

Faith and Reason in G. K. Chesterton's *Father Brown*

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G. K. Chesterton wrote a lot of detective stories, but the peculiarity of the *Father Brown* series is that the person who solves the mysteries of the cases is a priest of the Roman Catholic Church. Contrary to his sober appearance and his being a cleric, which gives an impression of a man who is far from reality, Father Brown is wiser and more able to face reality than any other character in the stories. It is well known that Chesterton was a religious writer, but it is also true that he had a special fondness of reality. We can see that his way of perceiving things such as 'eggs are eggs', written in *St. Thomas Aquinas*, is consistent with the way of facing reality of Father Brown and also in the relationship between faith and reason.

The Catholic Church asserts that faith is one of the Virtues given by God, but at the same time an act of free will. In *Father Brown*, on one hand, we can see Father Brown's attitudes and words which suggest his absolute confidence in God. On the other hand, we can see also that he respects the freedom of choice of the suspects. In addition, for Father Brown, believing in God and seeing 'things as they are' are connected. According to *The Bible*, faith is 'the evidence of things not seen' (Heb: 11, 1), and as Chesterton says in *Heretics*, faith is a virtue because it 'means believing the incredible'. However, this is also why faith is easily misunderstood as being 'the power of believing that which we know to be untrue' and that faith works against reason. Father Brown warns the other characters of the book the risk of jumping to superstitious conclusions, and that it is not faith. In *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton says that reason in itself is a matter of faith and that it is 'an act of faith to assert that our thoughts have any relation to reality at all'. Reason needs to be supported by truthful dialogue and faith fills this role. We can see it in the conversion of a thief, Flambeau, and in the relationship between the thief and Father Brown and his vocation as a priest.

The present Catholic Church supports the idea of St. Thomas Aquinas that held that although faith surpasses the capacity of reason, the truth that human reason knows naturally is not opposed to the truth of Christian faith. Chesterton worried about the neglect of reason which led people to mediums

and spiritualism. In fact, in *Father Brown*, there are many characters that pretend to be rational but try to solve the cases giving supernatural explanations. Father Brown admits the limit of human reason, but he also defends it and claims that faith and reason cannot be disconnected.

The Catholic Church holds that there are realities that must be observed by reason and faith helps reason to understand that in these realities works Divine Providence. Faith does not deny human reason; on the contrary, it elevates it. Father Brown resolves the seeming paradox of faith and reason in his person. The paradoxical figure of the quiet and pleasant celibate who knows the real evil in the world is a point of importance and comedy at the same time. As Chesterton explains the scientific humility of St. Thomas Aquinas, Father Brown's attitude in reasoning is humble, and in *Father Brown*, there is no quarrel between faith and reason.