

On Faith, Hope, and Love

1. Properly understood, the whole relation of a human being to God is comprehended by the word "faith," understood as comprising not only the passive moment of trust or confidence *in* God, but also the active moment of loyalty or fidelity *to* God. Thus the formula is correct that we are saved *by* grace *through* faith; for, as Mr. Wesley rightly observes, "The end is, in one word, salvation; the means to attain it, faith." Or, more sharply still, "Faith is the condition, and the only condition, of sanctification, exactly as it is of justification."

2. Since, however, faith by its very nature is *belief that* as well as *belief in* (in the twofold sense of trust in and loyalty to), there is justification for characterizing our relation to God by speaking not only of faith but also of hope and love. For the faith through which we are saved is not merely *belief that*, but also, and more fundamentally, *belief in*; and insofar as "faith" is taken, as it may be, and often has been taken, to mean merely *belief that*, there is reason to say that we are saved, not by faith alone, but only by faith together with hope (i.e., trust or confidence in God) and love (i.e., loyalty or fidelity to God as well as to all to whom God is loyal or faithful). "Hope" and "love," in other words, express respectively the passive and the active moments of faith itself, understood concretely as *belief in*, which is to say, trust in and loyalty to God Godself, as distinct from being understood abstractly as *belief that* God is, that God is this or that kind of God, and so on, i.e., beliefs *about* God.

3. All of the above may be said to apply, I think, even if one insists that there is an inauthentic as well as an authentic mode of faith. For if there is an inauthentic mode of faith, there is also an inauthentic mode of trusting in God and of being loyal to God, and hence, on the use of the term here clarified, an inauthentic mode of hope and love as well. The criterion of the difference between authentic and inauthentic faith, hope, and love is, of course, whether God *alone* is or is not the one in whom we trust and to whom we are loyal.

4. All of this suggests that it is indeed appropriate to speak of faith as *fides perdurans*, i.e., faith enduring in hope, and as *fides operans*, i.e., faith working through love.

5. Since hope and love are really moments of faith itself—respectively, its passive and active moments—they, too, are properly distinguished from the *works* (or fruit) in which faith perforce finds expression. Otherwise put: the works of faith as such are also the works of hope and love.

6. There is the further reflection that it is precisely faith in its passive sense of trust or hope that is "peculiarly human" (H. Richard Niebuhr). Faith in the sense of loyalty or love may also be meaningfully ascribed to God, as is in fact done in scripture. But it would be inappropriate to speak of God as trusting or hoping in anything beyond Godself, because it is precisely our radical contingency as human beings that distinguishes us from God as the sole necessary existent and that alone makes it appropriate, indeed, necessary to speak of our loyalty to or love of God as arising only out of our prior trust or hope in God.

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