glowing certainties light a path by which the Spirit leads doubting souls to a firm assurance of God and his salvation. Paul speaks thus: "I know whom I have believed."

And yet modernism often gives an even poorer concept

¹ Lamont, *ibid*, 125-126.

² Lamont, *ibid*, 275-76. Cf. Barth's contrast between "the modernist" and "the evangelical faith", *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 38.

³ Cf. Robinson, W. C., *The Certainties of the Gospel*.

of faith. Instead of postulating faith on the soul, "on the whole man and his whole world",¹ often an aspect or "part" of the personality is abstracted and faith represented as the act of this faculty or function of the ego. The classic American example of this thinking is, of course, William James' concept of faith as "the will to believe". Now "Faith is voluntary, but not a mere act of the will".² Faith involves present decision. Jesus said, "if any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak myself" (John vii. 17). But when this text is used as a basis for preaching the doctrine found in *The Will to Believe* the position of our Lord is misrepresented. In the first place, Jesus revealed the Infinite and Almighty God; James taught a finite and limited "God". The two conceptions differ so completely that Lamont asserts "a finite God is a contradiction in terms";³ and even Shailer Matthews confesses, "one cannot grow enthusiastic over a God who is in danger of cosmic bankruptcy, even though pragmatism be His receiver and humanism His self-certified accountant".⁴

Out of these radically different doctrines of God have come differences as to the meaning of faith. Jesus offered adequate objective evidence and when He found that men would not acknowledge Him because they loved the glory that was of men more than the glory that was of God, He put His finger on the unyielded will as the centre of the difficulty. The submission of the will rather than the satisfaction of the understanding is the primary duty which the creature owes the Creator. But James errs when he offers to supply a lack of objective evidence by a subjective power of willing. He suggests that an Alpine traveller can hurl himself across a yawning gulf; if, by an exertion of the will, he makes himself believe he can. Only, as Fulton J. Sheen has pointed out,⁵ this illustration absolutely fails to prove the thing it undertakes to prove. The objective reality of the rock on which the jumper is to land is the one thing that needs no proving. The rock was there as evident to the naked eye before the leap as after it. The great philosopher

¹ Buttrick, *Christian Faith and Modern Doubt*, p. 262.

² L. Berkhof.

³ Lamont, *ibid*, cf. also, "A God who is within the process is no God at all", p. 161.

"A 'god in the flux' which cannot be God," p. 175.

⁴ Matthews, S., *Religion in the New Age, Forum*, February, 1931.

⁵ Sheen, F. J., *God and Intelligence*.

used an illustration to prove the objective reality of God, which proved absolutely nothing as to objective reality. On the other hand Jesus had already proved the fact of His Deity by His words and His works before He asked for the yielding of the will.

Again Jesus both preceded and followed this statement of the will by a recognition of man's sinful estate and his need of regenerating grace. Near the beginning of His ministry, when many were professing to believe on His name because of the signs He did, Jesus declined to trust Himself to them (John ii. 23-4) and instead solemnly told their teacher: "Except a man be born of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." "Ye must be born again" (John iii. 1-15). Later He told those who had no abiding faith that they were servants of sin, and children not of God, but of the devil (John viii. 34-44). Jesus recognized that true and abiding faith is the work of the Holy Spirit; W. James teaches that faith is the mere act of the human will.

B. M. Palmer used the compass needle to illustrate the part of the will in believing. The needle in its compass box is protected from the constraints of mechanical impingement, and free to turn as it will. Magnetize the needle and it ever points to the North; demagnetize it and it moves aimlessly hither and yonder. The will of fallen, sinful man wanders here and there, first after one and then another worldly objective; the will of the regenerated nature seeks the path of virtue just as the magnetized needle reverts to the line of the North. The concept of a glorified human will, with plenary power to turn in faith to God, is the diametric opposite of the doctrine of Augustine, Luther and Calvin that we attain freedom by grace, not grace by freedom. Attractive as it may be to the American ego, it offers cold comfort for one's declining years after the hurdy-gurdy of life has softened or sapped the resiliency of many an iron will. Moreover it flatly contradicts Paul's declaration that "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth; but of God that showeth mercy".

A number of the current religious psychologists seem to have decided that the supreme religious faculty is the imagination, that it is even more powerful than the will. Accordingly we hear that "faith is the triumph of imagination over sensation", or that "faith is only imagination grown up". Now, no one

who reads Cardinal Newman's *Apologia Pro Sua Vita* can deny that imagination may have a potent effect upon the life of faith; but no Protestant who reads this work can hold that imagination correctly guided Newman's life. The older apologists felt constrained to oppose Hume's contention that faith cannot be distinguished from imagination. One does not wish to oppose a proper recognition of this great God-given faculty which wings the eloquence of the masters of assemblies. But are we not playing into the hands of humanism when we are content to characterize faith merely in terms of imagination at the very moment when John Dewey is so vehemently insisting that God is only a symbol of the ideals presented by human imagination? Moreover, the Scripture tells us that God saw that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually (Gen. vi. 6).

