



Faith and Reason

Wings of the Spirit

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Fides et Ratio

- Blessed John Paul II
- 1998 encyclical on "Faith and Reason"

The Two Wings

Truth and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves (cf. Ex 33:18; Ps 27:8-9; 63:2-3; Jn 8:12; 1 Jn 3:2).

Outline

I. The Nature of Faith

II. Why is Faith Necessary?

III. What Can Reason Accomplish?

IV. The Relation between Faith and Reason

I. The Nature of Faith

God has given us a supernatural 'end' or destination, nothing less than perfect union with Him.

To pursue this end, we must have supernatural knowledge, knowledge beyond the capacities of our created faculties.

St. Thomas Aquinas

• The Summa Theologica, I q1 a1 (the first article of the entire work).

• Man is directed to God, as to an end that surpasses the grasp of his reason: “The eye hath not seen, O God, beside Thee, what things Thou hast prepared for them that wait for Thee” (Isaiah 64:4). But the end must first be known by men who are to direct their thoughts and actions to the end. Hence it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation

Catechism of the Catholic Church

9) Faith is a supernatural gift from God. In order to believe, man needs the interior helps of the Holy Spirit.

10) “Believing” is a human act, conscious and free, corresponding to the dignity of the human person.

11) “Believing” is an ecclesial act. The Church's faith precedes, renders, supports and nourishes our faith. The Church is the Mother of all believers. “No one can have God as Father who do not have the Church as Mother” (St. Cyprian, De unit. 6: PL 4, 5)

II. Why is Faith Necessary?

A. Our supernatural end is nothing short of union with God, sharing in the divine nature.

God could not have created us with the power to achieve this on our own. It must be a free gift, gratuitous, superfluous, above and beyond our created powers.

Dei Verbum (Vatican II)

•5. “The obedience of faith” (Rom. 13:26; see 1:5; 2 Cor 10:5-6) “s to be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals.”

•6. Through divine revelation, God chose to show forth and communicate Himself and the eternal decisions of His will regarding the salvation of men. That is to say, He chose to share with them those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind. Chapter I, “On Divine Revelation”

. Faith Extends the Knowledge of

God to all Believers

God desires that all men should know him -- not merely philosophers or scientists.

To reach the knowledge of God through human reason would require a lifetime of study.

Because of the Fall and original sin, our natural knowledge of God has been made uncertain and subject to distortion.

The Summa Th I, q1, a1

•The truth about God such as reason could discover would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors. Whereas man's whole salvation, which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of this truth. Therefore, in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fitly and more surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation.

Part II-II, q2, a4 (on faith)

First, in order that man may arrive more quickly at the knowledge of divine truth. Because the science to whose province it belongs to prove the existence of God, is the last of all to offer itself to human research, since it presupposes many other sciences: so that it would not by the length of time in life that man would arrive at the knowledge of God.

The second reason is, in order that the knowledge of God may be made more general. For many are unable to make progress in the study of science, either through dullness of mind, or through having a number of other occupations, and temporal needs, or even through laziness in learning. All of whom would be altogether deprived of the knowledge of God, unless Divine things were brought to their knowledge under the guidance of faith.

The third reason is for the sake of certitude. For human reason is insufficient in things concerning God. A sign of this is that philosophers in their researches, by natural investigation, into human affairs, have fallen into many errors, and have disagreed among themselves.

Fides et Ratio (II.22)

According to the Apostle, it was part of the original plan of the creation that reason should without difficulty reach beyond the sensory data to the origin of all things: the Creator. But because of disobedience by which man and woman chose to set themselves in full and absolute autonomy in relation to the One who created them, this ready access to God the Creator was lost.

As again the Apostle who reveals just how far human thinking, because of sin, became “empty”, and human reasoning became distorted and inclined to falsehood (cf. Rom 1:21-22). The eyes and mind were no longer able to see clearly: reason became more a prisoner to itself. The coming of Christ was the saving event which redeemed reason from its weakness, setting it free from the shackles in which it had imprisoned itself.

. What can Reason Accomplish

Proving the 'preambles of the articles of faith'
including the existence of God.

Guiding "faith seeking understanding".
Philosophy as the handmaid of theology.

Moral Law

Romans 1:19-20. What can be known of God
in to them... Ever since the creation of the
world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal
power and deity, has been clearly perceived in
the things that have been made. So they are
without excuse.

Romans 2:15 They (the Gentiles) show that
what the law requires is written on their hearts
while their conscience also bears witness...

Summa Th., I q2, a2

Reply to Objection 1. The existence of God and other like truths about God, which can be known by natural reason, are not articles of faith, but are preambles to the articles; for faith presupposes natural knowledge, even as grace presupposes nature, and perfection supposes something that can be perfected.

