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Faith Triumphant—Echoes from the Epistle to the Hebrews

By PAUL M. BRETSCHER

WHO wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews? No one knows. But every reader of this epistle does know that its author was a man of faith. The term "faith" appears some 30 times in the epistle. Together with related terms, it constitutes one of the chief motifs in the epistle. On the basis of this epistle, we shall examine I. The Nature of Faith, and II. The Triumph of Faith.

I. THE NATURE OF FAITH

Faith is belief that God "exists and that He rewards those who seek Him" (11:6); that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who as High Priest appointed by God made purification for sins, who became the $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$, who sat down at the right hand of His Father, who supports His children in their trials and temptations, and who will return "to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him" (9:28. All Biblical quotations are from the RSV).

Faith is obedience to the Word of God. For the author of Hebrews nonfaith, or unbelief, is disobedience to the Word of God. Therefore this author sometimes uses the terms "unbelief" and "disobedience" interchangeably (3:18, 19; 4:6; 4:11). Faith is also dependence on the Word of God communicated by God to Moses and the prophets, or spoken by the Lord and attested by those who heard the Lord Jesus (2:2, 3).

Faith is "seeing Him who is invisible" (11:27) but also that which is invisible.

What was it that enabled Moses not to fear the anger of Pharaoh? Moses endured as one who saw the invisible God. Noah did not see the deluge coming, and yet he constructed the ark (11:7). Abraham was called to go out to the land of promise, "and he went out, not knowing where he was to go" (11:8). Luther puts it this way: "Faith's characteristic is to see what no one else sees, and not to see what everyone else sees (J. Ficker, *Luthers Vorlesung über den Hebräerbrief*, 1929, p. 56). Calvin has this interpretation:

To faith things that are not visible become manifest; faith is a vision of something that cannot be seen; it is apprehension of what is dark and hidden; it is the presence of that which is not present; it is the evidence of that which is concealed. [Quoted by Otto Michel in his *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, 1949, p. 249]

Faith is confidence and trust. "We are His house if we hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope" (3:6). "We share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence" (3:14). "Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace" (4:16). "Since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (10:19-21).

Faith is patience and perseverance in times of temptation, suffering, and persecution. Therefore the author encourages his readers: "Let us hold fast our confession" (4:14). "We desire each of you to

show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (6:11,12). "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering" (10:23). "Do not throw away your confidence . . . for you have need of endurance so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised" (10:35,36). "Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (12:1).

Faith includes knowledge of basic Christian truths. "Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of God's Word" (5:12; see also 6:1 ff.). Unfortunately, the cognitive factor involved in the Christian faith is questioned or even denied by many in our day so that John Herman Randall in his *The Role of Knowledge in Western Religion* (1958) is hardly making an overstatement with his criticism:

The theologians themselves are vying to insist that theology is not a form of knowledge, but the symbol of something else not intellectual at all: of moral values and social objectives, of aesthetic thrills and yearnings, or of therapeutic techniques. Since the theologians refuse to find any place for intelligibility, the physicists rush in to identify God with the "cosmic yeast." Whether religion be a crusade against the profit system, or a delicious feeling in the spine, or an amateur psychotherapy, or the blasphemies of mathematical physicists tempted by Gifford lectureships, no one today, it is clear, bothers to know God. [P. 138]

On the other hand, it is refreshing to note that there are also those in our day who recognize that Christian faith does possess

a cognitive factor. We quote from the May issue of the *British Lutheran*, in which the author publishes a statement made by A. Kevington Wood, minister of Southlands Methodist Church, York, England, and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. The Rev. Mr. Wood writes:

There is a growing awareness in all the denominational bodies that the challenge of the age calls for a return to the fundamentals. For one thing, there is a *firmer emphasis on the Word* [italics in the original]. Even outside the circle of those who traditionally accept the inspiration and inerrant authority of the Scriptures, there is a refreshing readiness to concede the primacy of revelation. . . . This leads us to note a *stronger insistence on doctrine* [italics in the original]. The time is past when it could be said—as it was by a witty critic—that any stigma would do to beat dogma. There is general recognition that belief is not an optional matter and that the Christian faith is capable of definition and has indeed been so defined in Scriptures and the historical creeds.