Complete pragmatism defines faith as "tendency toward action",¹ to which may be added the neo-realist statement that "faith is a conviction on which a man is willing to act".² Shall we forget Jesus' reverent refusal to put God to the test, and instead follow Herr Hitler's logical development of pragmatism in *Mein Kampf*? Here *Der Fuehrer* asserts that: "Success is the only earthly judge of right and wrong." Now faith fruits into action, but the whole contention of Paul and Luther is that faith, the faith of Abraham, the faith of a Christian, is different from works (Rom. iii. 28; Gal. ii. 16; Eph. ii. 8-9; 2 Tim. i. 9).

Finally, there are many pious people who insist that while the intellect is not able to attain faith in God, the heart, the poetic qualities or aesthetic sensibilities of the soul can. Calvin realized that faith was more of the heart than of the head, of the affections rather than of the mind; and Pascal has said that the heart hath her reasons which the reason cannot know. But Calvin was careful to affirm that this faith was graven on our hearts *by the finger of the living God*; whereas, many current advocates of heart faith and mysticism represent it as a human attainment. To rest faith on the mere experiences of the human heart is as humanistic, if not as rationalistic, as it is to rest faith on intellectual opinions. Jeremiah reminds us that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. xvii. 9).

¹ Dewey, *Forum*, March, 1930.

² Perry, R. B., *Present Philosophical Tendencies*.

Any faith which is merely the act of the creature, resting upon premises and inferences drawn from creation, is dead and doomed. For:

“ Like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on: and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.”—*The Tempest*.

Thus the return to faith, if we may for the moment call it a return, is a return to the psychology of faith. A faith which is defined exclusively in terms of man is not a return to God. It will not be a return to God until it becomes also and primarily a return to the theology of faith. In contrast to these definitions which characterize faith exclusively in terms of the soul, or some one of its vital functions, the men whose names are remembered as the fathers of faith drew up definitions, recognizing the human element to be sure, but without that tragic neglect of God's part in establishing faith which is so distinctive of current American definitions. In his small Catechism Luther teaches: “ I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me through the Gospel.” John Calvin offers as “ a complete definition of faith ” the following: “ It is a steady and certain knowledge of the divine benevolence towards us, which being founded on the truth of the gratuitous promise in Christ, is both revealed to our minds, and confirmed to our hearts, by the Holy Spirit.”¹ A collation of the thirtieth, thirty-first, and eighty-sixth answers of the Shorter Catechism likewise gives an adequate definition. B. M. Palmer does not compress his thoughts into such a concise form as Calvin. But those who read his discussion of *The Assurance of Faith* find that he there stresses the necessity for the activity of God the Son in revealing truth, and of God the Holy Spirit in inspiring Scripture and in enlightening men to receive it; and indicates both when he says: “ This spiritual apprehension and appropriation of revealed truth is what we understand by the word faith.”²

By an ever increasing number of European theologians of varied viewpoints—Barth, Thurneysen, Brunner, Heim,

¹ *Institutes*. ² *The Threefold Fellowship and the Threefold Assurance*, p. 124.

Adam, Sasse, Gogarten, Lamont, Schaefer—faith is defined with reference to God, sometimes exclusively with reference to God. Dr. Erich Schaefer endorses Luther's definition and further states: "Faith wrought by the spiritual drawing-nigh of the gracious God in Christ, is a complete, boundless trust in the sufficient grace or love of God. Thus it is something absolute."¹ Except God be the Alpha and the Omega of faith; except faith grip God, because by working faith in us God hath first gripped us, we are, of all men, most miserable. We have no propitious heavenly Father, no covenant blood, no forgiveness of sins, no everlasting arms of comfort, no assurance of things hoped for, no joy in the Holy Ghost, no blessed Lord and Divine Saviour; we have only one another.

II

THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF FAITH

The biblical doctrine of faith involves, then, both (a) a theology of faith and (b) a psychology of faith, or, since faith on its human side affects conduct as well as personality, the efficacy of faith.

(a) *The Theology of Faith.*

The theology of faith may be summarized under the following propositions:

First, God the ultimate subject of knowledge is the author and giver of faith.

Secondly, God the Son, acting in a saving revelation culminating in His Incarnation for our redemption, graciously condescended to make Himself the object of faith.

Thirdly, God the Holy Ghost has accommodated the Divine revelation to human thoughts and words in His word of inspiration; and efficaciously calls us to a saving faith by regenerating our hearts and enlightening our minds to receive the saving revelation recorded in His inspired Word.

Or, to state the matter more simply, faith is the gift of God; faith is receiving and resting upon Jesus Christ alone for salvation; faith is the work of the Holy Spirit.

First: God the ultimate subject is the author and giver of faith.

According to the Bible faith is the work of God, indeed the whole of salvation, including faith, is the gift of God

¹ *Theozentrische Theologie*, II, 259.

(Eph. ii. 8). Paul rejoiced that the faith of the Corinthians stood not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (1 Cor. ii. 4-5). God wrought faith in them, just as in Thessalonica the Apostle's gospel also came in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance (1 Thess. i. 5). Jesus says that flesh and blood does not reveal unto us a saving knowledge of the Christ, the Son of the living God; but that only the Father in heaven makes this gracious revelation (Matt. xvi. 17; xi. 25).

