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The relationship between love and reason

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Reflections on the Love and Reason Relationship¹

All the great Catholic universities of the world were founded on the belief that the human person is a creature made in the image and likeness of God since the book of *Genesis*, the very first book of the Bible, makes this claim. It is a belief that Jews and Christians share. Most theologians agree that being made according to this divine blue-print means that we have all been endowed with rational intellects with a capacity to discern truth, free wills with an appetite for goodness and an affective dimension of our spiritual selves with a capacity to love, most commonly known as the human heart. Our spiritual dimension also includes a memory and an imagination.

When the great medieval Catholic universities were founded these beliefs were taken for granted. The medievals would have found it odd to set up an academic institution in which people study, argue and conduct research if there were no such thing as truth to be pursued. The Dominicans, who along with the Franciscans, helped to staff many of these early universities like the Sorbonne, Oxford, Cambridge, Bologna and Salamanca, even took as their motto the Latin word *Veritas* meaning truth. Their logo was the black and white dog with a firebrand in its mouth. The general idea was that these black and white dogs (a visual pun on the name Dominican which can be translated as canines of the Lord) were to spread the truth of Christianity throughout the villages of Europe beginning in the great centres of learning.

As the centuries rolled by Catholic academics would argue among themselves and then after the 16th century they argued with Protestant academics and then after the 18th century they argued with so-called rationalists and deists, then finally in the twentieth century there came the debates with Marxists, Nietzscheans and a wide assortment of post-moderns. The difference between the Marxists and the Nietzscheans and all those post-moderns who follow Nietzsche is that the Marxists still believed in truth, while the Nietzscheans regard the mere belief in truth as an oppressive idea.

¹This paper was written as a professional development lecture for staff members of the University of Notre Dame in May, 2017. It represents a redaction and synthesis of two earlier publications: “Christianity in the Marketplace of Faith Traditions”, chapter 6 of Rowland, T, *Benedict XVI: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010): 114-128 and Rowland, T, “Joseph Ratzinger's Friendship with Augustine, Bonaventure and Aquinas”, *Logos et Musica: In Honorem Summi Romani Pontificis Benedicti XVI* E. Szczurko, et.al. (eds), (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013): 163-179.

At the University of Queensland which was founded in 1909 by an Act of the Queensland parliament, not by the Catholic Church, the building which is the home to the social sciences departments, known as the Michie Building, is made from Halidon sandstone. Chiseled into the sandstone in letters about a metre high are the words “Great is Truth and Mighty above all Things”. So a century ago even so-called secular universities saw themselves as being in the business of the pursuit of truth.

My paper today however is not simply about how Catholics are into truth because you all know this. What I want to explore is the broader fact that Catholics believe that human beings have both an intellectual and an affective dimension, a heart as well as a head, or in contemporary parlance “EQ” as well as “IQ” and I want to do this by reference to some of the statements in the theology of Pope Benedict, not because he is a pope Emeritus, but because he is a Catholic scholar who constantly emphasized the importance of the love and reason relationship. Lots of scholars have written about faith and reason but Joseph Ratzinger wrote quite a lot about love and reason.

In November of 1999 to mark the arrival of the millennium the Sorbonne University held a colloquium entitled *Deux mille sans après quoi?* Eighteen speakers were invited, including Cardinal Ratzinger, as he was. His address was framed by the question of how Christianity originally saw itself in the marketplace of religious traditions. He began by observing that in the year 2000 Christianity is in deep crisis, especially in Europe. He further identified the foundation of the crisis as the loss of belief in the idea that reason and religion have anything to do with one another. He also noted the popularity of the Buddhist fable promoted by Leo Tolstoy that compares the different faith traditions to different perceptions of an elephant as given by blind men, some having caught hold of its trunk, others its tail, others its ears and so on. The fable is often quoted by people who believe that there is no possibility of one true religion. There is simply a human quest for contact with something divine, some force that is supra-human. Different religious traditions merely represent different human experiments fostered by this basic psychological need. Human beings have no capacity to understand the supra-human, no faculty for contact with the divine. They are like blind men grasping parts of an elephant or so the fable goes.