Faith, according to the author of Hebrews, is, finally, a divine power which motivates and activates the Christian in all manifestations of his life. "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain" (11:4). "By faith he [Abraham] sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign land" (11:9). "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt" (11:24-26). "Time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel

and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises . . ." (11:32, 33). In his lectures on Hebrews Luther writes:

Therefore it cannot be otherwise but that faith in Christ is active, lives, and produces and triumphs. Works stream of themselves from faith. Our patience flows out of the patience of Christ, our humility out of that of Christ, and thus everything that is His, if only we seize it fast in faith, that He does all this *for* us, but not only *for* us, but also *before* us, as an example. . . . Who would therefore model his life after that of Christ must first of all firmly believe that Christ suffered and died for him as a divine sign. Those err terribly who attempt at once to overcome sin with works and deeds of penance and, as it were, begin with the example, whereas they should have begun with the sign of the suffering of Christ. [Erich Vogel-sang, *Luthers Hebräerbrief-Vorlesung von 1517/18*, 1930, p. 19]

II. THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH

The author of Hebrews is certain that the faith he has described is victorious, that is, that it is able to overcome all obstacles and reach the heavenly goal. But he is also aware that not all of God's people have this faith and that, because they lack this faith, they do not obtain the divine promise. He illustrates the sad fate of those who do not have this faith by referring to the experiences of Israel in the wilderness. The fate of Israel is for him the most obvious example of a people chosen by God as His people which nevertheless perished because they lacked faith. This motif the author develops particularly in chs. 3:7 to 4:12. But the motif is present in almost every chapter of the epistle.

The reason that Israel did not achieve

the victory of faith was not, according to the author, that God elected Israel to perdition, but that Israel did not accept the discipline of the Lord, that it refused to cling to the Word and promises of God, and that it even murmured and rebelled at God's tokens of love and mercy. Israel had hardened its heart against God's judgments as well as against His signs of mercy.

What does hardening of the heart mean? In his lectures on Hebrews, Luther illustrates what this hardening is. He writes:

Think of wax. When it is soft, it is possible to impress on it the writing, the picture, or the symbol of the stamping implement. But when the wax is hard, it will not take the impression. So is the human heart. Even the Christian heart continually vacillates between hardness and softness. [Erich Vogelsang, p. 59]

Israel had in course of time hardened its heart. It steadfastly refused to believe what Paul much later wrote to the Corinthians: "God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

When we read those chapters in Exodus and Numbers which tell of Israel's stubborn rebellion, we shudder at the magnitude of Israel's sin. Later generations of Israel never forgot the sin of their stubborn forefathers, as we can gather especially from psalms 78, 106, and 107. We quote Ps. 78:9-41. As we read the passage, we cannot fail to note the rhythm in this powerful piece of Old Testament poetry:

The Ephraimites, armed with the bow,
turned back on the day of battle.

They did not keep God's covenant,
but refused to walk according to His
law.

They forgot what He had done,
and the miracles that He had shown
them.

In the sight of their fathers He wrought
marvels,
in the land of Egypt, in the fields of
Zoan.

He divided the sea and let them pass
through it,
and made the waters stand like a heap.
In the daytime He led them with a cloud,
and all the night with a fiery light.

He cleft rocks in the wilderness,
and gave them drink abundantly as
from the deep.

He made streams come out of the rock,
and caused waters to flow down like
rivers.

Yet they sinned still more against Him,
rebelling against the Most High in the
desert.

They tested God in their heart
by demanding the food they craved.

They spoke against God, saying,
"Can God spread a table in the wil-
derness?"

He smote the rock so that water gushed
out
and streams overflowed.

Can He also give bread,
or provide meat for His people?"

Therefore, when the Lord heard, He was
full of wrath;

a fire was kindled against Jacob,
His anger mounted against Israel;
because they had no faith in God
and did not trust His saving power.

Yet He commanded the skies above,
and opened the doors of heaven;
and He rained down upon them manna
to eat

and gave them the grain of heaven.
Man ate of the bread of the angels;

He sent them food in abundance.
He caused the east wind to blow in the
heavens,

and by His power He led out the south
wind;

He rained flesh upon them like dust,
winged birds like the sand of the seas;
He let them fall in the midst of their
camp,
all around their habitations.

And they ate and were well filled,
for He gave them what they craved.

But before they had sated their craving,
while the food was still in their mouths,
the anger of God rose against them,
and He slew the strongest of them,
and laid low the picked men of Israel.

In spite of all this they still sinned;
despite His wonders they did not
believe.

So He made their days vanish like
a breath,
and their years in terror.