This Biblical teaching that faith is God's work and gift is the doctrine of the Reformed Faith. Calvin declares, "that only is saving faith which the Holy Spirit works in us". The Shorter Catechism teaches that God the Holy Ghost works faith in us and thereby unites us to Christ in our effectual calling. Premier Kuyper assures us that the doctrine of election just means that God, standing in unapproachable majesty above us, opens the councils of His peace to whom He will by the Holy Spirit.

No matter how serious our differences, there is no denying that much of the newest theology, in distinction from American "liberalism", does recognize the Divine initiative in faith. Lamont, the last moderator of the Church of Scotland, writes: "For our knowledge of God we are inexorably cast upon the initiative of God himself. . . . It is of the very essence of Christianity that God has taken the initiative and done for us what our own reason, God-given faculty though it is, could never do."¹ George W. Richards concludes that men "must be known by God before they can know Him, they must be laid hold on by God before they can lay hold on Him".² Karl Adam of Tübingen says: "Belief in Christ in its becoming and being is an act of God, a kiss from His freely bestowed love, it is His creative word to us."³ From John iii. 5 Barth shows that the possibility of believing requires nothing less than a new birth and the power which achieves it in us cannot be anything less than God's power. "We cannot give ourselves faith."⁴ Indeed, this position is so general that Erich Schaefer of Breslau declares that with some difference of emphasis the theology of the present insists that: "The living

¹ Lamont, D., *ibid.*, pp. 203, 219.

² Richards, G.W., in *American Philosophies of Religion*, 1936, p. 313.

³ Adam, Karl, *The Son of God*, pp. 40, 37, 46.

⁴ Barth, K., *Credo*, p. 136. *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 200.

God is never *in principle* the Object for men. Every realism which oversteps these bounds is an inversion and a perversion. *In principle* God is Subject over against us, not some given object, not a given substance or thing, but a Person. We are God's Objects; He is not Object for us. That other conception is an exaltation of ourselves above God which is contrary to reality and destructive of His honour. And the doctrine of the Enlightenment, which makes God an object for human investigation, is nothing else. . . . To be sure, while God treats us as Objects in the efficacy of the trusting faith that draws us to Himself, while He sovereignly apprehends us, He elevates us—just in the form of personal active faith—to a conscious willing Subject relation toward Himself. We relate ourselves to Him, He becomes for us the Object of a special peculiar relationship called faith. But in this form of the Object-Subject-relationship God always remains just as God, the real Subject. For we believe on Him as He moves and determines to believe and in believing. We believe on Him and His Christ as He rules us in faith. It belongs to the principles of a theocentric theology which is directed irremovably toward God, that always to some extent and in the ultimate analysis it holds in view the quality of God's Lordship. And this declares, at once, that God is standing, in principle, outside the category of the objective."¹ That is, God is still, in principle, Subject when He is the Object of faith; because God works faith in whom He will and faith does not place itself above its object in the observer-attitude. Rather the believer ever stands in trusting dependence upon his only Saviour, in grateful obedience 'neath his blessed Lord. Faith is that precise attitude which ascribes all the glory to God, our Saviour. Abraham believed, giving glory to God (Rom. iv. 20).

In his last book J. Gresham Machen pointed out that God is active; He is not to be studied like a passive object.² In scientific observation things are passive objects for our active control and manipulation. We take the first step. But in dealing with a personal life that life is not passive. All spiritual life is, by its very nature, a hidden life which can only be known as it reveals itself, or rather himself. The I-Thou relationship is different from the I-It relation. "Who among men

¹ Schaefer, E., *Theozentrische Theologia*, II, 3-4, 2 Auflage.

² Machen, J. G., *Christianity in the Modern World*.

knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of the man which is in Him? Even so, the things of God none knoweth save the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. ii. 11).

Moreover, God is the absolute and infinite person. Even though we might conceivably obtain some knowledge of our fellows by observation, or even if behaviourism were true, it would not follow that we could similarly know God. Every biographer sets himself above the character he is depicting. Man cannot place himself above His Maker. Nay, man does not even stand alongside of God. Heim characterizes faith as "a standing before God", that is, a standing beneath God, realizing that we are being investigated by Him. The I-My world attitude is necessarily very different from the I-Absolute attitude. God eternally exists as the Omnipresent Thou. He was before He created any creature capable of knowing Him. We are the temporal creatures of His hand; and in knowledge, as in being and in salvation, God is and will ever be the Lord. "The ground of our knowledge is in the freedom and sovereignty of God."¹ In the most gracious manifestations and pleadings of His love do not forget that God is still the Lord. Except we know God as Lord we do not know the living and true God.

Then sin has blinded the eyes of our understanding and radically separated man from his Maker.² Thus we can only come back to Him in the fellowship of blessed trust in case He take the initiative and of His sovereign grace restore us to Himself. There is only one fountain of grace; only one source of goodness; that is, God. Or to return to Lamont: "Christian revelation, including the faith which answers to it, is the bridge across the gulf between God and man and God alone has built it." The Apostle insists that we have come to know God, or rather to be known by God (Gal. iv. 9); that "the foundation of God standeth sure having this inscription, 'The Lord knoweth them that are His'" (2 Tim. ii. 19). Our saving knowledge of God can only be an acknowledgment (Col. ii. 2) of His knowing of us; a confession that He has graciously revealed Himself to us. God knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows us through and through; and has called us not to a complete, but to a saving knowledge of Himself, to a present decision, to a living faith. Even as we love Him because He first loved us

¹ Barth, K., *Dogmatik*, I. 288-90.

