

When faith and reason are both properly understood, it is much easier to learn how to fly with both wings of faith and of reason together. Birds, we observe, learn to fly gradually and by practice. To be sure, one also learns how to fly with faith and reason gradually and by practice. In order to facilitate that learning, we now present seven ways in which faith and reason relate to each other. Each of these ways also reveals an ongoing task for the Church as a whole and for individual faithful in order for us together to cultivate an intelligent faith and faithful intelligence. In each of the following numbered points we name the relation, define it in italics, clarify it with further comments and examples, and discuss the ongoing task it sets before the whole Church.

**1. Consistency.** *Right faith and right reason are logically consistent with each other.* Whatever God has *in fact* revealed for acceptance by faith and whatever has been *genuinely* demonstrated by reason do not and cannot contradict. For if God reveals something to be accepted by faith, then it is true. And if something has been genuinely demonstrated by reason, then it too is true. Since no truth can contradict another truth, what is held by a right faith and what is demonstrated by right reason cannot contradict one another.

The difficulty is that faith and reason sometimes seem to contradict. In such cases, we know that the appearance is due either to a faulty use of reason or to a misinterpretation of divine revelation. It would be a faulty use of reason to say that the universe is in a steady state without beginning or end. It would be a misinterpretation of divine revelation to say that God has revealed that the sun is the center of the universe. Because there can be faulty uses of reason or misinterpretations of divine revelation, it is important

to say that *right* reason and *right* faith are consistent.

There are many contemporary difficulties. For example, evolutionary biology seems to affirm that man is not a special creation by God but just the product of a meaningless chance process while Sacred Scripture seems to affirm that man is a special creation and *not* the product of a meaningless chance process (or not *just* the product of meaningless chance). But this is only an apparent contradiction.

**2. Support.** *Right reason can demonstrate many truths about God and support some of the things we believe by faith in God's revelation.* The Church claims that human reason, rightly used, is capable of

## Faith and Reason: The Two Wings of the Human Spirit / Part II

**Rev. James Brent, O.P.**

giving solid arguments for the existence of God as well as various divine attributes. In so doing, human reason can also

account for how its own language applies to God. Human reason can also provide good arguments for the immateriality and immortality of the human soul.

The Church also understands that not all human beings are equally capable of doing all the intellectual learning needed to elaborate or fathom all such arguments. The task, rather, falls to a few who are gifted with the aptitude, time, and leisure for such studies. Nonetheless, there are in the Church some people with a calling to take up just this task of searching into reasons in support of the faith, and the Church exhorts all to develop their own personal intellectual potential to the full.

**3. Defense.** *Right reason can refute objections brought against things we believe by faith.* Skeptics are often not content with requesting evidence

that supports Christian beliefs, but they often advance arguments attempting to show that Christian beliefs are false. Human reason, sometimes proceeding as philosophical reason and sometimes proceeding in the manner of other disciplines such as history, archaeology, biology, philology, *etc.*, is able to show that such arguments fail to arrive at their conclusions.

Human reason does not always easily find the fallacy in such arguments. The current state of the evidence may provide what seems to be deep support for positions incompatible with a particular Christian belief. But nonetheless it falls to reason to answer these objections if only by undertaking new research with a view to re-

futing them in the future. The task at hand is to gather these objections, humbly give them a fair hearing, humbly welcome what truth they hold, and answer them without a proud and polemical spirit.

**4. Illumination.** *Right reason can discover many truths that enhance our understanding of what we believe by faith in God's revelation.* Any truth knowable by philosophical reason or by human learning generally has the potential, either directly or indirectly, to enhance the believer's understanding of the mysteries of faith.

Whether philosophical reason or historical reason or scientific reason, all truth gathered "from below" potentially serves to understand the mysteries of faith. It is the task of systematic theology to take from the truths discovered by right reason and use them to illuminate the riches of the faith.

**5. Correction.** *Right faith corrects many errors that reason commonly makes.* It is commonly acknowledged that the history of human learning is a history of errors and mistakes (though it is not just errors and mistakes). Human inquiry, therefore, stands to benefit from having a higher light or criterion to show such errors and mistakes for what they are. Now, as pointed out above, any purported deliverance of reason that contradicts what God has revealed cannot itself be true or a

deliverance of right reason. For this reason, faith and revelation point out many errors of reason.

Given the corrective power of the faith, the task at hand is to point out errors, especially the more subtle ones, and to show what is compatible and incompatible with what God has revealed.

#### **6. Illumination from Above.**

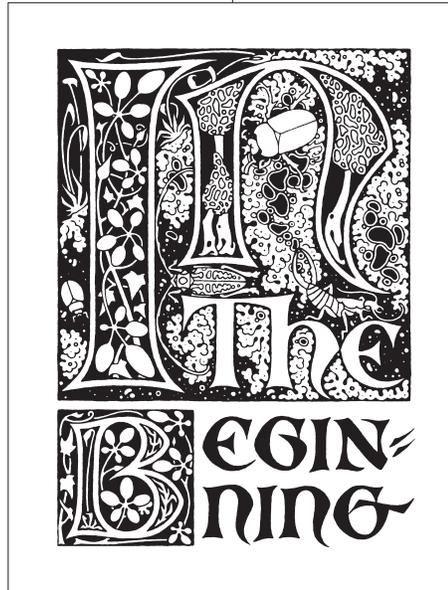
*Right faith allows the person to see all created things in relation to God.*

If one believes that God exists, has created all things, and rules all things by his providence, then a wonderful form of contemplation opens before the believer. All things can be "read" in light of God.

The Fathers of the Church were accustomed to "reading" the world this way—in light

of God. So were Christian thinkers after them for centuries. The task at hand for us today is to relearn this form of contemplation that reads the world in light of God's existence and providence. Even more radically, the task is to read all things in light of the revealed mysteries of the Trinity, Incarnation, and Paschal Mystery.

**7. Fulfillment.** *Right faith provides answers to some of the most common yet most difficult questions raised by reason.* Human reason has many questions, but the history of thought proves that human reason faces great difficulties in finding shared answers to its own most profound questions. Faith in divine revelation, however, speaks to many of our deepest questions. When one believes by faith the testimony offered by God, one receives answers to the questions of life. And those answers are susceptible to support, defense, and illumination by reason. The same answers serve also to correct and illuminate our own human learning. 



#### **FIND THIS (AND MORE) ON THE WEB:**

<http://www.thomisticevolution.org/disputed-questions/faith-and-reason-the-two-wings-of-the-human-spirit-part-ii/>