

American Foundation of Greek Language and Culture  
15<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL EDUCATIONAL FORUM CONFERENCE – FEBRUARY 19-20, 2010  
Tampa & Tarpon Springs, FL

**“THE DR. DEMETRIOS HALKIAS KEYNOTE LECTURE ON FAITH”**

The Rev. Stanley Harakas. Th.D., D.D.

I am deeply honored to have been asked to give the inaugural “Dr. Demetrios Halkias Keynote Lecture on Faith” as part of the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual American Foundation of Greek Language and Culture Educational Forum Conference. The decision by the founders of this annual lectureship to honor one of the original members of the AFGLC to focus on “Faith” is of particular note. One of the five endowed professorship of the AFGLC Interdisciplinary Centers at the University of South Florida focuses on Byzantium and the Orthodox Christian Faith.

Though a man of science in the field of Medical Microbiology, Dr. Halkias was also a faithful Orthodox Christian, who served the St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Tampa, Florida, as a parish council member, parish council president, and as a “psaltis” that is, a cantor, in the worship services of the parish. By any measure, he was not only an educator, a scientist, a doctoral candidate advisor, but also a man of faith. So it is not surprising that this lectureship should focus on the concept, practice and reality of faith.

Nevertheless, since the term “faith” is quite broad and in many ways complex, the topic will be interpreted and developed by future lecturers in varied and diverse ways. One well-known dictionary<sup>1</sup> provides six different definitions for the term “faith.” That gives wide latitude to how the topic can be addressed.

Faith, clearly, on the one end of the spectrum has profound religious and saving aspects, especially in Christianity. Jesus Himself, is recorded in the Gospels as affirming the power of religious faith, as when He said to a sick woman who was healed: “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.”<sup>2</sup> St. Paul was convinced of the saving power of faith in Christ, “(W)e hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law.”<sup>3</sup> And he was clear that such faith was God inspired and was distinct from anything mundane. Writing to the Christians of Corinth, he taught that their “faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”<sup>4</sup> And the author of the New Testament book of Hebrews, writes: “Without faith it is impossible to please him (God). For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”<sup>5</sup>

On the other end of the spectrum faith may be seen as opposed to rationality, logic, and empirical evidence. The second of the dictionary definitions reflects this: “Belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence.”<sup>6</sup> It is not only rationalists and empiricists who think this way. Theologian Paul Tillich described faith without personal conviction as a habit of mind that is the same as “assent to certain propositions on authority.” For him, this “involves a surrender of autonomy, a descent into a heteronomous or ‘other-directed’ situation.” In Tillich’s view, “At worst, this means that the capacity for intellectual honesty as well as for religious experience is profoundly damaged and psychic infantilism in religious matters is encouraged.”<sup>7</sup> From this perspective faith would be a negative value, something to be avoided and overcome.

These views and others in between might some day become topics for the Dr. Demetrios Halkias Lectureship on Faith. I have chosen another path for this presentation. What I wish to focus on in this inaugural Halkias lecture is the necessity of faith in the accomplishment of any

human endeavor, goal or achievement. It is summarized in the first dictionary definition referred to previously: “A confident belief in the truth, value, or trustworthiness of a person, idea, or thing”<sup>8</sup> Faith, in this sense, is a human trait that moves people to action toward a goal that is not yet fulfilled or proven. A biblical definition of faith that expresses this same idea with some amplification also comes from the New Testament book of Hebrews. There we are told that, “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”<sup>9</sup> The passage continues by identifying over a dozen persons and instances in which the exercise of faith in the history of Israel produced significant consequences. One example is, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”<sup>10</sup>

What is being described here, in the words of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Christian author, Clement of Alexandria is faith as a “preconception of the will.”<sup>11</sup> Or, as Theodoret of Cyr writing in the 4<sup>th</sup> century put it, “through faith we see what is hoped for. Faith depicts for us in advance”<sup>12</sup> what will be. In this understanding, faith is empowered by hope of results before the results are assured or experienced. When understood this way, faith is what makes things happen and provides a dynamism that leads people forward into planning and action. Hope without faith in what is to be accomplished is wishful thinking. Faith undergirded by hope provides the goal and purpose, energy, and, potentially, the end result.