In his response to the fable, Ratzinger suggested that the best place to find an answer to the question of how Christianity originally saw itself in the market place of faith traditions, is in

St. Augustine's work on the philosophy of religion according to Marcus Terrentius Varro (116-27BC). Varro identified 3 different approaches to theology: what might be termed mystical theology, political theology and natural theology or physics. Within Varro's framework, the classical poets were the mystical theologians, they composed hymns to the gods. Their natural habitat was the theatre which in classical times was thoroughly religious and cultic in character. According to popular conviction theatre shows were established in Rome on the orders of the gods. The content of mystical theology was thus the myths of the gods. The natural theologians were the philosophers, those who went beyond the mundane and searched to understand reality as such. Their natural habitat was in the academies and the content of their theology focused on the subject of the nature of the gods. The political theologians were those whose natural habitat was found in the organs of government and the content of their theology covered cult worship.

From these sets of distinctions Varro concluded that natural theology deals with the nature of the gods and the remaining theologies deal with the godly institutions of men. Civil theology does not ultimately have any god, only religion; while natural theology has no religion, only some deity. Within this triad the order of worship, the concrete world of religion, does not belong to the order of reality as such, but to the order of *mores*, or customs. The gods did not create the state, rather the state instituted its own gods, and their worship is important to the state in order to maintain the good conduct of its citizens. According to this view, religion is essentially a political phenomenon or what today would be called an ideology. Ratzinger noted that within this triad of theological types, St. Augustine placed Christianity into the realm of physical or natural theology. Christianity therefore has its antecedents in philosophical rationality, not in mythical cults which have their ultimate justification in their political usefulness.

From this foundation Ratzinger concluded that precisely because Christianity understood itself as the triumph of knowledge over myth, it had to consider itself universal – 'it had to be taken forth to all peoples not as a specific religion elbowing its way among others, not through any sort of religious imperialism, but as truth which makes illusion superfluous'. Since it did not concur with the relativity and changeability of the civic gods it frustrated the political usefulness of religion and as a result its adherents were subjected to successive waves of persecutions by Roman emperors.

Nonetheless, while Ratzinger, following St. Augustine, classified Christianity under the banner of a natural religion, he observed that with Christianity there is a profound modification of the philosophical image of God: the God in whom the Christians believe is truly a natural God, in contrast to the mythic and political gods; but not everything which is nature, is God. God is God by his nature, but nature as such is not God. There is a certain separation between all-embracing nature and the Being which affords it its origin and beginning. Further, this God is not a silent God. This God entered human history and revealed to humanity the fact that God is love.

According to Ratzinger's reading of history, Christianity was convincing precisely because it joined faith and reason and because it directed action to *caritas*, to charity – the moral practices which were a part of the Christian package placed an accent on the loving care of the suffering, the poor and the weak:

In the conception of Early Christianity the notions of human nature, God, the ethos [of institutions] and religion were inextricably linked to one another and precisely this bond helped Christianity to navigate clearly amidst the crisis of the gods and the crisis of ancient rationality.²

In other words, the triumph of Christianity over the pagan religions was not merely founded on a linking of faith and reason but on the triadic relationship of faith, reason and love.

In a more recent work *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, Ratzinger observed that there are essentially three ways of moving beyond the realm of primitive human religious experience and myth. He identified these as mysticism, monotheistic revolution and enlightenment. He further argued that the real questions concerning relations between religions arise between mysticism and monotheistic revolution and that no choice can be made in favour of one or the other on rational grounds since to do so would be to presuppose the absolute validity of the rational way. Accordingly, the choice is, in the final analysis, one of faith, albeit, in the case of a choice for monotheistic revolution, a faith that makes use of rational standards.³

² Ibid.

³ J. RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004): 32.