When He slew them, they sought for
Him;

they repented and sought God earnestly.
They remembered that God was their
Rock,

the Most High God their Redeemer.
But they flattered Him with their mouths;
they lied to Him with their tongues.

Their heart was not steadfast toward Him;
they were not true to His covenant.

Yet He, being compassionate,
forgave their iniquity,
and did not destroy them;

He restrained His anger often,
and did not stir up all His wrath.

He remembered that they were but flesh,
a wind that passes and comes not again.

How often they rebelled against Him in
the wilderness
and grieved Him in the desert!

They tested Him again and again,
and provoked the Holy One of Israel.
They did not keep in mind His power,
or the day when He redeemed them
from the foe;

when He wrought His signs in Egypt,
and His miracles in the fields of Zoan.

Therefore those generations of God's people which because of unbelief and disobedience perished in the wilderness will to the end of time be remembered as a warning signal that men should not cast away their faith in God, their Redeemer, but continue to cling to Him even though He tests them in the scorching furnace of affliction and persecution and though He withdraws His presence into a thick cloud. But it is precisely because of the fate of these stubborn and hardhearted Hebrew generations and because of the record in Holy Scripture of their experiences, that it is possible to appreciate, in a degree at least, what it means to possess a victorious faith. The author illustrates this faith by referring to saints of the Old Covenant and to Jesus. With their example before them, the readers of the epistle are to strive for a faith that conquers. Their example ought to be also for our own generation of Christians a shining example of the victory of faith.

1. *The Triumphant Faith of Saints in the Old Covenant*

These are the saints, heroes of the faith, as they are often referred to, spoken of in that well-known chapter 11 of Hebrews. It is a long chapter, the longest in the epistle. When we read it, we are impressed by what appears to be an endless list of men and women of faith. But the truth is, the author mentions by name only 16. Then he summarizes the experiences of

some prophets and faithful women. Yet that total number does not even remotely approximate the number of thousands of unfaithful Israelites who perished in the wilderness. Nevertheless these few faithful men and women of the Old Covenant were remembered by later generations, whereas we know by name only an even smaller number of Israelites who, together with the great mass of unbelieving Israel, perished in the wilderness because of unbelief.

Why were these few faithful saints remembered? Because their faith had carried them through incredible odds and seemingly unsurmountable barriers. We still shudder at the afflictions suffered by some: "They were stoned, they were sawn in two [most probably a reference to what was believed to have been the fate of Isaiah], they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated . . . wandering over deserts and mountains and in dens and caves of the earth" (11:37,38). In what were they faithful? They were faithful in their obedience to the promises of God in spite of chastisement, persecution, and death. But because they were faithful, they were numbered, so the author writes, with "the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven"; they belong to the number of "spirits of just men made perfect." They have come to Mount Zion, they are citizens of the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and they live in the presence of Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant (12:22-24). By faith they overcame the world, sin, death, and the fear of eternal punishment. These saints of the Old Covenant are a timeless memorial to the triumph of faith.

2. *The Triumphant Faith of Jesus*

Time and again the author of Hebrews refers to the faith of Jesus, to His endurance and perseverance in trial and temptation. "For it was fitting that He [God] . . . should make the Pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering" (2:10). Jesus thus reached the goal of His divine calling through trial and suffering. "In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard for His godly fear. Although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered" (5:7,8). This passage takes us to Gethsemane, where we see the Son of God, in the agony and fear of death, imploring His Father, if that be the Father's will, to remove the cup of suffering, but at the same time, in perfect obedience to the Father's will, committing Himself to whatever the Father had designed for Him.

In another passage we read: "Looking to Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself" (12:2,3). Here the author takes his readers to the courts of Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod and to the altar of the cross. But in spite of all indignities and blasphemies heaped on Him, Jesus despised the shame, remained faithful unto Him who had sent Him, ascended on high, sat down at the right hand of His Father, and became the Pioneer and Perfecter of faith. In yet another passage the author writes: "So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through His

own blood" (13:12), a parallel to Jesus' own words: "The Son of man came . . . to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

Thus the life and death of Jesus was not that of a Stoic who resigns himself to an inescapable fate. Nor was His death that of a martyr whom posterity honors because of his heroism. Jesus' death was rather an act of obedience to the Father's and to His own will. In that obedience He exemplified the most illustrious instance of triumphant faith in all of human history. Because of that faith He ultimately triumphed. For at His ascension "He sat down at the right hand of God, then to wait until His enemies should be made a stool for His feet" (10:13). Paul puts it this way: "Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11). Because Jesus was faithful unto death, He can say to all His followers: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

