

Now Abideth Hope

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ST. PAUL closed his hymn to love in I Corinthians with the trilogy **pistis, elpis, agape**. The history of Christian thought has explicated two of these terms for our day. The work of Paul, Augustine, Luther and others has been refurbished during the Twentieth Century so that there is a paradigm of **faith** available to the current Christian community. Barth, Bultmann, and Bonhoeffer have offered images of authentic and inauthentic faith stances.

Authentic faith is a stance **between**: A deliberate placing of one's self within the paradoxes of revelation and reason, trust and doubt, affirmation and analysis; a decision to live within the tension between law and gospel, obligation and freedom. We have come to understand inauthentic faith, not as a wrong statement of doctrine, but as a rejection of the tension, a too easy compromise with one side of the paradoxes of faith. The man of total trust is not faithful but naive. The man of total doubt is a cynic. The man of law or obligation is guilty of narrow legalism, while the man of absolute freedom is licentious. Thus we tend to measure the man of faith today, not as one who possesses correct ideas, but one who exhibits a proper stance: Decisional Man.

Likewise, there is a paradigm of **agape** available to the current Christian community. Nygren, Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr have offered images of authentic and inauthentic understandings of love. Christian charity is a relationship, not an attitude. This relationship is found in the paradoxes of

love and justice, creation and judgment, individual and society. We have come to understand inauthentic love, not as a wrong feeling toward our neighbor, but as a too easy compromise with one side of the paradox. The man of total charity is not loving but profligate; the man of total justice is blind. One who describes life in terms of creation without judgment is pre-historical, while judgment alone is the mark of a sadist. The individualist denies the structures of justice, while the mass man denies liberty. Thus we tend to measure the man of love today, not as one who possesses correct attitudes, but as one who exhibits a proper perspective: Comprehensive Man.

The task of theology in our day is to make a paradigm of **hope** available to the current Christian community. We are a community of theologians here tonight gathered to pay tribute to the leader of a school of theology. Thus, it might be appropriate for us to create images of authentic and inauthentic **hope**. Christian hope is in the dimension of time rather than the dimension of the ideal. A hopeful man lives his life in history not fantasy; he chooses a particular life style rather than withdrawing into projection and wish-fulfillment. But his life style when authentic is found in tension, in paradox. He lives between life and death, joy and tragedy, victory and defeat, past and present. We have come to understand inauthentic hope, not as misplaced loyalty or false expectations, but as a refusal to hold these paradoxes in tension. The man who denies death is a romantic, while he who denies the value of life is bent on self-destruction. The man who recognizes only joy is simple-minded, while he who wallows in tragedy is a fatalist. The man who cannot admit defeat lives in illusion, while he

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who cannot admit victory is a masochist. The man who lives in the past is already dead, while he who lives only in the present is without roots.

Holding these paradoxes in tension demands handles, symbolic modes of understanding, mythic representations which provide a unity of perception. Life and death become unified by history. If one is to live his history, he must live his death, for death is a part of one's life story. To be truly human requires that we possess our experiences; thus, we must possess our deaths as part of the gift of life itself. We commemorate a death tonight because of the life of Lowell Swan; we pay tribute to a life tonight because of the death of Lowell Swan.

Joy and tragedy become unified in celebration. The man who would fulfill his joy must celebrate, while he who would not be destroyed by tragedy may celebrate even his tragedies — thus, he deals with them. Tonight we celebrate in worship a tragedy and thus are enabled to deal with it and with ourselves.

Victory and defeat are unified by resurrection. The man who would understand his defeat must envision the victory yet beyond, while the man who would understand his victory must remember the defeats which preceded. The symbol of resurrection is not a part of the Twentieth Century world view and is thus not functional for many today. But every child in nursery school experiences resurrection as he plants the seed which dies and then waters the

flower which lives. In his own concrete manner, the pre-school child recognizes those things which are dead, those things which are alive and those things which have died that something else might live. Having experienced resurrection in the concrete modes of childhood, may we tonight experience an understanding of resurrection in the symbolic modes of adult communication. We pray "requiem eternam," but we also sing the Hallelujah Chorus.

Past and present are unified by the future. The man who would not be controlled by the past or engulfed by the momentariness of every present must live in expectancy, goal oriented, purposive, futuric. In the past, the life of Lowell Swan produced a model of a great pastor. In the present, the death of Lowell Swan has produced pain. In the future, the expectancy of Lowell Swan, his goal, his purpose, may produce many pastors from among those who share this hour.

Thus we tend to measure the man of hope today, not as one who possesses correct ideals, but as one who exhibits in history, celebration, resurrection, and future orientation, a proper life style: Futuric Man.

St. Paul's word in the Twentieth Century is that authentic faith is found in a stance—Decisional Man; authentic love is found in a perspective — Comprehensive Man; authentic hope is found in a life style — Futuric Man. But the word of God to us tonight is specifically: Now abide the hope.

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