² Vos, G., *Biblical Theology*.

(First John), so also we know Him because He first knew us (John x. 14; xv. 16). We need a return to that great hymn:

“ O gift of gifts! O grace of faith!
 My God, how can it be
 That Thou who hast discerning love,
 Shouldst give that gift to me?

How many hearts Thou mightst have had
 More innocent than mine,
 How many souls more worthy far
 Of that sweet touch of Thine!

Ah, grace, into unlikeliest hearts
 It is Thy boast to come,
 The glory of Thy light to find
 In darkest spots a home.”

Secondly: In His saving revelation God, the Son, has graciously made Himself the Object of faith.

God hath made a saving revelation of Himself in a historical process culminating in His own Incarnation. The Creator assumed the being or nature of a creature and entered¹ upon the plane of the historical, the analogical. The Lord of all made Himself the servant of all; the ultimate Subject of all knowledge of His own will condescended to become also the Object for our faith. In His humiliation God accommodated Himself to our limitations and weaknesses. Thus “ Christian faith is directed to God as He is revealed to us in Jesus Christ ”.² Lamont shows from Jesus’ dealings with the centurion that in our Lord’s own teaching the essence of faith is the religious recognition of Himself (Luke vii. 9). Gogarten affirms that only as I believe in Jesus Christ do I believe in God, the Creator; for only in Christ is God gracious to me, fulfilling for me His own requirements, and giving Himself in all that He is and has to me.³ Our Lord certifies that no man cometh unto the Father but by Him (John xiv. 6). He is the Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. ii. 5). The light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines for us in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. iv. 6). Calvin writes: “ Faith may find in Christ a solid ground of salvation,” and the Apostle excludes any additional basis, “ other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid which

¹ Cf. Barth, *Credo*, p. 46, “ Here the Creator Himself has become the creature and therefore objective reality ”.

² Lamont, *ibid.*

³ Gogarten, F., *Ich Glaube an den Dreieinigen Gott*, p. 205.

is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. iii. 11). In the time-honoured words of the Shorter Catechism, faith is receiving and resting upon Jesus Christ alone for salvation as He is offered to us in the Gospel.

Faith rests upon Jesus Christ; faith anchors in Him. Faith keeps close to His expiatory cross. Faith is accepting Christ, throwing oneself upon Christ. It is the entrusting of oneself to Christ, the solid confidence of the heart which commits the soul to the Lord Jesus for time and for eternity. All the eyes of faith are fixed upon the Lord Jesus, the Lamb for sinners slain. And the strength of faith is neither in the idea of faith nor in the amount of faith; but in Jesus Christ, the Alpha and the Omega of faith (Heb. xii. 2). If we have faith as a grain of mustard seed, faith in Christ, it suffices, He suffices. Luther says, "even weak faith does it". For "faith in Jesus is not the measure, but the token of your inheritance". "It is not thy hold on Christ that saves thee—it is Christ; it is not thy joy in Christ that saves thee—it is Christ; it is not even faith in Christ, though that be the instrument,—it is Christ's blood and merit."¹ The most beautiful picture of faith I have found is in the tenth chapter of Mark, the sixteenth verse. Jesus takes the babes in the crook of His arm and lays His hand upon them and blesses them. Faith is resting in those arms of Jesus which brought us up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and placed our feet upon the Rock of His redeeming Cross. Faith cries:

"Could my zeal no respite know,
 Could my tears for ever flow,
 All for sin could not atone:
Thou must save, and *Thou* alone."

Faith points as steadily to Jesus as the compass needle points to the North. Faith ever prays:

"Jesus, Lover of my soul,
 Let me to *Thy* bosom fly."

Yea:

"My faith looks up to *Thee*,
 Thou Lamb of Calvary,
 Saviour Divine!
 Now hear me while I pray;
 Take all my guilt away;
 O let me from this day
 Be wholly Thine."

¹ Spurgeon.

This whole-hearted committal of ourselves, our temporal interest and our eternal salvation to Jesus, means that we receive as our Saviour one great enough to bear the tremendous issues committed to Him. I not only need a whole world for my parish; a whole Church for my fellowship; a whole Bible for my staff; but first of all a whole Christ for my salvation. Only an infinite Saviour can be an all-sufficient Saviour. Let us be sure that the ground of our faith is the complete Christ. May we treasure and practise His words. The Sermon on the Mount is truly one of the mountain peaks of Scripture. But just as truly we need every one of the miracles which manifest His Divine power and glory. Jesus is God our Saviour, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, who for us men and for our salvation became also man and that in a miraculous way. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary and born of her, yet without sin. As Brother Bryan of Birmingham expresses it, "Jesus Christ is the only person who ever lived before He was born". The eternal Son of God was born a man that He might die for men; thereafter He rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty where He ever liveth to make intercession for us and whence also He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. He who was God, the Creator, became also man, the creature, that He might be the Mediator.