Ratzinger identifies the difference between the mystical and monotheistic ways as a different understanding of God. For the mystical traditions, such as Buddhism, God is entirely passive and the decisive element is human experience, whereas for the monotheistic traditions, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, God is active and in some sense invites the person into a relationship.⁴ What results from this difference is that the beliefs of the monotheistic traditions are historical in character, whereas the mystical traditions are unhistorical in character.⁵ Therefore Ratzinger emphasizes that Christianity is essentially faith in an event, in the Incarnation of Christ which we celebrate at Christmas and in the Resurrection of Christ which Christians celebrate at Easter, whereas the mystical traditions believe in the existence of an eternal world that stands in opposition to the world of time.⁶

The fact that the Christian God invites his creatures into a relationship means that they have to have a means of relating to him. The theological answer to this is that they relate through their knowledge and their love, and indeed that they were created in such a way that their intellects were made to receive the truth and their hearts were made to love the truth and to love God and all of his creation. From this principle Ratzinger concludes that ‘love *and* reason’ are the ‘twin pillars of all reality’ and accordingly any understanding of the human person needs to pay due regard to the intellectual and affective dimensions of human action.

The medieval scholars understood this when they said that “reason has a wax nose”. As any barrister can attest, the human intellect can be used as an instrument to argue all kinds of cases. A person with a sharp intellect and a heart closed in on itself is a social pest. Highly intelligent people who lack empathy are capable of extreme anti-social and even psychopathic behavior. Therefore both the intellect and the heart need a good formation.

The mid-twentieth century Catholic philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand devoted a number of his publications to this theme of the formation of the heart. He was a leading intellectual opponent of the Nazis and famously caught the last train out of Vienna before the Anschluss. He certainly believed in truth but he also thought that those whose understanding of the faith was defined by theological propositions without any real interior understanding of the propositions and without a Christian formation of the heart were simply not capable of

⁴ Ibid, 39

⁵ Ibid, 39.

⁶ Ibid, 40.

withstanding social and intellectual crises such as those which hit mid-twentieth century Europe.

Similarly, the contemporary work of Fr. Robert Sokolowski from the Catholic University of America, has drawn attention to the neglect of the importance of the affective dimension of the human soul in presentations of the natural law such as one finds in the fields of moral theology and jurisprudence. With reference to St. Paul's notion of the natural law being written on the hearts of the gentiles, Sokolowski has argued that the word *kardia* in the passage from St. Paul's *Letter to the Romans* (usually translated in the Vulgate as *cor*), does not connote the separation of heart and head that we take for granted in a world shaped by Descartes.⁷ Sokolowski concurs with the German philosopher Robert Spaemann's claim that in the New Testament the heart is taken to be a deeper recipient of truth than even the mind or intellect in Greek philosophy since it deals with the person's willingness to accept the truth.⁸

Accordingly, Ratzinger concluded that:

Amidst this contemporary crisis of humanity, the effort to restore the understanding of Christianity as the true religion or religion of truth in the classical sense, must be based equally upon orthopraxis as well as orthodoxy. Today as in the past, its deepest aspect must consist in love and reason converging with one another as the essential foundation pillars of reality: real reason is love and love is real reason. In their unity, they are the real basis and goal of all reality.⁹

This principle was emphasized in Ratzinger-Benedict's first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*. Many of the themes to be found in this encyclical can be traced back to the 1963 work *Love Alone is Credible* by the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988). In its preface Balthasar wrote that never in the history of the Church have Christian thinkers thought it adequate to answer the question of what specifically is Christian about Christianity with reference to a series of mysteries one is required to believe. Instead they have always aimed

⁷ R. SOKOLOWSKI, *Christian Faith and Human Understanding* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006): 230.

⁸ R. SOKOLOWSKI, "What Is Natural Law? Human Purposes and Natural Ends", *The Thomist* 68 (2004): 507–29 at 525.

⁹ J. RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003): 183.

at a point of unity that would serve to provide a justification for the demand for faith. He further argued that it was only an account of revelation based on the notion that God is love which can provide such a point of unity.