3. *The Triumphant Faith of the Readers of the Epistle*

May we truthfully say that the readers of this epistle lived a victorious faith? May we be certain that these addressees did remain faithful and that their faith triumphed in the face of temptations, trials, and persecutions? The epistle is, above all, a rousing, stirring, and eloquent appeal to them to be faithful unto death as were the saints of the Old Covenant and as was

Jesus. The readers were to be "imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (6:12). They were to "consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself" that they might not grow weary or fainthearted (12:3).

Therefore the author appeals over and over again: "We must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away" (2:1), that is, lest we be washed away from the shore of security out into the dark and stormy night of sin and death, and perish. "Therefore, holy brethren, who share in a heavenly call, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. He was faithful to Him who appointed Him" (3:1,2). "We are His house if we hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope" (3:6). "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, when you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion'" (3:7). "Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God" (3:12). "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience" (4:11). "Let us hold fast our confession" (4:14). "Let us, then, with confidence draw near to the throne of grace" (4:16). "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (10:23). "Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward" (10:35). "Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (12:11). "See that you do not refuse Him who is speaking" (12:25). And in the concluding words of the epistle the author writes: "I appeal to you, brethren, bear with my word of exhortation" (13:28). In the

light of these stirring appeals we must suppose that this epistle made a profound impression on the readers, whether they were, as some think, converted Jewish priests who fled from Jerusalem at the time of its destruction or whether they were a small "house" congregation of converts from paganism living in the vicinity of Rome.

But the author of this epistle not only exhorts his readers to be faithful, he is also certain that they will be faithful. There is a note of hopeful optimism discernible in the entire epistle. The author indeed warns repeatedly against the sins of disobedience, unbelief, and apostasy from the living God. Yet he is certain that his readers will not become disobedient, unfaithful, and that they will not apostasize. Therefore he writes: "Though we speak thus [the warning against apostasy in 6:4-8], yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things that belong to salvation" (6:9). "You had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. . . . We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls" (10:34-39).

But what were the dangers and temptations of these early Christians, and why were they in danger of unbelief, disobedience, and apostasy? The author supplies two answers:

a. They had already experienced a fearful persecution (perhaps the one under Nero). But though they had been faithful in this persecution to the point that they "joyfully accepted the plundering of their property" (10:34), they were facing another persecution which would soon be

upon them. "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (12:4). None of them had as yet become martyrs. But, so the author impresses on them, their steadfastness must be equal to martyrdom itself.

b. The writer is apprehensive that some of his readers may have become indifferent to their Christian faith. This peril of indifference would grow more and more serious as time went on and Jesus delayed His return in glory to save those who were eagerly expecting Him. Therefore the author was moved to write these Christians this stirring epistle. The cold and indifferent among them must be startled out of their torpor and neglect and be roused to a new consciousness of the transcendent worth of that which they possessed. The epistle is, in the truest sense, an impassioned oration centered in recalling to unshakable devotion to Christ weary and wavering disciples, to a steadfast faith which would triumph over all trials, temptations, impending persecution and death. Some of these readers had become dull of hearing the Word, they had ears to hear but did not hear (5:11); they were neglecting corporate worship (10:25); and they were in great danger of apostasy. "Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day as long as it is called today" (3:12, 13).

We do not know how the readers received the author's eloquent appeal. Yet we must share the firm faith of the writer that, though some might apostasize, the vast majority would remain faithful unto death, and therefore did receive the crown of glory.

4. *Will the Faith of Present-Day Christians Be Triumphant?*

The stirring appeal of the eternal Word of God: "Today when you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness" (3:7, 8) rings out in our day as it did throughout the Old Testament period; as it did in the message of John the Baptist and Jesus: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17); as it did in the Gospel preached by Paul: "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2); as God's messengers have proclaimed it throughout the world in the past two millennia. But every proclamation of the Gospel is at the same time a warning: "Today when you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." Also our generation of Christians is to be "imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (6:12). The Word of God, every word of God, speaking to man in Scripture, is also in our day "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (4:12).