It may be possible to walk across the roaring Niagara on a tight-rope; but when I cross that mighty cataract I want a solid structure of steel and concrete under me. And as I climb the ladder of faith leading up to the gates of God I rejoice that God has not given me a mere tight-rope, a Saviour who may only be a mere man, who may not have done mighty miracles, whose corpse someone may have stolen and left to decay under a Syrian sky.¹ No! thank God for His assurance that standing between my sinful soul and the lurid flames of Hell there is that Saviour who is God and man, Jehovah-Jesus, who entered human life by a miraculous conception and truly conquered death by the revivification of His own body, the supernatural Jesus now exalted to God's right hand, a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance and the remission of sins. Luther preached faith as unwavering trust of the heart in Him who hath given Himself to us in Christ as our Saviour, hearty

¹ Bacon, B. W., *The Story of Jesus Christ*.

assurance of faith because Christ with His work undertakes our cause.

'Tis Christ, and particularly Christ in His cross,¹ that we receive for salvation.

“ At the Cross, at the Cross
Where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away.
It was there by faith I received my sight;
And now I am happy all the day.”

“ My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.”

Brunner says that the whole struggle of the Reformation was simply the struggle for the right interpretation of the Cross; for he who understands the Cross aright understands the Bible, and understands Jesus Christ.² Luther declares: “ Therefore this text—He bore our sins—must be understood particularly thoroughly, as the foundation upon which stands the whole of the New Testament or the Gospel, as that which alone distinguishes us and our religion from all other religions. For Christians alone believe this text. Therefore, whosoever believes this article of faith is secure against all errors, and God the Holy Ghost is necessarily for Him.”

It is only when we look in faith to the Cross that the awful separation between the holy God and His sinful creatures is bridged. Sin caused us to hide from God; sin called forth His righteous indignation upon us. At the Cross we see ourselves in all our vileness. In the Cross God is manifest both in His holy hatred of sin and in the infinite tenderness of His love. The holy God can no more fail to punish sin than He can lie. The Cross is the vials of holy wrath poured upon One who was made sin and a curse; who, as Luther says, assumed our things that He might give us His. But the Cross is also love, love to the uttermost, God's love speaking peace and pardon by agony and death. My friends, the Cross is not a compromise with sin, it is an awful, a holy, a gracious substitution; it is not the cancellation of our debts, it is their satisfaction; it is not the mere wiping off of the slate, it is the wiping out of our guilt by blood, agony and death. In my place condemned He stood; bought my pardon with His blood. Here is the happy exchange of

¹ Lamont, *ibid.*, p. 168.

² Brunner, *The Mediator*, p. 435.

which the Reformer loved to speak. He assumed our penalty, and confers upon us His righteousness. Or as Augustine wrote:

“ From us death to Him; from Him salvation to us;
From us contumelies to Him; from Him honours to us.”

In the days when the hand of God mightily lifted the Protestant standard Calvin could truly say that the Romanists were erecting crosses of wood and stone and gold and silver because they had resigned to these crucifixes the task of preaching the Gospel, of setting forth Christ evidently crucified before our eyes (*Institutes*, i. xi. vii). But to-day, not without occasion, the Romanists are charging that in many parts of America Protestants have taken the Cross not only from the tops of the Churches, but as well from the heart of their preaching. As we work and pray for a great revival to quicken the pulse of American Protestantism let us remember that a revival can only start at the foot of the Cross. Christian faith is anchored at Golgotha where the dear Lord was crucified, who died to save us all. A revival will never come from neglecting or from trampling under foot the blood of the covenant. It will come only when the Church is again willing to be a mere index finger pointing to the Crucified, a John the Baptist voice crying: “ Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.” Then will the exalted Christ once again fulfil His plighted Word: “ And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto myself.”

Thirdly: In inspiration God the Holy Spirit has accommodated revelation to human apprehension; and in regeneration illumines sinners to receive this revelation.

God not only graciously condescended to reveal Himself to men by the Second Person of the Godhead becoming incarnate; He also put that revelation in a dependable record clear enough for the wayfaring man not to misunderstand. The Third Person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, carried out the work of inspiration. He accommodated the revelation of God to human thought and human words so that men might know what they needed to know in order to be saved. Thus the Bible becomes the inspired prism or spectacles through which we are to look in order to see God. The Word is the lamp unto our feet and the light for our pathway (Ps. cxix).

Barth is right in insisting on the majesty of the transcendent God who can only be known as He wills to reveal

Himself, and must be known through His revelation. But Barth has not sufficiently realized the accommodation of God or the perspicuity of the inspired record of this revelation.¹ God is in heaven, we are on earth (Eccles. v. 2); but God's Word, the Word of the gospel which we preach, is nigh us, in our mouths and in our hearts (Rom. x. 8).

