

Proclus, On Love, Truth and Faith

Note: There has been a premature rush towards faith before the exercise of mind – a tendency which has undermined the interior life of the West these many centuries. Damascius, in his *Doubts and Solutions* wrote, “But, in short, we thus form a conception of *the one* which we contain as the summit or flower of our essence, as being more proximate and allied to us, and more prompt to such a suspicion of that which nearly leaves all things behind it. But from some particular thing which is made the subject of hypothesis, the transition is easy to that which is simply supposed, though we should in no respect accede to it, but being carried in that which is most simple in us, should form a suspicion concerning that which is prior to all things. The One therefore, is thus effable, and thus ineffable, but that which is beyond it is to be honoured in the most perfect silence, and prior to this, by the most perfect ignorance which despises all knowledge.” Of this “perfect ignorance”, Thomas Taylor notes, “As that which is below all knowledge is an ignorance worse than knowledge, so the silence in which our ascent to the ineffable terminates is preceded by an ignorance superior to all knowledge. Let it however, be carefully remembered, *that such an ignorance is only to be obtained after the most scientific and intellectual energies.*” With this mysterious silence in mind, the following exposition of Proclus on faith is offered to the reader.

*From The Theology of Plato, Book I, chapters 24 & 25
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24 I think therefore, it is manifest to every one, and it is frequently asserted by Plato, that the cause which congregates all secondary natures to divine beauty, which familiarizes them to it and is the source of their being filled with it, and of their derivation from thence, is nothing else than love, which always conjoins according to the beautiful, secondary to the first Gods, and the more excellent genera, and the best of souls.

But again, truth is certainly the leader to, and establishes beings in, divine wisdom, with which intellect being filled, possesses a knowledge of beings, and souls participating of this energize intellectually. For the full participation of true wisdom is effected through truth, since this every where illuminates intellectual natures, and conjoins them with the objects of intellection, just as truth also is the first thing that congregates intellect and the intelligible.

To those however who hasten to be conjoined with the good, knowledge and co-operation are no longer requisite, but collocation, a firm establishment and quiet are necessary.

25 What therefore is it which unites us to the good? What is it which causes in us a cessation of energy and motion. What is it which establishes all divine

natures in the first and ineffable unity of goodness. And how does it come to pass that every thing being established in that which is prior to itself according to the good which is in itself again establishes things posterior to itself according to cause? It is, in short, the faith of the Gods, which ineffably unites all the genera of the Gods, of dæmons, and of happy souls to *The Good*. For it is necessary to investigate *The Good* neither gnostically, nor imperfectly, but giving ourselves up to the divine light, and closing the eyes of the soul, after this manner to become established in the unknown and occult unity of beings. For such a kind of faith as this is more ancient than the gnostic energy, not in us only, but with the Gods themselves, and according to this all the Gods are united, and about one centre uniformly collect the whole of their powers and progressions.

If however it be requisite to give a particular definition of this faith, let no one suppose that it is such a kind of faith as that which is conversant with the wandering about sensibles. For this falls short of science, and much more of the truth of beings. But the faith of the Gods surpasses all knowledge, and according to the highest union conjoins secondary with first natures.

Nor again, let him conceive a faith of a similar species with the celebrated belief in common conceptions; for we believe in common conceptions prior to all reasoning. But the knowledge of these is divisible, and is by no means equivalent to divine union; and the science of these is not only posterior to faith, but also to intellectual simplicity. For intellect is established beyond all science, both the first science, and that which is posterior to it. Neither, therefore, must we say that the energy according to intellect is similar to such a faith as this. For intellectual energy is multiform, and is separated from the objects of intellection through difference; and in short, it is intellectual motion about the intelligible.

But it is necessary that divine faith should be uniform and quiet, being perfectly established in the port of goodness. For neither is the beautiful, nor wisdom, nor any thing else among beings, so credible and stable to all things, and so exempt from all ambiguity, divisible apprehension and motion, as *The Good*. For through this intellect also embraces another union more ancient than intellectual energy, and prior to energy. And soul considers the variety of intellect and the splendour of forms as nothing with respect to that transcendency of *The Good* by which it surpasses the whole of things. And it dismisses indeed intellectual perception, running back to its own hyparxis; but it always pursues, investigates, and aspires after *The Good*, hastens as it were to embosom it, and gives itself to this alone among all things without hesitation.

But why is it necessary to speak of the soul? For these mortal animals, as Diotima somewhere says, despise all other things, and even life itself and being, through a desire of the nature of *The Good*; and all things have this one immoveable and ineffable tendency to *The Good*; but they overlook, consider as secondary, and despise the order of every thing else. This, therefore, is the one secure port of all beings.

This also is especially the object of belief to all beings. And through this the conjunction and union with it is denominated faith by theologians, and not by them only, but by Plato likewise, (if I may speak what appears to be to be the case) the alliance of this faith with truth and love is proclaimed in the *Laws*. The multitude therefore are ignorant, that he who has a conception of these things, when discoursing about their contraries, infers the same thing with respect to the deviations from this triad. Plato then clearly asserts in the *Laws* that the lover of falsehood is not to be believed, and that he who is not to be believed is void of friendship. Hence it is necessary that the lover of truth should be worthy of belief, and that he who is worthy of belief should be well adapted to friendship.

From these things therefore, we may survey divine truth, faith and love, and comprehend by a reasoning process their stable communion with each other. If, however, you are willing, prior to these things we will recall to our memory that Plato denominates that virtue fidelity which conciliates those that disagree, and subverts the greatest of wars, I mean seditions in cities. For from these things faith appears to be the cause of union, communion and quiet. And if there is such a power as this in us, it is by a much greater priority in the Gods themselves. For as Plato speaks of a certain divine temperance, justice and science, how is it possible that faith which connectedly comprehends the whole order of the virtues should not subsist with the Gods?

In short, there are these three things which replenish divine natures, and which are the sources of plenitude to all the superior genera of beings, *viz.* goodness, wisdom and beauty. And again, there are three things which collect together the natures that are filled, being secondary indeed to the former, but pervading to all the divine orders, and these are faith, truth and love. But all things are saved through these, and are conjoined to their primary causes; some things indeed, through the amatory mania, others through divine philosophy, and others through theurgic power, which is more excellent than all human wisdom, and which comprehends prophetic good, the purifying powers of perfective good, and in short, all such things as are the effects of divine possession.