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# The expression of faith as the fulfillment of man's life

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THE EXPRESSION OF FAITH AS THE FULFILLMENT OF MAN'S LIFE,

AN ESSAY

SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE INTERDENOMINATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CENTER

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE BACHELOR OF DIVINITY

BY

Grady Butler  
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## PREFACE

The function of faith in man's life has been increasing interest to the writer. Throughout his study at the Inter-denominational Theological Center, he has developed resourceful thoughts concerning the nature and meaning of faith. This paper will deal with the nature of faith, the nature of man, and the function of faith in man's life. An effort is made to show the essential necessity of faith to fulfill man's life.

The writer wishes to express gratitude to Dr. Charles B. Copher, who has given counsel and suggestions throughout the writing of this paper. Also, he would like to thank Dr. Ellis H. Richards, Dr. Joseph A. Johnson, Jr., and Dr. Samuel C. Kincheloe, who discussed ideas and made helpful suggestions that have been of great value to the developing of this paper. Finally, the writer expresses gratitude to his wife, LaConyee, who has been a continued source of inspiration and who did the typing of this paper.

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## INTRODUCTION

Faith has supreme value for the life of mankind. Faith and life are inevitably connected to formulate the core and foundation for the existence of man's life. One has faith in the things that make life for him worth living. Faith keeps alive in one the sparks of hope. By faith one keeps striving to make his hopes a reality. Faith gives hope a vision of reality that helps one to walk where he cannot see. Paul says, "For we walk by faith, not by sight." Faith projects one into a world unseen by natural eyes but seen through the eyes of the Spirit.

In this paper the writer will deal with faith as it is understood within the context of Christianity. The nature of faith is analyzed for its meaning, source and foundations. Secondly, the nature of man is analyzed within the context of the different views of his human nature. Thirdly, the writer will be concerned with showing how the expression of faith in God can lead to a life of wholeness and fulfillment.

## THE NATURE OF FAITH

### What is Faith?

Faith is a concept that has been misunderstood, too often, down through the years. For many, this concept has not grown out of their childhood capacity of understanding. They have kept it in simple formula, so that it could be easily comprehended. However, according to the best theological thinking of our time, man's understanding of faith and its relevance for life has been too immature and fragile. Really, man has not made the effort to plumb the depths of the power and fortitude of faith.

Before going further, the definition of faith should be considered. For a long time, the writer understood the meaning of faith from the Biblical definition in the book of Hebrews --- "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). He held this as a definition that gave the full dimension of the meaning of faith. But as he grew in the graces of theology and science, this definition became inadequate to describe his understanding of the depth, height, and breadth of faith's meaning.

For a more sufficient understanding of the meaning of faith, it is fitting to consider Paul Tillich's definition.

He says, "Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned."<sup>1</sup> He points out that man is concerned about many things in life --- his home, his family, his job and many others --- but faith is something that rests at the heart, the center of one's being. It demands ultimate surrender of one's will and power.

Faith as ultimate concern in one's life demands ultimate fulfillment of one's being. As one responds with ultimate concern, there is a reciprocal yearning to be ultimately fulfilled or satisfied. One does not yield himself in ultimate concern without expecting to receive satisfaction in return.<sup>2</sup> Recently the writer had the opportunity to hear a lecture by Dr. Howard Thurman. In his lecture, he gave the dynamics of commitment in one's life. He said, "When one is committed to something, he yields the nerve center of his life to it." He pointed out that one receives power and influence from the thing to which he is committed. For example, if one's life is committed to sin, he receives the power of sin. Or if one's life is committed to a clean Christian life, his life receives the power and influence of a clean Christian life. This seems to express the deep, concrete and significant dimension of what faith really is.

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 2-3.

## The Source of Faith

The source of faith has continually presented questions to man's understanding. Why has man always believed? What causes one to drive toward a goal when he does not know that the goal exists? There has always been the effort, on the part of man, to reach out to the unknown, to find meaning for his existence, and to provide the basic explanations for the things that he cannot know, but which are, nevertheless, real in his life.