God made exceeding great and precious promises to Abraham and the patriarch apprehended and accepted these promises. Faith is accepting the Word of God as true. "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ" (Rom. x. 17); and believers are "born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible through the Word of God which liveth and abideth" (1 Pet. i. 23). In his *Liberty of a Christian Man* Luther assures us that by believing the promises of God we receive the blessings promised. Calvin writes that "faith has a perpetual relation to the Word, and can no more be separated from it, than the rays from the sun whence they proceed". "The same Divine word is the foundation by which faith is sustained and supported, and from which it cannot be moved without an immediate downfall. Take away the Word and there will be no faith left." Indeed, so close is the connection between the Word and faith in the mind of the Genevan that he can say, "faith is used metonymically for the Word".² In a similar key the first Moderator of the Southern Presbyterian Church wrote, "Faith clings to the testimony of the divine word";³ and the 1936 Moderator of the Church of Scotland rightly says that God inspires faith through His word and that "the man of faith waits upon the Word of God".³ God lays His saving hand upon the hearts of men by His Word and by His Spirit (Isa. lix. 21); therefore, there can be no revival of faith except through a revival of Bible preaching, Bible reading, Bible believing, Bible obeying. "The same Spirit that prompted the faith of the Apostles can evoke a like faith from us when we give ourselves to the hearing of their testimony."⁴ This testimony of God is the true basis of faith.⁵

In the Bible we have "a Word of God in which God speaks

¹ Schilder, K., *Zur Begriffsgeschichte des "Paradoxon"*.

² *The Institutes*.

³ Palmer, B. M., *ibid*, p. 140.

⁴ Lamont, D., *ibid*, pp. 255, 278, 279.

⁵ So Adolphe Monod, as quoted with approval by Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, p. 70

directly to each of our souls".¹ Hence, if you would know God apply yourself to the Bible. God hath given here everything necessary for His own glory, for the salvation of the soul, for faith and for life. You will not gain a true knowledge of God by reading the books of mystical experiences; by following the vagaries of idealistic philosophy; by sitting with vacant minds in the hours of the morning waiting for some stimulus to enter your empty head; by spinning extravagant paradoxes; or by give and take with the Confucian, the liberal Jew, the Buddhist, or the Christian Scientist in the mistaken idea of attaining some truth more final and inclusive than the Christian Scriptures which you can call "the New Testament of every existing faith".² We only pray "Hallowed be Thy Name" in its true meaning when we reverently accept that revelation which He has made of His Name in the Bible as complete, final, true. Only then are our souls filled with the vision of a God who does not give His glory to another, and our hearts inflamed with gratitude for the fatherly love we are receiving from this great God.

God the Holy Spirit has prepared His own instrument for the building and maintaining of faith. "The Word is the instrument by which the Lord dispenses to believers the illumination of His Spirit."³ The Galatian Christians received the Spirit by the hearing of faith, that is by the hearing of the Word of God which demands faith (Gal. iii. 2).

The One who inspired the Word illumines both our sin-darkened heart and the Word, so that "In His light we see light" (Ps. xxxvi. 9). The Holy Ghost shines in our hearts that we may apprehend the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Only by being in God can we know God. Thus "the actualizing power of faith comes alone through the agency of the Holy Spirit". Credo Deo Deum.

We insist, as cordially as anyone, that God uses the revelation which took place once for all in a present action taking place to-day. This gives the Word of God, rather than the sacrament, a personal encounter rather than a material connection, the place of emphasis as the centre of the Church's life and worship.⁴ Only we understand and designate this current action of God as *present application*, not as *future revelation*.

¹ Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, p. 71.

² *Re-thinking Missions*, p. 44.

³ Calvin, *Institutes*.

⁴ Cf. Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pp. 135, 140, 77.

And we concur with Spurgeon: "Application is the work of God alone."

Two things are necessary for sight, light and a seeing eye. Every ray of the Divine glory in its merciful ministry of redemption shines from the face of Jesus Christ. But sin has so darkened our spiritual discernment that even the Word of the Cross is foolishness to us until our minds are enlightened, our stony hearts are melted, and our craven wills are renewed by the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit. Just because the Spirit accompanies the preaching of the Gospel, effectually working faith in the hearts of hearers (2 Cor. iii. 3; 1 Cor. ii. 4-5; xii. 3; 1 Thess. i. 5; Eph. ii. 8), He is designated "the Spirit of faith" (2 Cor. iv. 13). Faith is revealed to our minds and confirmed to our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Our faith does not rest on the shifting opinion of men; it is neither a bare figment of our imagination, nor a mere leap of our weak and wicked wills to God; nor yet the acceptance of God primarily on the testimony of the Church. Faith is a confidence graven on our hearts by the finger of the living God. "That alone is true faith which the Spirit of God seals in our hearts."¹ As the illumination of the Holy Spirit, faith is a knowledge of God rooted in the depths of the heart.

Thus diametrically contradicting humanistic thought the New Testament denies that faith is a conjecture, or an uncertainty, and expressly commends it as a full assurance. Abraham did not doubt the promises of God in unbelief, but waxed strong in faith . . . being fully assured that what He had promised He is able also to do (Rom. iv. 20-1). To ask in faith means a prayer "wholly free from doubt"² (James i. 6; cf. 1 Tim. ii. 8). "Faith is an assurance of things hoped for, a certainty of things not seen" (Heb. xi. 6). Faith produces full assurance (Heb. x. 22; cf. 1 Thess. i. 5).

Happily, this New Testament doctrine has had and does have advocates. At the time of the Reformation Patrick Hamilton declared, "faith is a certainty", and Calvin defined faith as "a certain and stedfast knowledge".³ With obvious reference to John's *a fortiori*, "if we receive the testimony of men, the

¹ *Institutes*, I, vii, v.

² Thayer, *Lexicon of the New Testament*.

