

[1973. In *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*. Carl F.H. Henry, ed. Washington D.C.: Canon Press.]

**FAITH.** Faith is a concept that raises two main problems: (1) its definition or psychological analysis and (2) its function. The second of these, concerned chiefly with the doctrine of justification by faith alone, will be treated only briefly.

Augustine was probably the first to define faith. In his treatise *Concerning the Predestination of the Saints* he said, "Thinking is prior to believing... To believe is nothing other than to think with assent. For not all who think believe... but all who believe think; and they think believing and believe thinking." To the present day the Roman church defines faith as assent, "fiducial assent" (cf. *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1967).

The Reformers, though more concerned with justification, of necessity considered faith. That faith or belief had an intellectual content was universally accepted. Aside from the mystics, Kant was the first to speak of a faith without knowledge. Jacobi, Schleiermacher, some Modernists, and more particularly the contemporary dialectical theologians follow this line. Brunner (q.v.) states, "God and the medium of conceptuality are mutually exclusive." But the Reformers unanimously agreed that belief requires a known object.

The second element in belief is assent. A person may know or understand a proposition and yet not believe it. To believe is to think with assent. Assent is an act of will: it is the voluntary acceptance of the proposition as true.

By combining knowledge and assent Calvin was able to oppose the Romish idea of implicit faith. The *Institutes* (III.2) complain that the schoolmen "have fabricated the notion of implicit faith, a term with which they have honored the grossest ignorance... Is this faith- to understand nothing? Faith consists not in ignorance, but in knowledge."

The early Reformers were inclined to include assurance of salvation in their definition of faith. But there were many variations. Cunningham (cf. bibliography) reports seven different views. Later Reformed theologians definitely excluded assurance (cf. the Westminster Confession), but came to add *fiducia*, as a third element in addition to knowledge and assent. They failed, however, to give an intelligible account of *fiducia*,

restricting themselves to synonyms or illustrations (cf. Thomas Manton, *Exposition of the Epistle of James*, pp.216ff., Marshallton, Del., Sovereign Grace Book Club, 196-). This defective view is so common today that many ministers have never heard of the earlier Reformed views.

The doctrine of faith, like all doctrines, must be deduced from Scripture. One cannot make an empirical analysis of experience and hope to arrive at the Christian position on faith, regeneration, or anything. Because the Scriptural material is so copious, all that can be offered here is a sample study restricted to John. John speaks of faith about one hundred times; more accurately It should be said that John uses the term *faith* only once, while the other ninety-nine times he uses the verb *believe*. Consonant with this, John puts great emphasis on the intellectual content of faith and supports his emphasis by asserting that Christ is the Logos or Reason of God, who himself is truth.

Sometimes the object of the verb believe is a noun or pronoun: name, doctrine, Son, Moses, me, him. No one should conclude from this that belief in a person is any different from belief in a truth, for in most cases it is easy to see the doctrine or proposition in the context even when the word-object is a pronoun (John 4:21; 5:38; 8:31, 45, 46; 10:37).

Twenty-five percent of instances of the verb *believe* have the propositional object written out in full, if not in the verse itself, at least in the context (2:22; 3:12; 4:21, 41, 50; 5:47; 6:69; etc.). These two sets of references show that the immediate and proper object of faith or belief is a proposition. To believe the Son, or me, or Moses, is to believe what the person said.

In contrast, the Liberals of the twentieth century want a “faith” in a god who is unknowable and silent because he is impotent to give us any information to believe. This anti-intellectualism undermines all good news and makes gospel information useless.

But according to John, and Paul as well, assent to doctrine or information is not useless. “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in thy heart that God has raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” Likewise John tells us that those who believe in his name, i.e., believe he is the Messiah, have the right to be children of God (1:12; 3:15, 36); and those who don’t, don’t (3:18). Those who believe have already crossed over from death to life (5:24). Faith or assent is not the cause of life:

it is the evidence of life. Similar ideas are found in 6:40, 47; 7:38; 8:31; 11:25; and particularly 8:51, 52, “If anyone keeps my doctrine, he shall not see death ever.” Obviously this is consistent with the doctrine of justification (q.v.) by faith.

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