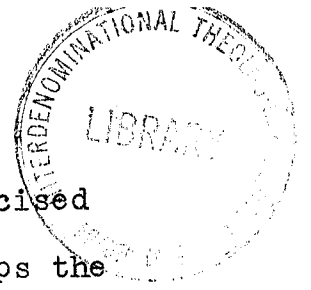
Tillich says, "Man is driven toward faith by his awareness of the infinite to which he belongs, but which he does not own like a possession."<sup>3</sup> The ultimate concern in the life of man is an inevitable quest to achieve a wholeness which he cannot achieve by any other means. There is a restlessness of heart that cannot be satisfied outside the realm of the expression of faith in something that is ultimate. Augustine vividly expressed this idea when he said, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee." Within the flux of life, the soul of man cries out for something beyond himself, something of ultimate value to give meaning to life and its perplexities.

The source of faith also resides in the passion one has for that which he considers to be worthy of his ultimate

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 9.





concern. In this perspective, the act of faith is exercised in a religious response. The power of the ultimate grips the person in a passionate response. In the framework of the Christian faith, the ultimate is referred to as God. Therefore, as one responds to God, the passionate nature of God captures his ultimate concern. Therefore, God, as object, directs the response of individuals who seek the ultimate for their lives. This response creates a passionate effect. In this act of faith, the worship of God is carried out. And God is experienced as the source of faith.<sup>4</sup>

#### Foundations for Faith in God

As one expresses faith in God, his faith is not without some type of foundation. One does not believe in something without grounds for his belief. Belief stems from one's convictions that have been formulated out of his experiences. Along with convictions, mystery plays an important role in the establishment of foundations for belief in God.

Taking a look at experience, it is seen that within the realm of experiences in life, there develops the sufficient grounds for one's believing in God. As things happen to individuals and those around them, and as they respond with ultimate concern for an explanation of what happens to them, they find that faith provides consolation and grounds for continued believing.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-10.

Further considering foundations for faith in God, one must consider knowledge as playing a major role. While acquiring ? in areas such as science, philosophy, theology, psychology, etc., one discovers that these, too, must walk by faith. The ultimate that is acquired in the fields of knowledge needs the light of faith to give it meaning and significance. Faith adds to the puzzle of knowledge the necessary pieces to complete the picture. Experience, knowledge, and the insoluble mysteries of life, all provide foundations for faith. Within themselves they present only a part of the answer; therefore, one must respond in faith to complete their meanings.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>John Kellam, The Foundations of Faith (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1921), p. 30.

## THE NATURE OF MAN

### What is Man?

This is a question that has many answers. Man may be viewed psychologically, sociologically, biologically, theologically, and many other ways. However, the writer is concerned with the basic nature of man as he exists. When one asks the question, "What is man?", many other questions crowd his mind. Some of these are: What is the origin of man?; What is his worth?; and What is his purpose and function in the world? However, the writer will be concerned specifically with the anthropological and the Christian views of man. These two views will be surveyed with the hope of achieving a satisfactory presentation of the basic nature of man.

### The Anthropological View of Man

The science of anthropology views the humanity in man. This view of man reveals the existence of man in the framework of man as a highly developed animal.<sup>6</sup> As an animal, man is viewed according to the animalistic characteristics of his nature. He possesses an anatomy akin to that of the animal.

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<sup>6</sup>Edwin McNeill Poteat, God Makes the Difference (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), p. 55.

The basic needs --- food and shelter --- are essential in his life. He learned to hunt for food, to carry on agriculture for the harvesting of foodstuff. He learned to build places of shelter, and he reproduced himself through offspring. These characteristics of animal life are viewed with emphasis by the anthropologist. But the anthropologist cannot be secure in limiting man's human nature within these perspectives. "Man can understand what he is only if he sees himself within the context of nature, and yet if his understanding does not allow for factors that transcend nature, his knowledge of himself will be faulty."<sup>7</sup>

Man possesses qualities that cannot be defined and exhausted in the realm of the order of nature. He is a specimen that has the characteristic of a highly developed animal, but if his nature is to be truly understood, he must be viewed beyond the confines of the naturalistic order.

#### The Unique Character of Man

The anthropologist recognizes that man is an animal, but he has character that is different from the character of any other animal. This character is explicitly contained in the rational ability of man. He has a mind. He can think and make decisions and adaptations to his environment. His mind is capable of producing an idea. And he has the initiative

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

to develop an idea, to give it direction and meaning. He has a symbol of language that provides him with the capacity to communicate his thoughts and ideas. He has the ability to organize, weigh alternatives, and project his ideas beyond immediate situations.