³ *Certa cognitio*. "He was concerned for the unconditional certitude of faith," A. Lang, citing S. P. Lee's *Het Geloofsbegrif van Calvijn*, p. 26, *Evangelical Quarterly*, January 6, 1932.

testimony of God is greater", Thornwell writes: "No authority can be higher than the direct testimony of God, and no certainty can be greater than that imparted by the Spirit shining on the Word." B. M. Palmer found in Colossians ii. 2 a fourfold intensification of language used to express the entire certainty of Christianity and hence described faith as "certitude of the truth in its reality and its actual appropriation to practical ends".¹ P. T. Forsyth declares, "faith is Christian certainty".² Dean Doumergue reminds us, "if it be a horrible sacrilege to suspect any revelation coming from Him either of deceit, or of uncertainty, or of ambiguity, then must we not affirm the certitude of that which He has revealed?" Schaefer reasons that since a living faith is wrought by the presence of the living God and rests on His unchanging grace it is a certainty of God and of His salvation.³ And the last Moderator of the Church of Scotland takes up the refrain, asserting that: "He who recognises a voice in his own soul as an echo . . . of that voice which rings from the New Testament, the absolutely authoritative Word of God, has the highest and most joyous certainty that a man can have on earth."⁴

(b) *The Efficacy of Faith.*

Archimedes, the Greek mathematician, declared that if he only had a place on which to stand, a fulcrum on which to rest his lever, he could move the world. Just because faith has its fulcrum in the Beyond, its leverage in the Lord, its anchorage in the Almighty it is "the victory that overcomes the world" (1 John v. 4). By her sure foundation in the unchanging God faith becomes "an energy of the whole soul" a force mighty enough to move mountains. Call the roll of the heroes of faith and you read the list of the men of action, of accomplishment. In presenting a portrait of Stonewall Jackson to the Capital Club in Raleigh, N.C., Woodrow Wilson said: "I do not understand how any man can approach the discharge of the duties of life without faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."⁵ Luther well said: "Your faith is not a dream and fancy, but it is life and deed." Christianity, Judaism, and Mohammedanism all look back to one who was a pilgrim and a sojourner with no

¹ Palmer, B. M., *The Threefold Fellowship and the Threefold Assurance*, pp. 97, 124.

² Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, H. & S., p. 32.

³ Schaefer, *ibid* p. 258-9.

⁴ Lamont, D., *Christ and the World of Thought*, p. 240.

⁵ Daniel, J., *Life of Woodrow Wilson*, p. 258.

earthly city to call his own—to Abraham, the man of faith. The mighty tread of Martin Luther, a miner's son who took God at His Word, shook to the very foundations the ruling powers of Christendom, papacy, empire, scholastic learning. Geneva became the West Point of Protestantism when Calvin expounded the Scriptures with a logic impregnated by the passion of conviction. Men complained of the first century believers that they had turned the world upside down (Acts xvii. 6). Faith multiplies a man's impact upon life a hundredfold. The world has been moved, the world will be moved and moulded by the men of faith.

“Faith is like the God to whom it refers.” And “that which is wrought and accomplished of faith by God or by the Spirit of God signifies that faith is something totalitarian or absolute”.¹

Thornwell describes faith as an intuition awakened by the Holy Spirit. This heavenly vision diffuses itself through every power of the soul, undergirding and intensifying every function of personality, rectifying and enlightening the reason, purifying the heart, sanctifying the imagination, renewing the will. Or as Dr. Palmer expressed it in terms of an older psychology: “The principle of holiness breaks the power of reigning sin and directs anew the faculties of the soul. The mind perceives truth under the new light which is shed upon it; the conscience renders its judgment under a new code which it accepts; the heart turns to a new love which attracts it, and the will, polarized afresh, impels in another course than before.”

On its intellectual side Christian belief is not anti-rational; rather in this aspect “faith is only reason enlightened and rectified by grace”.² Apart from grace reason is so darkened by sin that it can no more appreciate redemptive truth than one who is colour-blind can appreciate the manifold hues of autumn, or one who refuses to look at a stained glass window except from without the cathedral can enjoy its rich tints and hallowed artistry. Rectified by grace reason discovers in the Word a temple of holiness that could have only God for its architect, beholds a beacon of truth which shines in its own light and illumines all about it, finds a power for life which can only be

¹ Schaefer, E., *Theozentrische Theologie*, II, 256-7.

² Thornwell, I. 52. Cf. Berdyaev: “Faith does not abandon reason, it carries reason with it; but reason is transformed and illuminated.” Dickie, E. P., *Religion in Life*, Winter, 1936.

the energy of the Almighty. Faith is, thus, a conviction produced by evidence.¹ In other words, the *evidence* that the Scriptures are the Word of God is in the Scriptures themselves. The *capacity* to discern this evidence is given by the Holy Spirit. Faith directs the mind to God as the unifying centre and source of all activities. There is one God, but a diversity of workings (1 Cor. xiii. 4-6). Faith teaches us that complete coherence is in God, the absolute reason; and hence, that it is more reasonable for us to walk by faith than to fancy we can attain an absolute coherence with our finite and relative minds. By placing our trust in God, faith enables us to concentrate without fear upon the present duty. Securing our hearts in One who feeds the tiny birds and clothes even the lilies, faith makes it reasonable for a believer to share his meagre store with others in need. We can care for others, for He careth for us. The logic of faith reasons that if we fear God we have no one else to fear, or, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. viii. 31). He maketh all things to work together for good to those who love Him.

