

We ought to know that faith, like other aspects of our humanity, grows and changes. Faith is not something inhuman. It is bound up with our human emotions and experiences, and therefore the concrete sense of faith is not something on which we can place excessive reliance. Faith may be there but, like other aspects of our humanity, is susceptible to change and chance.. We misjudge ourselves as faithless, says Hooker, when we don't see results quickly. We need the assurance that in our darkness or doubt or failure, God is faithful.

(R.Williams p.27 *Christian Imagination in Poetry and Polity* 2002)

We need the assurance that in our darkness or doubt or failure, God is faithful.

This is Rowan Williams commenting on a passage by the sixteenth century Anglican theologian, Richard Hooker. Abram steps out in faith – with a promise of future blessing but no knowledge of it otherwise. *So Abram went as the Lord told him* and no doubt suffered all the challenges and changes to his faith which Rowan Williams suggests is true of us all. It's our nature to lose sight of our true end, or rather of the true nature of our quest which is not so much about our faith in God but God's faith in us. Our faith, in this sense, is not something we hold, a personal possession, but something held for us by God and, in this sense also, not subject to our feelings at all. In Paul's second letter to Timothy we see him reassuring Timothy of the true nature of his faith as gift, as a grace indeed, given *in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time*. This gift is characterised by Paul, in the verses immediately before and after those we hear today, as the gift of the Holy Spirit – *the Spirit of power and love and self-control*. It's this Spirit which will see us through those times when what we take to be faith seems absent, when suffering comes and when our supposed lack of faith becomes part of our suffering. But this faith is being held for us by God, is God in all God's eternity, in all God's eternal love for us. And knowing us and loving us just as we are, in all our human frailty, which is to say in all our changeableness and misreading of our own nature, just occasionally God's Spirit reveals us to ourselves, or more often to others, as we really are, that is, creatures made in the image and likeness of God and able to reflect God's glory. The context for this is, of course, as we are coming increasingly to realise, a creation of which we are an intimate part, which can also reflect God's glory. There is a process of enlightenment and illumination which is mostly a sub-plot in our existence but comes to light, as it were, in moments of sudden glory. This is what Peter, Jesus, and John are being reminded of when they glimpse Jesus as he truly is - and as *they* truly are but have yet to realise. This is their preparation for suffering. It's not sufficient, as we know from their behaviour at the Passion, and the Holy Spirit will be gifted to them again in order for this process of revelation to continue, but the dynamic of God's faith in us rather than our faith in God, still holds true for all of us today. Or, in the words of Richard Hooker,

Well, let the frailty of our nature, the subtlety of Satan, the force of our deceivable imaginations be, as we cannot deny that they are, things that threaten every moment the utter subversion of our faith, faith notwithstanding is not hazarded by these things.

(Sermon I: *Of the Certainty and Perpetuity of Faith in the Elect.*
Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity Vol III pp 474-6)