Man can project his mind into the past by the process of memory, and he can project his mind into the future by the process of imagination and insight. He can gather the past and the future into a precise moment and arrive at an understanding for a given problem. He can be conscious of self and not-self. He has motives, drives, and intellect. These qualities give to man a specific character that makes him different from any other animal.<sup>8</sup>

In viewing the unique character of man, there is another aspect that should be considered. This uniqueness is described in man's desire for progress. Man has a desire to improve himself. He wants to invent, discover, create, and elevate himself. He wants to know more about himself, his environment, his origin and his destiny. He keeps pushing out to new frontiers. He examines, questions, and analyzes the things that are within the grasp of his ability to conceive or comprehend. Man is an adventurer, an explorer of all that he comes in contact with. He does not stay put. These qualities give him a uniqueness of character beyond the ability of any other animal.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

## The Christian View of Man

As man is viewed in the Christian perspective, he is regarded as consisting of body and spirit. According to the Bible, man is associated with God through his spiritual nature. He is considered to have a God-likeness that makes him super-human. The Psalmist refers to man's nature as being just a little lower than God.

What is man that thou art mindful of him,  
and the son of man that thou dost care for him?  
Yet thou hast made him little less than God,  
and dost crown him with glory and honor.<sup>10</sup>

The Christian view of man is understood primarily from the standpoint of God, rather than the uniqueness of his character, or his relation to the order of nature. Man is considered to be made in the image of God. He transcends his human nature through the power of the spiritual content of his nature. By the means of the Spirit, he has ability to maintain a personal relationship with God. But God is always viewed as Father of mankind, and mankind is viewed as children of the Heavenly Father.<sup>11</sup>

There is another view of man within the context of the Christian view that is in contrast with this first idea. This view portrays man as a sinner. He is considered a sinner because he is rebellious toward God. Man possesses a will that

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<sup>10</sup>Psalms 8:4-5, RSV.

<sup>11</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), p. 14.

provides him with the opportunity to commit sin. The Christian conceives of the human evil to be precisely serious, and places it at the center of human personality. Man, as viewed by the Christian, contradicts himself by means of his own true essence. His essence is embodied in his free self-determination. Man commits sin by the wrong use of his freedom, which consequently leads to destruction.<sup>12</sup>

The Christian view of man is contained in a paradoxical presentation. It presents the high spiritual qualities of man that give him transcendence of his human nature. And, at the same time, it gives a serious view of man's evil. This view is much broader than any undertaken by the anthropologist.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

## THE FUNCTION OF FAITH IN MAN'S LIFE

### Fruits of Faith

Out of the experience of the Christian faith grows a fruit of the Spirit. The growth of this fruit is the product of the kind of life one lives. Faith enters the life of man to give it meaning and to bring it to fulfillment. Faith brings nourishment to one's life and supports his inner spirit. At this point, three fruits of faith will be considered.

The first to be discussed is peace of mind. Peace of mind is consistently pursued by man. There is a constant yearning for it. However, peace of mind is a fruit of faith that is produced only after one makes possible the conditions for this fruit to grow and ripen. There can be no peace of mind until one decides to accept the truth. The truth gives one a liberty through Christ which sets the mind free. The truth makes men free, and we can only will to truth as we respond in faith to a living God, who is the source of truth. One's peace of mind is attained only as he yields in faith to a living God.

Peace of mind generates to give one peace of soul. It helps to interpret the experience of reality and the meaning of Christian experience. When there is peace of mind, God can



be worshipped with all of one's mind. It aids in the releasing of feelings and developing of the proper attitude toward God in all experiences of life. One's mind can only rest as he expresses faith in a living God, and knows Him within the experiences of his own life.<sup>14</sup>

Another fruit of faith in a living God is the power to will. One's will gives direction and command to his body. Without power of will, one's life loses the sense of direction and drifts meaninglessly. The first step in developing power of will is to be honest with oneself. In doing so, one places himself bare before God. He surrenders his will to God's will. Thus, he becomes a participant in God's own life. In the process, God's will becomes his will.