Indeed, when we consider the situation in which Christians find themselves in this day and age we are apt to conclude that they, too, have become devotees of materialism and secularism. For does it not seem as though the golden age, of which mankind has always dreamed the most romantic dreams, has at last arrived? Have we not become the wealthiest country on this planet? Do we not have the highest standard of living and culture ever attained by civilization? And yet this same age is

an age of anxiety not only for existentialist thinkers but also for millions of others who do not even know the word "existentialism." It is an age of nuclear weapons and missiles. It is also an age of revolt the world over by the proletariat, and the ominous threat and rousing appeal of Marx and Engels more than 100 years ago is stirring even primitive tribes into action: "Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workingmen of all countries, unite!" Countries are not drawing together into *one* world as seemed to be the case less than a generation ago but into two worlds, each viewing the other with suspicion and determined to outstrip the other with larger stockpiles of destructive bombs. If the Lord Jesus were to return on the clouds of heaven at this time, would He find faith on earth? Would He not discover that Christianity has very, very largely degenerated into but another form of humanistic religiosity?

There is little need to develop at length what is happening in our country on the ethical level. An analysis by Robert E. Fitch in *Christianity and Crisis*, quoted by Billy Graham in a syndicated article June 7, hardly overstates the case:

We live today in an age when ethics is becoming obsolete. It is superseded by science, deleted by psychology, dismissed as emotive by philosophy. It is drowned in compassion, evaporated into aesthetics and retreats before relativism. . . . The usual moral distinctions are simply drowned in a maudlin emotion in which we have more feeling for the murderer than for the betrayed; and in which we gradually begin to believe that the really guilty party, the one who somehow caused it all, is the victim, not the perpetrator, of the crime.

On the theological level it is still too early to say just where we are. The names of Kierkegaard, Barth, and Brunner are mentioned with the same respect, and as being equally authoritative, as the names of Luther and Calvin. Terms like "existentialism," "encounter," "propositional truth," "paradox," and "ultimate concern" are being kept alive even in semipopular journals, words which sound uncomfortably strange to seminary graduates of 50, 40, and even 30 years ago. The tension is no longer between the orthodoxy and liberalism of the early decades of this century, but the concern now is where precisely neo-orthodoxy fits in, to what extent it is orthodox and to what extent it is "neo." Reformation research has made significant discoveries. What has happened, however, is that some of the research has come up with a "new" Luther and a "new" Calvin to the bewildered trepidation of those nurtured in the 19th-century interpretation of the Reformation. In the meantime tensions are rising in practically all Christian groups, each one concerned to find a way out of desperate dilemmas. There is admittedly in all Christian circles great stress on the authority of Holy Scriptures as the only and final source for ascertaining the will of God, but greater emphasis is being laid on merging related churches into larger units. Besides existential philosophy, other forms of philosophic thought have laid their hands on Biblical theology and are attempting to absorb it into their systems, just as in the early centuries some Christian theologians reduced Christianity to a kind of gnosticism and as in the late Middle Ages Aristotelianism became the underpinning of Biblical theology.

Yet in spite of what is happening in this day and age on the political, ethical, and

theological levels, the Christian faith can be victorious. It can know that it is being tested and disciplined. It can know that God means to purify it of the dross of sin clinging to it and staining the purity of its soul. But what, in particular, is our generation of Christians to learn from the situation the church at present finds itself in? We direct attention to some observations the author of Hebrews spells out for the church of the 20th century.

1. Christians are to look to Jesus, the ascended Lord, who, sitting at the right hand of His Father, rules the universe and is the Head of His church. He is the Author and Perfecter of the Christian's faith. He is able to sympathize with the Christian's weaknesses, for He was tempted in every respect as we are. "Because He Himself has suffered and been tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted" (2:18). "He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (7:25). "Christ has entered . . . into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (9:24). "Let us, then, with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (4:16).

2. Christians are to be mindful that by His one sacrifice Jesus brought about forgiveness of sins for all times and for all peoples. He made obsolete all further sacrifices for sin and all other efforts of man to undo his past and to do penance for his guilt. Since God has declared: "I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more," the author of Hebrews draws the assuring inference: "Where there is forgiveness of these [sins and misdeeds], there

is no longer any offering for sin" (10:18). "In speaking of a new covenant, He [God] treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away" (8:13). The Old Covenant has vanished like a shadow, for the substance, the true reality itself, has appeared in the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ.

3. Christians are to live lives devoted to the glory of God and of His Christ. "Now may the God of peace . . . equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever" (13:20, 21).

