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## In My Own Words

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## IN MY OWN WORDS

It is conventional to state that the first universities matured the distinction between faith and reason which gave the natural, secular world its own intellectual autonomy. But this distinction must not be taken to be more absolute than it actually was. Even with the distinction, reason and faith interacted. Reason was not simply established within a realm in which its own processes ruled, but . . . was also actually strengthened within its own realm by faith, which conveyed its own assurance that reason was worthwhile. Moreover, if reason was indebted to faith for this encouragement, faith itself was helpless without reason, for it needed reason to explicate its own interior organization.

“The feeling for knowledge to which universities today are heirs thus traces to complex noetic structures in the past. In these structures the two intellectual worlds, that in which man comprehends and controls nature and that in which he faces his ultimate concerns, were allied at the very time that they were distinct. The alliance and the distinction between the two persist today. Secular knowledge and faith are still related in ways both uneasy and telling. In the midst of our present knowledge explosions, it will take effort to keep alive a fruitful relationship between the two intellectual worlds. But if knowledge is to be advanced—which is virtually the same as saying, if man is to survive—we have to maintain a firm, if inevitably precarious, hold on both.”

Walter J. Ong, S.J.

*From Knowledge and the Future of Man*  
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