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# The Faith That Moves Mountains



Izvor Collection



P R O S V E T A

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# **The Faith That Moves Mountains**



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## Chapter One

# Faith, hope and love

When someone asks if you have faith, they are really asking: 'Do you believe in God?' These days, the word 'faith' belongs almost exclusively to the domain of religion. Faith and religion are so intimately linked that people tend to assimilate the two. They are inclined to forget about the other two virtues, hope and love, which together with faith make up what are known as the 'theological virtues', virtues whose direct object is God. To gain a better understanding of faith, therefore, we must begin by situating it in relation to hope and love.

It was St Paul, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, who said: *And now faith, hope, and charity abide, these three; and the greatest of these is charity.*

You must not be surprised if I use the word 'love' instead of 'charity'. I do so because, 'charity' has lost the meaning of spiritual love it had when Christianity first began. At that time it was used to distinguish the virtue from the unbridled impulse of the passions that is generally meant by love. Today, the word 'charity'

designates the altruistic feeling which motivates people to help those in need. This is why I prefer to use the word 'love'.

Faith, hope and love... If you ask people what these words represent for them, most of them will just shrug their shoulders. Some will perhaps remember having heard talk of the three virtues in church when they were children, but all that seems so far away, it does not have much meaning for them any more.

In actual fact, whoever they may be and whatever their degree of evolution or education, all human beings believe, hope and love. But if they are so often disappointed by their beliefs, hopes and loves, it is because they do not know where or in whom to place them. In fact, they almost certainly do not know what it means to love God or to believe or hope in him.

An example of these three virtues, faith hope and love, was given to us by Jesus in that episode in the Gospels in which the devil came to tempt him. I have already explained the underlying meaning of the three temptations,<sup>1</sup> but there is still much more to be learned from them.

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But he answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God".'*

*Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you," and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone". Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test".'*

*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! For it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him".'*

*Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.*

A careful study of the three suggestions the devil put before Jesus reveals that they concern the three planes of being: the physical, the astral (feelings and desires), and the mental (thought).

Jesus was hungry and the devil suggested that he transform the desert stones into loaves of bread. Bread symbolizes food and, in a more general way, all that allows us to maintain our existence on the physical plane.

Next, the devil took Jesus to the holy city of Jerusalem, placed him on the highest point of the temple, and told him to throw himself down. And in order to convince him that he had nothing to fear, he even quoted Psalm 91:

*He will command his angels concerning you, and on their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.*

The temple is the symbol of religion, that is, of the heart. And because the Father loves Jesus and Jesus loves his Father, the devil tried to convince him that, whatever he did, the son of God could always count on divine protection.

Finally, the devil took Jesus to the top of a high mountain and promised to give him all the kingdoms of the earth if he consented to bow down before him. The high mountain represents the head, the mental plane, the mind or intellect. But the intellect is the faculty that leads man to consider himself the lord of the world to the point where he defies God. It is that senseless pride that led some of the angels to defy God, and it is this that the devil hoped to awaken in Jesus.

Jesus resisted each of the temptations offered by the devil, because he had learned to master his physical body (against the temptation of physical food he set spiritual food), his astral body (he refused to put God's love to the test in vain), and his mental body (he refused to consider himself God's equal and chose to remain his servant).

It is very important to understand the meaning of the three temptations to which Jesus was exposed, because we too have to confront them in our everyday lives, and if we want to make progress in our inner life, we must begin by seeing all this very clearly. The importance of clear-sightedness becomes evident



when we see that this episode is at the beginning of the Gospel. Jesus had just been baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan; he had not yet chosen his first disciples or begun to teach. Those who want to put themselves at the service of God must begin by resolving the question of these three temptations.

You will say that the Creator has given us a physical body, a heart and a mind, and that we must provide them with the nourishment they need. Yes, of course, this is indispensable. But there are different kinds of nourishment and different ways of procuring it. It is precisely here that we need faith, hope and love to guide us in our choice of food and of the means to obtain it, for hope relates to the physical body, faith to the astral body, and love to the intellect or mental body.

Bread, in the broadest sense of the word, is thus the symbol of whatever enables us to maintain our existence on the physical plane. And what is the fate of those who do not put their hope in God? They are fearful for their physical security and have only one idea in mind: to look after their business, pile up reserve stocks, increase their profits. Not only do they allow themselves to be completely absorbed by the most prosaic cares, but they are led to be unjust and dishonest toward others. They have no scruples about short-changing others or riding roughshod over them, and in this way they close themselves to any spiritual nourishment.

To hope in God is to free oneself from all fear for tomorrow: 'Will we have what we need to eat, to

clothe ourselves and to put a roof over our heads?' In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus warns us against this fear for the morrow: *So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.*

If hope is related to the physical body, faith, for its part, is linked to the heart. And the heart is the temple in which God abides. When Jesus answered, *Do not put the Lord your God to the test*, it was a declaration of faith in the God that dwelt within him, and he refused to put him to the test. Faith does not consist in throwing yourself into the abyss in the conviction that God will send angels to cushion your fall. Anyone who imagines that God protects fools who deliberately expose themselves to danger is simply entertaining false beliefs. And the reason why human beings suffer so many disappointments in their lives, why they so often meet with failure instead of the success they counted on, is that they confuse faith and belief.