Again, "faith worketh by love" (Gal. v. 6). "A believing act is essentially a loving act. It is a giving of personal confidence. It implies the outgo of the self toward another."² Faith wrought such a devotion to the Lord in the heart of Abraham that he became known as the friend of God. Christian faith is love for and loyalty to Jesus Christ. When our Lord took our punishment and offered Himself an expiatory sacrifice to God, He at the same time flung Himself at love, that great dynamo of human action. There is an incentive in His love for us. "We love, because He first loved us" (1 John iv. 19). The grace of God floods our hearts with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Like a mighty ocean breaking all around us the flood-tide of His love constraineth our love. Revealing to our wondering eyes the love that brought Christ to die for sinners, the Holy Ghost sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts (Rom. v. 5). The work of the Spirit in our hearts, the love of the Father in giving His only-begotten and the love of Christ for us are the dynamics of faith. And since "God is greater than our heart" (1 John iii. 20), Christian faith is something more than a mere philosophy of loyalty. It is loyalty to the One altogether lovely, engendered by the Holy Spirit and sustained

¹ Palmer, in *Southern Presbyterian Review*, 1848.

² A. B. D. Alexander.

by the living presence of Him who loveth us. Or as Paul expressed it: "Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me." Love for Christ expresses itself particularly in love for the brotherhood, for

"The Church our blest Redeemer saved
With His own precious blood."

Likewise it calls for love for the lost for whom Christ died. It binds the Great Commission upon our hearts, causing us to realize that we are debtors to those who have never heard the message of salvation from God's own holy Word.

One of the most beautiful pictures of the faith that worketh by love is found in the record of a martyrdom in Carthage, March 7, 203. The Roman authorities surprised and arrested a communicant class composed of half a dozen catechumens preparing for Church membership. Notable in the group were Perpetua, a noble Roman matron and mother, and Felicitas, a slave who became a mother before her martyrdom. The lady was appealed to by her father with flatteries, threats, entreaties for his sake and for the sake of the baby at her breast to deny her Lord. She replied that as truly as one could not call a table other than a table, a lamp other than a lamp, so no one could call her anything other than a Christian. When they were taken into the arena a wild cow tossed both mothers to the dirt. Lifting herself, Perpetua hastily pinned together her torn garments and arranged her dishevelled hair. Unbound locks were a sign of mourning and this was to be her day of triumph, to-day she was to be the bride of Christ. Then, seeing that her companion had been unable to rise, the Roman lady reached down to lift the slave mother, and the arena saw faith working by love, a sisterhood that knows no boundaries, manifested in Christian martyrdom.

Rooted in the highest reason, working by love, the mightiest dynamic of the heart, the believing soul has a certain conviction on which it acts, a principle and a power producing "new movements and works in men". Acting upon and through the will, the spiritual principle of saving faith secures an actual appropriation of the Saviour and all His benefits for the soul. Faith sees the purpose of God moving through the ages, the Kingdom of God actualizing itself in life, and undertakes the

“good works which God hath before ordained that one should walk in”. Faith bows our wills to God’s will and presents our bodies living sacrifices in His service. Faith moved the wills and the bodies of the patriarchs and the apostles to go out not knowing whither they went. By faith Moses made life’s great choice. “The mighty dynamic of faith lifted and drove him to a complete surrender of his will in faithful and fearless obedience.”¹ By refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, this Hebrew became known as “Moses the man of God”. Acting upon the will faith shows itself by its fruits. Rooted in God it fruits in a life of service. By faith we “worship God in the Church and serve Him in the world”. Amid confusion, compromise and concession, faith, ever and anon, lifts the banner of testimony. “The faith of David made him proclaim the fidelity and goodness of God. The faith of Paul made him, despite all the suffering it brought upon him, proclaim the gospel with full assurance of its truth and of his own participation in its benefits.”² In the midst of the turmoil of “Nicodemites”, Anabaptists, mystics and German interims, the faith of Calvin held aloft the standard of God’s Word, as the sole and sufficient rule for His people. “Having the same Spirit of faith, according as it is written, ‘I have believed, therefore have I spoken’, we also believe, therefore we speak” (2 Cor. iv. 13). Faith recognizes, with Calvin, that “the chief good consists in the practice of righteousness in obedience to the commands of God; and that the ultimate end of a happy life is to be beloved by Him”.

Faith is the one thing needful for this life and for that which is to come. By faith alone Abraham forsook home, city and family and went out not knowing whither he went. The one abiding possession of these nomad patriarchs was their faith. And the Epistle to the Hebrews is written to teach the early Jewish believers that faith, the one great thing they need, will abide when temple, city and nation have perished. They have Jesus the Alpha and the Omega of faith, what else matters?

On one occasion Spurgeon entered his pulpit directly from visits to several of his members who were on their death beds, and declared that the manifestation of the reality of their

¹ Clark, Dr. Melton, in *Daily Manna*, 1937.

² Hodge, Charles, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, H. & S., p. 97.