Nevertheless, there is nothing to prevent a man, who cannot grasp a proof, accepting, as a matter of faith, something which in itself is capable of being scientifically known and demonstrated.

Catechism 31

Created in God's image and called to know and love him, every person who seeks God discovers certain ways of knowing to know him. These are also called proofs for the existence of God, not in the sense of proofs in the natural sciences, but rather in the sense of “converging and convincing arguments”, which allow us to attain certainty about the truth. These “ways” of approaching God from creation have a twofold point of departure: the physical world, and the human person.

St. Thomas's Five Ways

Summa Theologica I, q2, a3. See also Summa
Contra Gentiles Part I.

- First Way: from motion and change.
- Second Way: from the causation of existence.
- Third Way: from the necessity/permanence of existence.
- Fourth Way: from the perfection of the First Cause
- Fifth Way: from the intelligence of the FC.

Proving God vs. Proving a Creation in Time

Thomas Aquinas argued that we cannot prove that the world of natural things had a beginning in time (a moment of creation).

He thought that we know this only by faith.

Nonetheless, he thought that we could prove

by reason that the world (even an eternal

world) would have to have an eternal first

cause.

Way 1: from change

Time is the measure of change. So, no change, no passage of time.

Change involves the actualization of some potential. Every such actualization requires a 'first' or primary agent (one whose potentiality is not itself the result of the action of something else).

Such a first agent must be eternally in action, since if it weren't, it would have to be put in action by something else.

Something that is eternally in action would be "outside" time itself, truly eternal (i.e., God).

Way 2: from causation

Everything has a nature, by which it belongs to some 'natural' kind.

If a natural kind has any actual instances, this must be causally explained by the action of some other kind of thing.

This chain cannot regress to infinity: so there must be a kind of thing that exists by its own nature.

existence

Whether the world had a beginning or it has existed for an infinite period of time.

If it had a beginning, then it must have had a eternal cause.

If it has existed for an infinite period, there must be an eternal cause that explains its continuing to exist for so long. Either way, God causes the world to exist.

May 4: the Perfection of God

cause must be “greater” than its effect:
greater in power, goodness, wisdom.

any possible being other than God would have
be caused by God.

, God must be the greatest possible being.

May 5: the Intelligence of God

We can learn about God's attributes by examining his effects: the created world.

The created world is an orderly world, obeying simple and general laws of nature.

The system of the world is organized for good results, like the existence of life and perception.

The source of such an orderly and productive system must be a being of great intelligence.

Conscience

Catechism 33: The human person: with his openness to truth and beauty, his sense of moral goodness, his freedom and the voice of his conscience, with his longings for the infinite and for happiness... In all this he discerns signs of his spiritual soul. The soul, the "seed of eternity we bear in ourselves, irreducible to the merely material", can have its origin only in God.

The Moral Law Within

We experience the interior voice of God through our conscience, our sense of morality (Romans 2).

S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity and The Abolition of Man*.

John Henry Cardinal Newman, *The Grammar of Assent*.

The Appeal to Truth

In our intellectual lives, we experience the authority of truth as an eternal standard of thought to which we must aspire.

Our awareness of such an eternal standard of intellectual action is a way of knowing God: Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will*, II; Anselm, *De Veritate* (On Truth); C. S. Lewis, *On Miracles* (Chapter 2).

'Faith Seeking Understanding'

- St. Anselm's motto.
- Reason's function is rather to find meaning, to discover explanations which might allow everyone to come to a certain understanding of the contents of faith.... Faith asks that its object be understood with the help of reason; and at the summit of its searching reason acknowledges that it cannot do without what faith presents. Blessed John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 42.

Fides et Ratio 34-44

h therefore has no fear of reason, but seeks it out and has trust in it. Justice builds on nature and brings it to fulfillment, so faith builds upon and perfects reason. Illumined by faith, reason is set free from the fragility and limitations deriving from the disobedience of sin and finds the strength required to rise to the knowledge of the Triune God.

Profoundly convinced that “whatever its source, truth is of the Holy Spirit” (omne verum a quocumque dicatur a Spiritu Sancto est), Saint Thomas was impartial in his love of truth. He sought truth wherever it might be found and gave consummate demonstration of its universality.

Reason

The two cannot contradict each other.

Faith is itself reasonable.

Reason requires the help of faith if it is to remain vigorous, avoid self-annihilation.

Why God doesn't provide irresistible evidence for the faith?