Finally, the third temptation, which is related to the head, can only be overcome by love. The devil had taken Jesus to the top of a high mountain. In us, it is our head which represents the mountain. Those who reach the summit possess knowledge, authority and power. But history has demonstrated that those who obtain power have great difficulty in resisting all the possibilities which open up before them – money, pleasure and glory – and think that they now have the right to do whatever they please. So many truly outstanding people have succumbed in the end, vanquished by their own pride. Only the love of the

Being of all beings can shield us from these dangers. It is he who has given us all our faculties and talents, and if we love him sincerely and deeply, that love will preserve us from pride.

Hope, faith and love are therefore the only forces that make it possible for us to go through life in the best physical, psychic and spiritual conditions. Hope in God preserves us from the anxieties of our material existence. Faith in him frees us from the grip of illusions. Finally, love of him enables us to reach and secure our hold on the summit without risk of falling.

Study the lives of those who have faith, hope and love, and see how they work, how they grow in beauty and vitality, how they manage to face up to difficulties and overcome trials, finding in each occasion a new opportunity for enrichment. These three virtues seem very remote to you, because your understanding of them is too abstract. You fail to sense that they constitute the three pillars of your psychic life. To help you to understand and sense their full importance, I will give you an exercise to do.

Faith, hope and love are called ‘theological’ virtues because it is through them that we can be in touch with God. Here again the trouble is that human beings have a tendency to see God as an abstraction. Most people – if they do not actually picture him as an old man with a white beard who spends his time recording their good and especially their bad deeds, in order to reward or punish them – do not know quite how to envisage him. But I have never ceased to tell you: the best possible depiction of God is the sun, the

one that pours forth life, light and warmth. Only the life, light and warmth of the sun can give us some idea of the power, wisdom and love of God.<sup>2</sup> And it is up to us to establish a relationship with that divine power, wisdom and light. How can we do this? Through hope, faith and love. Yes, it is through our hope, our faith and our love that we make contact with the quintessence of the Godhead: Wisdom, Power and Love.

Here then is the exercise: Recite the following prayer slowly, concentrating on every word: ‘Dear God, I love your wisdom; I have faith in your love; I hope in your power.’ Our love puts us in touch with divine wisdom; through faith we communicate with divine love, and through hope we are in contact with divine power. These notions are very simple, but they need further explanation.

‘Lord, I love your wisdom.’ Wisdom has an affinity with the cold, and love with warmth. Our heart needs a great deal of warmth, a great deal of fervour and enthusiasm, but it senses that it is ignorant, that it lacks discernment and restraint, and that it is apt to make a great many mistakes for which it suffers. So it must love and seek to acquire what it lacks and needs: wisdom.

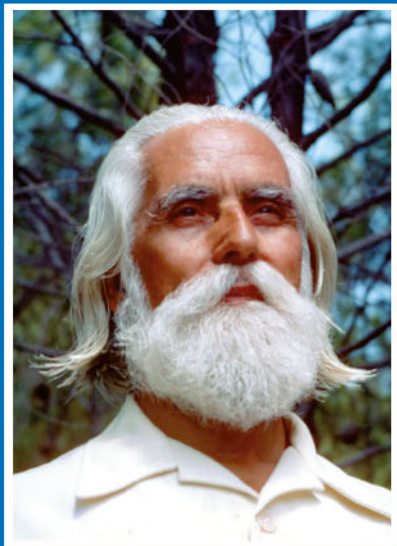
‘I believe in your love.’ We do not need to love love, but we do need to believe in it. A child believes in its mother’s love; this is why it feels safe with her. Love and faith are linked. If you believe in someone he will love you; if you love someone he will believe in you. And because the love of the Creator is the very foundation of the universe, it is in him and in

him alone that we can have absolute faith. Our faith in beings and things can rest on a firm foundation only if we have placed our trust first of all in divine love.

‘I hope in your power.’ How often people say that it is hope that keeps them alive! At the beginning of every year, people exchange good wishes and express the hope that the new year will be better than the one before and bring solutions to all their problems. But what are these hopes based on? Money... arms... weak, unstable people! This is why they are always disappointed. The fact is that we can count only on the true strength, the true stability of divine omnipotence.

And now, look at the way this prayer establishes links with the divine world. When you say, ‘Lord, I love your wisdom’, you link your love to divine wisdom and God allows you to be wiser because of that love. When you say, ‘Lord, I believe in your love’, your faith attracts divine love and God loves you because you believe in him. When you say, ‘I hope in your power’, your hope appeals to God’s power, and it begins to protect you because of that hope.

Hope, faith and love correspond respectively to the form, the content and the meaning. Hope is linked to form (the physical body), faith to the content (the heart), and love to the meaning (the intellect). It is the form which prepares and preserves the content. The content brings strength, and the only *raison d’être* of strength is that it has meaning.



*The distinguished philosopher and spiritual Master, Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov (1900 - 1986), was born in Bulgaria. In 1937 he moved to France, where he lived and taught for almost fifty years until his death. One of the most striking aspects of the Master's teaching is the enormous variety of ways in which he presents the one central theme of man and his growth in perfection. Whatever the question under discussion, it is invariably dealt with in terms of how man can better conduct his life.*

Faith goes hand in hand with long-term work. It is the fruit of efforts repeated day after day. Faith is something that lives, something that we must never separate from our everyday life. This is what we need to understand if we are to discover the hidden meaning of Jesus' words: if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move.

We can move a mountain, but only if we do not rush at it, thinking to move it in one go. We can move a mountain, but only if we are ready to move it stone by stone. Every stone we move – that is, every time we succeed in something, however small – increases our faith; we begin to feel that we are stronger and more stalwart, more in control of the situation. And then one day, if we look back at the progress we have made and find that half the work is already done, it is just possible that our faith will have become so strong that we can move the rest in one go.