In worship man's life is lifted up into God's life; and God's life, with direction and power, takes hold of man's whole will and gives it concern and creative drive. Those who have never learned the secret of quiet surrender and patient waiting for God to act through them have never had their lives pruned to rich fruit bearing.<sup>15</sup>

Freedom from fear is a third fruit of faith in a living God. As one conceives of God as his Father, he receives a freedom from fear as he trusts God for his life. Because of his relationship with God, he has the ability to trust in life and believe that God is in ultimate control of it. When faith

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<sup>14</sup>Nels F. S. Ferre, "A Living God," Fruits of Faith, ed. J. Richard Spann (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), p. 12.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

in God is real, one simply trusts in the whole of life through love. He can put trust in others, and he himself is able to live with himself. The fruit of freedom from fear is obtained as one expresses **faith** in a living God who frees man from the fears of life, others, himself, and the world.<sup>16</sup>

### Faith and Reason

Faith and reason are no longer viewed as contradictory to each other. Traditional thinking about their not having use for each other has been eradicated. Taking a look at faith and reason in light on contemporary theology, it can be seen that they need each other. Faith can give meaning to reason and reason can give meaning to faith. However, one must recognize the distinct quality that is inherent within each of them. Faith must not deny reason, and reason must not deny the challenge of faith. Rather, faith and reason must cooperate for the common good without ever confusing their distinctive natures, functions, and fields.<sup>17</sup>

Reason keeps faith to its proper task. Reason serves as a guide to give direction and meaning to the activity of faith. When one uses reason, he makes an intellectual response to reality. Faith cannot operate without reason. Reason provides a check to determine the validity of faith. Therefore as one

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>17</sup>Nels F. S. Ferre, Faith and Reason (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946), p. 230.

expresses faith, reason functions at the same time to give direction to it. However, faith tells more about God than reason can. Faith goes beyond the realm of descriptive reasoning. Faith gives one conviction of things he has not seen. Therefore, it must be concluded that faith and reason need each other and the product of the two can provide power to transform the world.<sup>18</sup>

### Faith and the Wholeness of Man

The expression of faith, by man, in the living God, has always functioned to give to his life meaning and fulfillment. In many instances man has tried to fulfill his life by developing himself, but at every attempt he has not succeeded. This was because he had placed confidence and hope in his own finite limitations. He reached out and tried to grasp the universe within the context of his own understanding of it, but he failed at such an undertaking. His reason, intellect, and creative powers could not match the mysteries and complexities of the universe. In the process of man's seeking to understand the universe and himself, he discovered that there is a Supreme Being who is in control of the universe. This Supreme Being is considered to be the living God who is the ultimate source of man's understanding of the universe and of himself.

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 225.

Man has learned that he must respond to God in faith. His faith in God becomes the means of fulfilling his life and making him whole. Through faith the wholeness of man can be attained. When Jesus sent the ten lepers to cleanse themselves, and only one returned, He said, "...thy faith hath made thee whole."<sup>19</sup>

One cannot achieve wholeness unless he yields his whole being to the power of faith in the living God.<sup>20</sup> His nature must be transformed by the power of the Spirit. The expression of faith is necessary to provide fulfillment in man's life. His rational nature is not capable of providing the meaning and understanding to life and to himself. Therefore, man is made whole, and his life is fulfilled as he expresses faith in the living God.

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<sup>19</sup>St. Luke 17:19.

<sup>20</sup>Samuel H. Miller, "The Wholeness of Man," Theology Today, XVIII (July, 1961), 148.

## SUMMARY

Faith is an inevitable necessity for the fulfillment and the development of wholeness in the life of mankind. Faith fulfills a need that lies at the heart of man's existence. This need is of ultimate significance, and only faith can provide the ultimate demands that are required.

The nature of man is viewed in many ways. Man is viewed as a highly developed animal, and, also, as one possessing a uniqueness of character because of his rational capacity. He is viewed as a creature made in the image of God. The nature of man reveals the existence of a living God, who created and sustains his life. As man observes the order of nature and the complexities of life that are beyond his comprehension, he finds that his life must be lived by faith.

Faith provides ultimate fulfillment in man's life. As he expresses himself to God in ultimate concern, his life receives wholeness and meaning. Reason and faith complement each other. Reason keeps faith guided to its primary goal. It serves as a guide to give direction and meaning to the activity of faith. However, faith tells more about God than reason can, and goes beyond the realm of descriptive reasoning. Therefore, when faith and reason are blended together, a force will be discovered that has the power to transform the world.

Man needs faith in the living God. Only as he responds to God in ultimate concern will his life be ultimately fulfilled.

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