Harmony of Faith and Reason

This truth, which God reveals to us in Jesus Christ, is not opposed to the truths which philosophy perceives. On the contrary, the two modes of knowledge lead to truth in all its fullness. The unity of truth is a fundamental premise of human reasoning, as the principle of non-contradiction makes clear. Fides et Ratio,

Vatican I, Dei Filius

Even though faith is above reason, there can never be any real disagreement between faith and reason, since it is the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith, and who has endowed the human mind with the light of reason.

Not only can faith and reason never be at odds with one another but they mutually support each other, for on the one hand right reason established the foundations of the faith and, illuminated by its light, develops the science of these things; on the other hand, faith delivers reason from errors and protects and furnishes it with knowledge of many kinds. (Chapter IV, 1870)

Faith is Reasonable

Natural knowledge involves rational faith in other people. How much more rational is faith in God!

The Holy Spirit moves us to believe, from a rational desire for our supernatural end.

God has confirmed the truth of his revelation through many miracles, including the miracle of the Church itself.

Summa Theologica II-II, q2 a9

Reply to Objection 3. The believer has sufficient motive for believing, for he is moved by the authority of Divine teaching confirmed by miracles, and, what is more, by the inward instinct of the Divine invitation: hence he does not believe lightly. He has not, however, sufficient reason for scientific knowledge, hence he does not lose the merit.

Dei Filius, ch. 3 (Vatican I)

Nevertheless, in order that the submission of our faith should be in accordance with reason, it was God's will that there should be linked to the internal assistance of the holy Spirit external indications of his revelation, that is to say divine acts, and first and foremost miracles and prophecies, which clearly demonstrating as they do the omnipotence and infinite knowledge of God, are the most certain signs of revelation and are suited to the understanding of all.

For instance, Moses and the prophets, and especially Christ our Lord himself, worked many absolutely clear miracles and delivered prophecies; while of the apostles we read:

And they went forth and preached every, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it .

Catechism 156

Thus the miracles of Christ and the saints, prophecies, the Church's growth and holiness and her fruitfulness and stability "are the most certain signs of divine Revelation, adapted to the intelligence of all"; they are "motives of credibility" (*motiva credibilitatis*), which show that the assent of faith is "by no means a blind impulse of the mind".

Reason Depends on Faith

The Christian faith is a charter of human reason.

God is a God of reason: “Come let us reason together.” (Isaiah 1:18) Abraham debates God over Sodom (Genesis 18)

We are created in God’s image, commanded to “subdue” and “have dominion” over creation (Gen. 1:28)

Modern science developed in Christian Europe.

John Paul II

taking up what has been taught repeatedly by the Popes for several generations and affirmed by the Second Vatican Council itself, I wish to reaffirm strongly the conviction that the human being can come to a unified and organic vision of knowledge. This is one of the tasks which Christian thought will have to take up through the next millennium of the Christian era. The segmentation of knowledge, with its splintered approach to truth and the consequent fragmentation of meaning, keeps people today from coming to an interior

to believe it possible to know a universally valid truth is in no way to encourage tolerance; on the contrary, it is the essential condition for sincere and authentic dialogue between persons. On this basis alone is it possible to overcome divisions and to journey further towards full truth, walking those paths known only to the Spirit of the Risen Lord (Ratio et Ratio)

Danger of Relativism

5. Rather than make use of the human capacity to know the truth, modern philosophy has preferred to accentuate the ways in which this capacity is limited and conditioned.

This has given rise to different forms of agnosticism and relativism which have led philosophical research to lose its way in the shifting sands of widespread scepticism. Recent times have seen the rise to prominence of various doctrines which tend to devalue even the truths which had been judged certain. A legitimate plurality of positions has yielded to an undifferentiated pluralism, based upon the assumption that all positions are equally valid, which is one of today's most widespread symptoms of the lack of confidence in truth. Even certain conceptions of life coming from the East betray this lack of confidence, denying truth its exclusive character and assuming that truth reveals itself equally in different doctrines, even if they contradict one another. On this understanding, everything is reduced to opinion; and there is a sense of being adrift. (Fides et Ratio, Introduction)

Moral Relativism

When the idea of a universal truth about the good, knowable by human reason, is lost, inevitably the notion of conscience also changes. Conscience is no longer considered in its primordial reality as an act of a person's intelligence, the function of which is to apply the universal knowledge of the good in a specific situation and thus to express a judgment about the right act to be chosen here and now. Instead, there is a tendency to grant to individual conscience the prerogative of independently determining the criteria of good and evil and then acting accordingly. Such an outlook is quite alien to an individualist ethic, wherein each individual is faced with his own truth, different from the truth of others. Taken to its extreme consequences, this individualism leads to a denial of the very idea of human nature.