In his fourth century *Catechetical Lectures*, Cyril of Jerusalem shows how faith is a dynamic force in ordinary life and endeavors, an essential element of any human project that can bear fruit in life. Allow me to share with you a relatively extensive passage from Cyril which illustrates this productive power of faith. He writes:

It is not only among those of us who bear the name of Christ that the dignity of faith is great. Rather, all things that are accomplished in the world, even by those who are strangers to the church, are accomplished by faith. By faith the laws of marriage yoke together those who have lived as strangers. Because of the faith in marriage contracts, a stranger is made partner of another stranger’s person and possessions. By faith, farmers are also sustained, for the one who does not believe that he shall receive a harvest is not going to endure the work. By faith seafaring men, trusting to the thinnest plank, exchange that most solid element, the land, for the restless motion of the waves, committing themselves to uncertain hopes and carrying with them a faith more sure than any anchor. By faith, therefore, most of men’s affairs are held together.<sup>13</sup>

I would like to offer to you several examples of the significance and importance of this kind of faith, in the affairs of ordinary life, beginning with the life of the man who is honored by this lectureship. His story followed, and was followed, by millions of immigrants to the United States. He was born in 1932 in Greece into a family distinguished by a physician father. Though his father died when he was only three years old, Demetrios grew up having faith that there was a future for him in medicine. That future seemed almost unrealizable during the dark days of Nazi occupation of Greece. His faith that he could “become somebody” led to the hopeful decision to come to the United States as an immigrant in December of 1951. As his biography notes “He settled in Chicago and started as a dishwasher, then laundry man, and finally a short order cook. He attended night school to learn the English language.” He had faith in himself, that in spite of all the obstacles beyond the expectations of logic and reality, he would achieve

his goal. It turned out that he did so, but not with the results that he expected. Two years after he immigrated to the United States, he began studies at the University of Illinois, graduating in 1957. Continuing his graduate studies at the Stritch School of Medicine, Loyola University, he earned an MS and a PhD degree in Medical Microbiology. Demetrios began his teaching career in the field of Medical Microbiology at Creighton University School of Medicine in Omaha, Nebraska. In 1972, he left Creighton as Associate Professor and moved to the University of South Florida (USF) College of Medicine as a charter faculty member and became Chief of the Microbiology Section at the James A. Haley Veterans Administration Hospital. In 1978 he was promoted to the rank of Professor of Pathology and Medical Microbiology.

Thus we have the story of the realization of the faith and hope of a three year old orphan boy. He did not allow the suffering and deprivation of the Nazi occupation to weaken the faith which he held, that he could accomplish great things in his life. His hope of a bright future in medicine was supported by the faith in himself and in the grace of God, and became a reality after decades of committed work and study. Faith with hope produced results that could never have been predicted or determined from the difficult and painful years of his early childhood. Indeed, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Another example of the energizing power of faith in a concept, fueled by hope is to be found in the lives of Marie and Pierre Curie who lived in the late 1800's<sup>14</sup>. It is a fairly well known fact that Marie Curie and her husband became convinced, without evidence, that there was more to the radioactivity of pitchblende than met the eye. On April 14, 1898 they optimistically weighed out a 100-gram sample of pitchblende and ground it with a pestle and mortar. They did not realize at the time that what they were searching for was present in such minute quantities that they eventually would have to process tons of the ore.

The Curies had been investigating the cause of pitchblende radioactivity. They were convinced that in addition to the elements of uranium and thorium present in the pitchblende, there had to be another radioactive element present in addition to them, because the intensity of the radioactivity was more than that of the uranium and thorium put together. Their repeated, backbreaking toil to isolate what they believed were other fundamental elements, is storied. Their faith in their theory told them that something more was in the pitchblende and they theorized that with enough experimenting they would be able to isolate the new elements. They believed they were onto something and hoped that their exhaustive experiments could isolate the elements that they believed, but could not see, and which no one else had ever seen, actually existed.

After years of labor expended in the effort, they became the first persons in July of 1898 to identify traces of the radioactive element they believed was present in pitchblende, which they named after their Polish homeland, Polonium. Within a few months, in December of 1898, believing there was more to be found as a result of their experiments, they also found traces of radium. Both were acknowledged as new elements in the table of elements which constitute the physical world.

