

For a long time now, I've thought that our basic faith as human beings is

nothing utterly simple or lacking in complexity, but, at best, a unity in diversity or a structured whole, involving **several** constitutive moments. In fact, one is tempted to say that we live not so much by faith as by faiths, by a number of basic beliefs whose exact relation to one another we may well discover to be an existential as well as a reflective problem.

Thus, for example, there is the basic belief tacitly presupposed by our whole enterprise of scientific explanation as organized in the several special sciences. This is the belief that the world of events of which we are a part is so ordered that our experience of phenomena in the past and the present warrants our having certain expectations of the future. Or to give another example, there is the belief underlying all our moral behavior and language that some course of action open to us ought to be followed and that it ought to be a course which, so far as possible, includes the realization rather than the frustration of the various relevant interests affected by our action. These beliefs certainly are not the only ones that might be mentioned, and simply mentioning them is far from expressing an adequate understanding of their places in the faith by which we live (OT: 75 f.).

In all of this, as I've acknowledged, I've been furthered in my thinking not only by Whitehead and Hartshorne as well as Santayana, but also, especially, by Collingwood. But I've more and more come to realize that perhaps no one's thinking is more supportive of my whole outlook than H. Richard Niebuhr's. Dating from my first reading of his little essay, "Life Is Worth Living," probably some time along in the late 'seventies or early 'eighties, I've been increasingly struck by how closely our two ways of thinking converge. What I take to be the principal points of our convergence can be summarized as follows:

1. There is a faith given with life itself, without which one cannot live. To give it up is to give up life.

2. There are three main forms of this faith underlying respectively the domains of knowledge, conduct, and worship. Thus there are "the faith in reality," "the faith in right," and "the faith in meaning."

3. Reason cannot question faith in any of its three main forms, because reason works in all three domains on the basis of faith. What reasoning on the basis of faith can do, however, is to make faith in each of its forms more critical and therefore more rational.

4. Progress, accordingly, is not from faith to reason, but from faith to faith—from a naive, uncritical faith to a mature, critical faith that accepts the limitations of mind and will.

5. Youth is the time when inherited beliefs in all domains usually become problematic enough that new beginnings need to be made. Then it is that the mind, in seeking sure foundations upon which it can build the superstructure of knowledge, conduct, and worship, discovers that the only sure foundations have already been laid in the faith given with life itself, without which one cannot live.

6. Just as mature, critical faith can say, "There is a right, even if all my standards are but poor and imperfect and unrighteous approximations to it," so it can also say both "There is a reality, even if all my beliefs are but poor and imperfect and erroneous approximations to it" and "There is a meaning, even if all my beliefs are but poor and imperfect and idolatrous approximations to it."

One point where HRN is not as clear as Whitehead and Hartshorne are is that our basic faith in all of its forms is grounded in immediate experience. Thus Whitehead asks, for example, "What is the dominating insight whereby we presuppose ourselves as actualities within a world of actualities?"—his assumption being, obviously, that there is—indeed, must be—some such insight (*MT*: 146). Or he can say of the "deeper faith" in reason underlying not only science, but all rational inquiry, that "it springs from direct inspection of the nature of things as disclosed in our immediate present experience" (*SMW*: 27 f.). Similarly, Hartshorne insists that "theological terms, though literal, derive this literal meaning from intuitions which are not conspicuous in normal human experience, and must be carefully distinguished from other, more conspicuous intuitions with which they may be confused" (*DR*: 38). Although I know of no place where HRN denies, or even questions, such views, I cannot think of any place where he clearly affirms, or implies, them either.