**Part VI – Faith and Reason**

God is perfect and the Supreme Creator of all things. God is goodness itself and truth itself. With that being the case, God cannot contradict Himself. God’s truths are absolute. God cannot reveal truths opposed to each other. God is Wisdom itself thus His truths are by their nature always reasonable. God is also eternal and therefore God cannot change His mind.

When God created human persons, He created us in His image. This means that just as God has an intellect and a will, He created us with an intellect and a will as well. However, our intellect and will are finite (have limits) unlike God who is infinite/limitless. But our intellect does have the ability to reason which means to think, understand and form judgments (using a process of logic). Using this ability, we can look at the various things God has revealed Himself to us and better understand God (and thus ourselves as well). In addition, we can use reason to help us make conclusions as to which of the various teachings that **claim** to be divine revelations are in fact the very Word of God. Anything unreasonable must be determined to be false. Now, unlike false claims, we will find that there are some truths that are **beyond** our reason to comprehend. This is different than being unreasonable! Being “beyond our reason” means that our intellects are too finite to understand/comprehend certain truths about the infinite God.

[Confused about the distinction? Example: If someone asks me if God could create a two dimensional circle that was three sided, I would say no because by definition, a shape that is 2D and three sided is a triangle and not a circle. This does NOT mean that God is “limited” or that God is “not all powerful since He cannot do this”. Rather, this idea is unreasonable! On the other hand, as Christians we believe that God has revealed that Jesus is God become man and that God is a Trinity (one God, three Divine Persons). These are difficult teachings for us to fully comprehend/fully understand but it does not mean that they are not true nor are they unreasonable. These mysteries of our faith are beyond our finite intellect to fully understand!]

The important point here is that our God-given ability to reason is a great gift that we must utilize when evaluating anything claiming to be truth. Too often people abandon their reason and simply believe whatever they are taught. I have heard some preach that “reason is the greatest enemy of faith”. But this is not true! Reason is a gift from God. It is true that our reason/our intellect is not perfect and it can make mistakes/errors. But when good reasoning is used and when we have our reason rely on faith as being its foundation, reason is not an enemy of faith. Rather, our reason can help us to better understand God’s revelations and can help us discern whether or not something we are being taught is a truth or falsehood.

How can our reason help us in evaluating God and His Revelations? Here are a few examples:

There are some who take the word of a person who has made himself a trustworthy authority figure and simply because this person says it some will believe it. But we have to be careful because there are many who deceive us (either intentionally or more often unintentionally). If what they teach is **unreasonable** we can know it is NOT from God.

Example of an unreasonable statement: If someone said that in Scripture God commands us to obey His laws giving us consequences if we are disobedient, yet in reality it is not possible for us to obey God’s laws, this would be unreasonable! How can God command something for us to do but make it impossible for us to be able to do it? If God commands it, the reasonable reaction would be that God has given us some means to be able to obey Him! [I can talk more about God’s laws if there are questions.]

Another example of an unreasonable statement: If someone said that God gives us laws because He wants us to be unhappy or because God does not love us this is false. Using reason confirmed by Scripture, God loves us unconditionally. We may not understand why God gives us certain laws and commands but we cannot say that these laws are contrary to love and happiness. Therefore, if someone says that laws such as ‘thou shall not commit adultery’ or ‘lust in the heart is an act of adultery’ are given to us to prevent us from being happy we can conclude this is unreasonable and a false statement.

There are also some who claim to have had visions of God or an angel or some other theophany. They then claim that through this experience they were given special revelations from God. It is not impossible that God could allow a person to have some private revelation. However, when examining these special revelations, if there are things that contradict what the Bible says then these revelations are not to be trusted. God does not necessarily reveal all things in the same format BUT God’s revelations will never contradict each other!

And we can even use our experiences in this world to help us understand the ways of God in some areas. If it is unreasonable in this earthly life, we can extend the principles to the ways of God.

Example: To say that a baby in the womb at 24 weeks old is not a human person yet a woman gives birth to a 24 week old baby and thus it IS now a human person – this is unreasonable. We can thus know that God does not see this as being true either. A human person is a human person from the moment of conception. The embryo that is growing is NOTHING else but a male/female human being at an early stage in life.