The Curies then "undertook the arduous task of separating out radium salt by differential crystallization. From a ton of pitchblende, one-tenth of a gram of radium chloride was separated in 1902. . . . Working alone, after her husband died in an accident in 1906, by 1910 Madam Curie, had isolated the pure radium metal."<sup>15</sup>

For her groundbreaking discoveries Madam Curie was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1903, and the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1911. She was the first person in history to be awarded two Nobel Prizes.

It was belief that those elements had to be present in pitchblende that led to exhausting work over boiling vats of radioactive pitchblende that was eventually justified by their

experiments.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Albert Einstein provides us with further example of tenacious faith in a truth that was not seen, yet stubbornly believed in and held to be true which eventually led to the theories of relativity for which he was eventually justly honored. Einstein is universally recognized as a genius, but proving what he believed to be true about those theories was not an easy project. According to one account of the development of the Special and General Theories of Relativity he at first

. . . dealt only with systems or observers in uniform (unaccelerated) motion with respect to one another and is referred to as the special theory of relativity; among other results, it demonstrated that two observers moving at great speed with respect to each other will disagree about measurements of length and time intervals made in each other's systems, that the speed of light is the limiting speed of all bodies having mass, and that mass and energy are equivalent. In 1911 he asserted the equivalence of gravitation and inertia, and in 1916 he completed his mathematical formulation of a general theory of relativity that included gravitation as a determiner of the curvature of a space-time continuum.<sup>17</sup>

The phrase to focus on in the context of this presentation is “in 1916 he completed his mathematical formulation of a general theory of relativity.” What is not generally realized is that the actual formulation of the theory took hundreds upon hundreds of tries at getting the formula right. Sheet after sheet of calculations ended in the wastepaper basket. Again and again, the formula had to be recalculated until he eventually could conceptualize his hypothesis in a way that explained the process. He believed –he had faith- that his insights were true and he sought then to articulate them in a scientific formula that could stand the test of measurement and hence, prove their validity.

Three years later, in May of 1919, Arthur Stanley Eddington, conducted a series of experiments that showed that Einstein had correctly predicted the gravitational deflection of starlight by the sun, through photographs of a solar eclipse taken at two widely separated locations.<sup>18</sup> *The Times* of London, on November 7, 1919 headed its article on the achievement with this phrase covering much of the first page, “Revolution in Science – New Theory of the Universe – Newtonian Ideas Overthrown.” Einstein’s belief, his faith in his theories, had been vindicated, in the face of high level doubts by such distinguished nay-sayers at the Mount Wilson Observatory and the Lick Observatory, both in California. Indeed, “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”<sup>19</sup>

The thesis of this inaugural presentation of the “Dr. Demetrios Halkias Keynote Lecture on Faith” can be summarized by a full page ad in the October, 2009 issue of *United Airline Hemisphere* magazine, as well as in the *New York Times* issues of September 11, 2009 and February 1, 2010. The advertisement was placed by the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Eye Center. Its headline was “Sometimes seeing is believing.” But it continued, on the second line, “Our ophthalmologists think believing comes first.” Indeed, “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

But that is not the last word about this aspect of faith. There is a religious dimension also. The connection of faith with religion in general is almost self-evident. This is especially true of Christianity. In it, as noted above, faith is seen as essential for salvation and eternal life; it is one of the crucial, indispensable and necessary elements for the living of the Christian life. St. Paul

highlights it in many ways such as when he writes at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of his first letter to the Corinthian Christians, “So faith, hope, and love abide, these three.”<sup>20</sup> But the Christian tradition goes even further. The New Testament teaches that without faith in Jesus Christ, salvation cannot be received; it is a *sine qua non* for overcoming the forces of sin, evil and spiritual death. As St. Paul put it, “Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>21</sup>

However, just as widely present in the New Testament is the understanding of faith as what the dictionary calls “A confident belief in the truth, value, or trustworthiness of a person, idea, or thing.” It is what I call the heuristic dimension of religious faith. The term comes directly from the Greek word εὐρίσκω, which means to “find” or to “discover.” Used as an adjective it describes experience-based techniques that help a person to solve problems, to learn new things, and to discover the unexpected. One dictionary definition states “A heuristic method is particularly used to rapidly come to a solution that is hoped to be close to the best possible answer, or 'optimal solution'.”<sup>22</sup>

In this sense, appeals to religious truth are responded to by a voluntary decision to commit trust in a belief, teaching and especially in Christianity -in a Person- who makes transcendent claims on one’s loyalty, understanding and life-style.