Ratzinger began *Deus Caritas Est* with the passage from scripture so emphasized by Balthasar (1 Jn 4:16) – ‘God is love and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in Him’ - and he noted that it is very difficult to find texts of this kind in other religions, that this notion is an element that is peculiar to Christianity.¹⁰ In the first paragraphs of *Deus Caritas Est* he also reiterated the principle he had learned from one of his lecturers - Romano Guardini - that for Christians, truth is a person. According to Guardini:

This *Logos*, which is perfectly simple and yet immeasurably rich, is no order of forms and laws, no world of prototypes and arrangements, but *Someone*, He is the living son of the eternal Father. We can stand before Him, face to face. We can speak to Him and He answers, indeed, He Himself gives us the power to stand before Him and He can grant our request. We can love Him and He is able to give us a communion which reflects the intimacy in which He lies upon the bosom of the Father, and which St. John experienced when His Master permitted him to lay his head upon His heart. This fact established a contrast to everything which natural philosophy and piety can experience or invent. This *Logos*, this one and all, steps into history and becomes man.¹¹

Therefore, Christians believe not only because something is logically coherent but because they have seen the beliefs embodied in the practices of the lives of the saints whose love for others is what makes belief plausible and persuasive and even compelling.

Statements on this theme can also be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a publication of the Holy See which offers a summary of Catholic teaching. Paragraph 31 of *Catechism* states:

Created in God’s image and called to know and love him, the person who seeks God discovers certain ways of coming 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

¹⁰ J. RATZINGER, *Jesus, the Apostles and the Early Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007): 72.

¹¹ R. GUARDINI, *The Word of God: On Faith, Hope and Charity* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1963): 28

sense of converging and convincing arguments, which allow us to attain certainty about the truth.

Moreover in paragraph 30 of Pope Benedict's encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* we find the claim that 'knowledge is never purely the work of the intellect'. While 'it can certainly be reduced to calculation and experiment', if it 'aspires to be wisdom capable of directing man in the light of his first beginnings and his final ends, it must be "seasoned" with the "salt" of charity'. According to Benedict charity is not an added extra, like an appendix to work already concluded in each of the various disciplines: it engages them in dialogue from the very beginning. In effect 'this means that moral evaluation and scientific research must go hand in hand, and that charity must animate them in a harmonious interdisciplinary whole, marked by unity and distinction'.

The importance of the love and reason relationship is also highlighted in the encyclical *Lumen Fidei* which was drafted by Pope Benedict but settled and promulgated by Pope Francis. In paragraph 27 of *Lumen Fidei* we find the following words:

If love needs truth, truth also needs love. Love and truth are inseparable. Without love, truth becomes cold, impersonal and oppressive for people's day-to-day lives. The truth we seek, the truth that gives meaning to our journey through life, enlightens us whenever we are touched by love. One who loves realizes that love is an experience of truth, that it opens our eyes to see reality in a new way, in union with the beloved. In this sense, Saint Gregory the Great could write that "*amor ipse notitia est*", love is itself a kind of knowledge possessed of its own logic. It is a relational way of viewing the world, which then becomes a form of shared knowledge, vision through the eyes of another and a shared vision of all that exists. William of Saint-Thierry, in the Middle Ages, follows this tradition when he comments on the verse of the Song of Songs where the lover says to the beloved, "Your eyes are doves" (*Song 1:15*). The two eyes, says William, are faith-filled reason and love, which then become one in rising to the contemplation of God, when our understanding becomes "an understanding of enlightened love".

The English convert-author G.K. Chesterton indirectly addressed the love-reason relationship in his biographical sketches of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Thomas Aquinas. According to his own self-description St. Francis was a ‘troubadour’, a lover. St. Thomas was clearly an intellectual. The charism of St. Francis had a liberating effect on the imagination, while the studies of St. Thomas had a liberating effect on the intellect. St. Francis gave Catholic culture the nativity set, St. Thomas gave Catholic culture an intellectual synthesis of Greek and Patristic learning. Both saints wrote hymns of enduring beauty. St. Francis emphasised ‘the love of nature; the love of animals, the sense of social compassion’, while St. Thomas understood that to be a Christian means believing that ‘deity or sanctity lies attached to matter or entered into the world of the senses’.¹² Chesterton concluded that if ‘St. Francis was like that common or garden donkey who carried Christ into Jerusalem, St. Thomas, who was actually compared to an ox, rather resembled that Apocalyptic monster of almost Assyrian mystery, the winged bull’.¹³ One was an example of what the human heart is capable of if in love with Christ, the other was an example of the capacity of the human intellect illumined by Revelation.