Example: I have been told that the idea of having a hierarchy is “evil”. However, look around. In our families, in our societies, in our military, in our sports teams and in creation there IS hierarchy! This signifies order. It helps to control against chaos. It provides unity. It is true that the people **within** the hierarchy potentially could cause problems but it is unreasonable to say that hierarchy itself is evil.

Having explained this, we must recognize that faith and reason are inseparable! Pope Saint John Paul II wrote, “Faith 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 the desire to know the truth — in a word, to know himself — so that by knowing and loving God, men and women can come to the fullness of the truth about themselves” (*Fides et ratio*). It is important to truly understand this reality.

Faith without reason leads to blind faith which is not how God calls us to know Him. This blind faith can lead to a misunderstanding about who God is. God does not want us to close our eyes and jump into a swimming pool not knowing whether or not it is filled with water! God wants us to love Him. Thus, He wants us to come to know Him by studying all that He has revealed. The more we know God, the more we can love God. Having a blind faith can lead some to simply believe certain teachings said to be from God without realizing they are being deceived and misled.

On the other hand, reason without faith will ultimately lead to doubt then skepticism then to disbelief. Ultimately the result of using reason alone without faith will be relativism. Why? Because our intellect – our ability to reason – is not infallible – we CAN make mistakes in our thinking. But if I convince myself that my idea is the most reasonable and is therefore true, yet it is in conflict to what another person believes to be truth, what do you do?

One outcome is that you merely agree to disagree but then what is truth?

The other option is that you succumb to the idea that whatever is true in your own reasonable mind is just as true as another person’s opinion who, using their own reason, comes to a contradictory idea of truth. In this mindset, truth is within the individual’s reason and thus could be different for everyone. This is relativism – the belief that truth is variable from person to person. Inevitably with this view we are left with people believing that any opinions/conclusions based on reason are to be accepted. This has led to the common meme of today “Whatever is true for me is true for me; whatever is true for you is true for you; as long as no harm comes upon an innocent person, we can agree to disagree and hold all truths”.

But let us use our reason! It is unreasonable to believe in relativism!

Truth cannot contradict truth. It is either true or it is false. There may things we do not yet know or understand. There may be some things where there are several possible choices. But the idea of contradictory truths is not a reality. [Those who hold to relativism will even say that relativism is the only true way of thinking. Well, but wait, they are claiming there IS a truth – it is their view that relativism! So they believe in an absolute truth when it comes to relativism being true, but they do not believe absolute truths exist in other areas! This is bad reasoning!]

Having discussed the issues with reason, what is the role of faith when it comes to reason?

Faith is first a response to God. By faith we give our assent to God’s divine testimony – to those truths God has revealed. We are to have an obedience of faith to these truths because it is God Himself who is the guarantor of these truths. We are to then embrace these truths known by faith with our reason to better see their profound meaning. Using our reason we can come to know some truths about the world, about ourselves and about God. BUT we are creatures with a finite (limited) mind. There is only so much we can come to know. The most intelligent human person that has ever lived or will ever live will still have limits to what they can know. This person also still can make mistakes and errors in thought. Only God has infinite, perfect knowledge. But God does not abandon us to our finite reason. God has given us the gift of faith and, in these revealed truths, our reason is elevated and can be perfected.

Faith involves believing all that God has revealed. Because faith is adhering ourselves to God’s truths. Faith surpasses that of reason because it involves truths that we can know absolutely because God has revealed them. Knowledge that we have through our reason alone can be erroneous, but that which we know through faith can never be wrong because it is what we have been told by God.

[It is true that we can have an erroneous source of revelation which is why we must test everything BUT what we have truly been given by God will not change and will not err.]

Because of this, our faith **elevates and perfects** our reason! Taking that which we know by faith and then contemplating it using our reason we can come to better understanding and have deeper insights of these truths.

Regardless of what faith background we hold, as we continue to reflect on God and His truths in these posts, we must recognize that faith and reason are inseparable. And divine faith and human reason properly utilized will not contradict as both are gifts from god. “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 the mysteries and infuses faith, and who has endowed the human mind with the light of reason. Moreover, God cannot deny himself, nor can truth contradict truth” (Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith). With this awareness, let us not neglect our gifts of faith and reason as we contemplate more and more on what we believe and why!

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