Faith, in this heuristic sense is, first of all, a free assent and commitment. It cannot be forced. It is an act of self-determination, in Greek, it is a function of the αὐτεξούσιον. We see this in the encounter of Philip and Nathaniel, with Jesus. The passage from the Gospel of Matthew reads:

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. And he found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." . . . Philip found Nathaniel, and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathaniel said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."<sup>23</sup>

Secondly, faith is a commitment to test in practice the beliefs to which one has committed himself or herself. It is positive and constructive belief, but it is not knowledge. At least is not so at the beginning. The dictionary definition cited at the beginning of this presentation is true of nearly all religious and spiritual traditions: faith is “a confident belief in the truth, value, or trustworthiness of a person, idea, or thing”

In a more philosophical vein, it can be compared to the “As If” philosophy of Hans Vaihinger who lived from 1852 to 1933, “and who held the idea that our constructions are better viewed as useful hypotheses.”<sup>24</sup> One of those philosophers who followed him, George Kelly, described his approach as follows:

...Vaihinger began to develop a system of philosophy he called the "philosophy of 'as if' ". In it he offered a system of thought in which God and reality might best be represented as paradigms. This was not to say that either God or reality was any less certain than anything else in the realm of man’s awareness, but only that all matters confronting man might best be regarded in hypothetical ways."<sup>25</sup>

Clearly, this is akin to the faith of a Demetrios Halkias, or the hypothesis of a Marie Curie, or the unproven theories of Albert Einstein, All had faith “as if” their beliefs were true and acted on them just as the University of Pittsburgh Medical Centers’ Eye Center does this very day. As Vaihinger put it, ideas “provide us with an instrument for finding our way about”<sup>26</sup> It has

been pointed out that “(w)hile the logic of 'as if' has been mostly applied in the realm of psychotherapy, it can easily be generalized to just about any area of human inquiry.”<sup>27</sup>

This “as if” approach, so akin to the aspect of faith being discussed in this presentation, has one more dimension that can move a person from faith understood in the category of “as if” to an experiential certainty that becomes almost impossible to shake.

Faith that is lived out in personal experience, tested by adversity and supported by the encounters with life in multiple and varied ways, can become something closer to assurance than hypothesis; something of a real rather than imagined strength, which undergirds the soul; something of power which overcomes obstacles in a victorious way; and something which sustains courage with a promise that approaches knowledge. It is true, that for some, faith disappoints and is abandoned. But for many others, this religious faith finds fulfillment and inspires confidence and strength that is no longer just a hypothesis for the believer, but a confident assurance that the faith has become a personal knowledge, in which there is no more doubt or questioning. As such, faith is like an experiment in living life in accordance with what is believed, which can bring the believer as close as it is possible to secure confidence in what is believed.

Such was the faith of Job, who in the depths of his humiliation and despair found within him a rock-like faith that could declare “*I know* that my Redeemer lives.”<sup>28</sup> Such was the faith of St. Paul, whose faith was transformed and transfigured into assured knowledge, for even in the face of persecution and suffering, he could declare, “*I know* whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.”<sup>29</sup> In this vein he also declared “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”<sup>30</sup>

Yet, just as knowledge of the world through science is almost never absolute or complete, so it is in the sphere of faith. In his second letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul, that man of immense faith, declared, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. *Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully*, even as I have been fully understood.”<sup>31</sup>

---

I chose in this Inaugural Dr. Demetrios Halkias AFGLC Lecture on Faith to focus on the phenomenon of faith, leaving it to others in the future to explore its many nuanced meanings. I have tried to show that faith is an essential dimension of living and achieving; that it has been even in the rarified fields of scientific research an essential precondition for the discovery of technical and controlled experimental knowledge. And I have cursorily even addressed the role that faith plays in achieving a level of religious knowledge, at least as it is perceived in the Biblical tradition.

Yet faith transcends all this, in that it pervades every aspect of human interaction, relationship and experience. It can be justified, it can be misplaced. Think of all those people who had faith in disgraced investor Bernie Madoff! But faith also sustains the relationships of people, one to another; of people with and in institutions; of institutions with institutions; of nations with nations, and so on. Faith is ubiquitous and essential to human existence.