4. Christians are to live out their personal lives in accordance with specifics as relevant today as they were in the first century. "Strive for peace with all men and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (12:14). "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the immoral and adulterous. Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; for He has said, 'I will never fail you nor forsake you.'" (13:4, 5).

5. Christians are to have a deep concern for the brethren. "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works" (10:24). "See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' spring up and cause trouble, and by it many become defiled, that no one be immoral or irreligious like Esau" (12:14-16). "Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers. . . . Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them; and those who are ill-treated

since you also are in the body. . . . Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (13:1-3, 16).

6. Christians are to draw comfort from the truth that they are living in the company also of past saints in the one holy Christian and apostolic church. "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (12:22-24). Christians may sing with joyful conviction those stirring stanzas:

O blest communion, fellowship divine,
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl, streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

7. Christians are to join their fellow Christians in hearing the Word and using the sacraments. Let us "not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encourage one another" (10:25). "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assur-

ance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (10:22: a veiled reference to Holy Baptism). "We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat" (13:10: a veiled reference to Holy Communion).

8. Christians are to honor and to be guided by the spiritual ministrations of their pastors. "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith" (13:7). "Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account" (13:17).

9. Christians are to be mission-minded. This we may properly infer from 2:10: "For it was fitting that He [God] . . . in bringing many sons to glory, should make the Pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering." God plans to bring many sons to glory, that is, to have many redeemed sinners share in the glory which was Christ's before the world began and into which Christ entered after He brought the sacrifice for sins on Calvary. However distracting and troublesome the Christian's way through life might be, of one obligation he may never absolve himself: his personal responsibility to help bring many sons to glory, that is, of witnessing to his unbelieving fellow men, to pray and to give for the extension of the church so that the Gospel of Christ might be brought to all men everywhere. What an example the apostle Paul left Christians of all times! He, too, found himself wrestling with a great variety of conflicting ethical and religious streams of thought; he, too, suffered trials of all kinds. Yet in all these difficulties he acted. He traveled from

place to place to preach the Gospel of Christ, and to the young churches he or others had founded he often wrote letters pleading with them to remain loyal in their faith to that Christ.

Can the faith of Christians living in our day, the faith which the author of Hebrews has in mind and which we have attempted to describe, be victorious? Can Christians of our day say with assurance what the sacred writer of Hebrews says of Christians of his day: "But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed but of those who have faith and keep their souls" (10:39). Yes, for the author assures also present-day Christians: "We are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (12:28). The fact of the matter is that the saints of old have, in reality, no advantage over Christians of later ages. "All these [the Old Testament saints], though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect" (11:39,40). Christians, too, of our age, who are expecting Christ's return "to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him" (9:28), should be certain that at His return He will raise all saints of the past, present, and future, change their lowly body to be like His glorious body, and that all saints of all times will together join in the victor's song "Thou wast slain and by Thy blood didst ransom men for God" (Rev. 5:9).

We conclude this section on the triumph of faith with some lines from the last paragraph of a little book bearing the title *Evangelical Church in Berlin and the Soviet Zone of Germany*. This little book tells of the trials of our Christian brethren in the German Democratic Republic. Pub-

lished originally in German in 1959, it later appeared in an English translation. The lines read:

Neither the ever-increasing atheist propaganda nor the disguised or open obstructiveness, nor the continuous State measures against all branches of the Church's work have been able to prevent life from going on. When the all-German Kirchentag planned for Thuringia in 1957 was prohibited—for fear of non-Communist-directed mass meetings—small local Kirchentage took place in the ecclesiastical districts and parishes, which were very well attended. While the State does everything, using administrative measures and propaganda, to hinder the financing of the Church's work, collections are increasing. While Communist State agencies attempt to steer the "Socialist family" in atheist ways, the aid to mothers of Inner Mission enjoys increasing popularity. While Party officials in the country are continuously making efforts for the intensification of Communist education, and State agencies refuse material and licenses for rebuilding church buildings, caravans are put into service in the Oderbruch and other areas and the Word proclaimed from them. While the academies and colleges turn more and more into places for Communist schooling, the Evangelical Academy holds conferences and weekend courses to point the ways which help out from inward uncertainty and fear.

As in the Eastern Zone of Germany, so Christians the world over may live out their lives assured of final victory. They may still have to resist unto blood. They may experience imprisonment and confiscation of their property. But in all such trials they will be triumphant if they continue steadfastly to look to Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of their faith and salvation.

St. Louis, Mo.