

APOLOGION

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Why would a scholar say anything about his religious faith on his *scholarly* website? There are two issues here: (1) what faith has to do with reason; and even granting that it has to do with reason, (2) what justifies reference to personal matters.

What faith has to do with reason

Underlying the challenge “What does faith have to do with reason?” is an assumption -- usually unexamined -- that faith and reason are enemies. This supposition makes interesting bedfellows, for it is the one point that extreme secularists and extreme fundamentalists have in common. The former imagine that by rejecting faith they are choosing reason; the latter imagine that by rejecting reason they are choosing faith.

Though it comes as a surprise to both groups, Christianity has historically rejected fideism, holding that disciplined faith and disciplined reason are not enemies but allies. As John Paul II remarked, they are like the two wings of a bird, both of them necessary to fly. Before his own accession to the papacy, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger wrote that in the early days of Christianity, "in an environment teeming with gods," when believers were asked to which god their God corresponded, "the answer ran: to none of them. To none of the gods to whom you pray but solely and alone to him to whom you do not pray, to that highest being of whom your philosophers speak." He explained that this meant choosing the *Logos*, divine reason, in place of any kind of myth.

Rejecting faith leads not to faithlessness but to unreasonable faith. Consider, for example, the unofficial established religion of the secular university. The university does not insist that there is no God. However, one is expected to act as though if there is a God, He could not make a difference to anything else, especially to one's scholarship. In other words, one is supposed to believe in an *irrelevant* God. Notice that this stance does not make the secular university neutral among religions. On the contrary, it puts it diametrically at odds with Christianity, for the Christian faith believes in a relevant God, one who does make a difference to scholarship, since He is the First Truth on which every other truth depends. And there is more. If one considers God irrelevant, it does not follow that one does not worship. What follows is that one bows to different supreme concerns, although

they are usually unacknowledged; one worships other gods than God. Historically, Christianity has proposed reasons for trusting in the God that it adores openly; it proposes a reasonable faith. But the intellectual culture of the secular university does not propose reasons for trusting in the gods that it adores tacitly; therefore it pursues an unreasonable faith.

What justifies reference to personal matters

Faith is inevitably personal, because it is more than intellectual agreement with propositions posted on a blackboard. If I believe in my mind that the bridge will hold me up, yet I refuse to walk out on it, there is something lacking in my assent. So it is if I believe in my mind that the living God is the foundation of reality and the ultimate good, yet I live as though He were not. Faith, then, is more than intellectual agreement. It is the *Yes* that one gives to the Redeemer with everything that is in him, mind, strength, soul, and heart. This does not reduce scholarship to biography. But it shows why biography matters. Our intellectual investigation of what is in fact true is inescapable bound up with our personal response to this truth.

Christianity has delved more deeply into these matters than other religions, because of its conviction that God Himself is personal, a blazing unity of three Persons in one Substance. Continuing the remarks that I quoted above, Cardinal Ratzinger explains,

By deciding exclusively in favor of the God of the philosophers and logically declaring this God to be the God who speaks to man and to whom one can pray, the Christian faith gave a completely new significance to this God of the philosophers, removing him from the purely academic realm and thus transforming him ... this God who had been understood as pure Being or pure thought, circling round for ever closed in upon itself without reaching over to man and his little world; this God of the philosophers, whose pure eternity and unchangeability had excluded any relation with the changeable and transitory, now appeared to the eye of faith as the God of men, who is not only thought of all thoughts, the eternal mathematics of the universe, but also agape, the power of creative love.

References

John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* ("Faith and Reason"), Preface.

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), pp. 94-95, 99.