In his St. Patrick’s Day General Audience of 2010 Ratzinger-Benedict addressed this theme of the difference between the Thomist and Franciscan traditions head-on. He began by noting that St Thomas and St Bonaventure define the human being's final goal, his complete happiness, in different ways. For St Thomas the supreme end to which our desire is directed is to see God while for St Bonaventure the ultimate destiny of the human being is to love God. He concluded:

Along these lines we could also say that the loftiest category for St Thomas is the true, whereas for St Bonaventure it is the good. It would be mistaken to see a contradiction in these two answers. For both of them the true is also the good, and the good is also the true; to see God is to love and to love is to see God. Hence it was a question of their different interpretation of a fundamentally shared vision. Both emphases have given shape to different traditions and different spiritualities and have thus shown the fruitfulness of the faith: one, in the diversity of its expressions.¹⁴

¹² G.K. CHESTERTON, *St. Francis of Assisi* (New York: Image Doubleday, 1957): 9 and G. K. CHESTERTON, *St. Thomas Aquinas* (Image Doubleday: New York, 1956): 41.

¹³ G.K. CHESTERTON, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, 31.

¹⁴ BENEDICT XVI, General Audience Address, March 17, 2010.

According to this reading the two Church Doctors and their intellectual traditions are not locked into a zero sum relationship. It is possible to reconcile the Thomist and Franciscan traditions if one operates on the principle that ‘love and reason are the twin pillars of all reality’. Thomist *veritas* needs Franciscan *caritas et amor* and vice-versa. Problems arise both at the personal and ecclesial levels if one or other ‘pillar’ is obscured. A major challenge of contemporary theological anthropology is thus to present an account of the human person which pays due regard to both the cognitive and affective dimensions.

The contemporary relevance of sustaining the cognitive and affective dimensions of the human person in a mutually auxiliary relationship can also be gleaned from the following exchange between two very prominent continental philosophers, Gianni Vattimo and René Girard. Vattimo remarked that he views the ‘trajectory of contemporary philosophy – from Wittgenstein’s language games to the idea of Being as an event in Heidegger to Richard Rorty’s particular version of pragmatism – as a passage from *veritas* to *caritas*’. He added that ‘truth matters nothing to me except in relation to some particular goal’.¹⁵ To this statement Girard responded:

Personally, I agree with Vattimo when he says that Christianity is a revelation of love, but I don’t exclude that it is also a revelation of truth, because in Christianity truth and love coincide and are one and the same. I think we ought to take very seriously this concept: the concept of love, which in Christianity is the rehabilitation of the unjustly accused victim, which is truth itself, which is the anthropological truth and the Christian truth.¹⁶

If Vattimo’s hostility to truth represents the current state of much contemporary post-Christian scholarship, then the principle that ‘love and reason are the twin pillars of all reality’ becomes the standard under which Catholic scholars need to rally. Reason and dogma without love end in a sterile and pastorally insensitive moralism, while love without reason can be equally pastorally destructive since there are no criteria for judging the merits of alternative acts and styles of life.

¹⁵ G. VATTIMO and R. GIRARD, *Christianity, Truth and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue* Pierpaolo Antonello (ed), (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010): 39.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 47.

In a Catholic University the responsibility of academics is to present their students with the truth as best they see it and for other university employees to offer plenty of opportunities for affective development, for example, through the encouragement of sporting and musical societies, the provision of pastoral care and a chaplaincy service that offers a rich liturgical life. These aspects of university life are often neglected in the big sausage factory universities which no longer seek to educate the whole person but merely to prepare people for jobs in the work force. Offering opportunities to develop every dimension of the human soul is thus one of the hallmarks of a Catholic university and it is probably for this reason that students rate their satisfaction levels with the University of Notre Dame so highly.

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