In 2009, author Mitch Albom wrote a non-fiction book which he sub-titled “A True Story.” It describes his experience with two men, ostensibly of two worlds. One was an eight-two year old rabbi who lived in Albom’s home town, who asked him to deliver the eulogy at his coming funeral, even though Albom was not much of a man of evident faith. Awed by the request, Albom enters into a sort of experiment of living to get to know who the rabbi really was, as if gathering material for the eulogy.

At the same time Albom becomes involved with a black minister who was a reformed drug dealer and convict and whose congregation was composed of impoverished underprivileged and homeless persons and whose church building was decaying to the point of having a hole in its roof. Albom moves between these two men, one Jewish and well-to-do and the other Christian and poor. The dust jacket describes how “these very different men employ faith similarly in fighting for survival: the older, suburban rabbi embracing it as death approaches; the younger, inner-city pastor relying on it to keep himself and his church afloat.”

Albom and the two men of God explore issues that perplex modern man; how to endure when difficult things happen; what heaven is; intermarriage; forgiveness; doubting God; and the importance of faith in trying times. Although the texts, prayers, and histories are different, Albom begins to recognize a striking unity between the two worlds – and indeed, between beliefs everywhere. . . . (Finally Albom) understands what both men had been teaching all along: the profound comfort of believing in something bigger than yourself. . . . (This) book is about life’s purpose, about losing belief and finding it again. . . . It is one man’s journey, but it is everyone’s story.<sup>32</sup>

On the last page of the book, Albom asks, “Have you ever known a man of faith? Did you run the other way? If so, stop running. Maybe sit down for a minute. For a glass of ice water. For a plate of corn bread. You may find there is something beautiful to learn, and it doesn’t bite you and it doesn’t weaken you, it only proves a divine spark lies inside each of us, and that spark may one day save the world.”<sup>33</sup>

O yes! The title of the book? *Have A Little Faith!*

---

<sup>1</sup> The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. William Morris, ed. Boston: American Heritage Publishing Co, Inc. and Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970, p. 471.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 9: 22.

<sup>3</sup> Romans 3:28.

<sup>4</sup> 1Corinthians 2:5.

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 11:6.

<sup>6</sup> The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons. Volume II, 1973, p. 211.

<sup>8</sup> The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 11:1.

<sup>10</sup> Hebrews 11:8-10.

<sup>11</sup> *Stromateis* 2.2.8-9.

<sup>12</sup> *Interpretation of Hebrews*, 11.

<sup>13</sup> *Catechetical Lectures*, 5.3.

- 
- <sup>14</sup> Philip Steele, Marie Curie: The Woman Who Changed the Course of Science, Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2006.
- <sup>15</sup> Wikipedia account of the discoveries.
- <sup>16</sup> Pasachoff, Naomi E., Marie Curie and the Science of Radioactivity. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- <sup>17</sup> The Columbia Encyclopedia. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001-2009.
- <sup>18</sup> Dual concurrent expeditions photographed the same solar eclipse, one in Sobral, northern Brazil and Principe, a west African island.
- <sup>19</sup> Walter Isaacson, Albert Einstein: His Life and Universe. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009.
- <sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:13.
- <sup>21</sup> Romans 5:1.
- <sup>22</sup> Wikipedia definition.
- <sup>23</sup> John 1:44-46.
- <sup>24</sup> The Internet Encyclopaedia of Personal Construct Psychology. The “as if” philosophy.
- <sup>25</sup> Kelly, G. A. “The language of hypothesis: Man’s psychological instrument.” In B. Maher (Ed.), Clinical psychology and personality: The selected papers of George Kelly (pp. 147-162). New York: John Wiley. (Original work published 1964), p. 149.
- <sup>26</sup> Vaihinger, Hans, The philosophy of "as if" (C. K. Ogden, Trans.). London: Routledge, 1952. (Original English work published 1924), p. 15.
- <sup>27</sup> Jonathan D. Ruskin and Laurie Ann Morano in The Internet Encyclopaedia of Personal Construct Psychology. The “as if” philosophy.
- <sup>28</sup> Job 19:25.
- <sup>29</sup> 2 Timothy 1:12.
- <sup>30</sup> Galatians 2:20.
- <sup>31</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:12.
- <sup>32</sup> Quoted from the book jacket.
- <sup>33</sup> Mitch Albom, Have a Little Faith: A True Story. New York: Hyperion Books-Harper Collins, 2009, p. 247.