

Do Faith and Reason Conflict?

Notes prepared by Ronnie W Rogers, for panel discussion at University of Oklahoma, 4/16/03.

- I Relationship of Reason, Revelation and Faith: (Natural faith & saving faith)
- 1 Reason is the ability to discover truth and Revelation is the disclosure of truth by God—whether general or special; therefore, reason is essential in discovering truth but is insufficient alone.
 - 2 Revelation & faith go beyond reason but not contrary to it e.g. Trinity.
 - 3 Faith is a free act of the intellect and the will.
 - (1) “Reason supports faith and faith is not contrary to reason, Reason can demonstrate that God exists, but it cannot convince an unbeliever to believe in God. There is always room for unbelievers not to believe in God. If one could base faith solely on reason, faith would not be a free act; it would be consent caused by the mind”; Faith is a free act of the intellect and the will.
 - 4 “Faith is the acceptance of a proposition as true based on the testimony of witnesses¹ (Augustine)
 - (1) If one measures the Eiffel tower, he may be said to know the height, but if he tells someone else, then that person does not strictly “know”, but accepts the statement by faith, based on credibility of the messenger, plausibility, law of non-contradiction....
 - (2) Most, if not all, of what you learn family, OU etc. is by faith; history, what people say, studies, etc.
 - 5 Blaise Pascal², “faith affirms many things respecting which the senses are silent, but nothing which they deny. It is superior to their testimony but never opposed to it”³
 - 6 Faith uses reason, and reason cannot succeed in finding truth without faith”
- II Reason & Faith in phases of Christianity.
- 1 Salvation
 - (1) Believe that God is (reason) before one can believe *in* God (faith)
 - A Before fall *in* love with someone must believe that the someone *is*
 - a Creation (Rom 1:19-20), Conscience (Rom 2:14-15), Conviction (John 16:8).
 - (2) "To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many *convincing proofs*... “(Ac 1:3) **Not blind leap of faith.**
 - (3) Greatest Command, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, SOUL, MIND.” (Mt 22:37)
 - (4) “And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*”.⁴ (Heb. 11:6)
 - 2 Serving (growth)
 - (1) “Test the Spirits” (1 John 4:1); “Study” (2 Tim. 2:15)
 - (2) “*ἀντίθεσις*”, =contradiction, Paul told Timothy to guard truth against (1 Tim. 6:20)
 - 3 Sharing
 - (1) “Be ready to give an answer (*απολογία*) defense, to every one who asks.... (1 Pet. 3:15)

- III Reasons for believing in Christianity
- 1 Person and character of Christ.
 - (1) Sinless character
 - (2) Prophecy fulfilled
 - (3) Impeccable behavior
 - (4) Verifiable claims—He said He would raise His body—resurrection.
 - 2 Scripture
 - (1) Manuscript evidence
 - (2) Christ—the consistent presentation; He said, “thy word is truth”
 - (3) Prophecy fulfilled—about Him & other things, NC, Babylon etc.
 - (4) Archeology—William Ramsey on Luke etc.; plausibility and probability
 - (5) Internal consistency—40 authors, different time periods and consistent message etc.
 - (6) Changed lives—of all types, and none say it was them but Christ.
- IV Reason: The place of it in Christianity
- (1) Many reasonable people believe in God, Thomas Aquinas, “although we cannot reason to God, there are many reasons for believing in God.
 - (2) Reason can only demonstrate what is possible not what is actual. Can only rule out inconsistencies. For example, the statements “the church is meeting today” and “the church is not meeting today”, reason tells you both are not true, but only experience can tell you which is true.
 - (3) Reason demonstrates
 - A The preambles of faith
 - B Analyzes teachings of Scripture and philosophers in order to demonstrate corresponding concepts
 - C Opposes attacks against faith from logic⁵
 - D Illustrates supernatural truths, like trinity.
 - (4) Some say, we then mean that reason is the final test, but actually saying that the Christian faith is not irrational; we do use other methods to learn, but Scripture is the final authority on truth where it speaks.
- V Faith: The place of it in Christianity.⁶
- 1 Faith is not direct knowledge, but neither is it blind.
 - 2 “Faith uses reason, and reason cannot succeed in finding truth without faith”⁷
 - 3 “One cannot both know and believe the same thing at the same time”
 - (1) We know that contradictory assertions are not true in the same way at the same time
 - A Cannot be here and not be here...
 - B God cannot exist and not exist in the same way at the same time.
 - a Therefore not faith
 - 4 Faith goes beyond reason but not contrary to it.
 - 5 We must first believe (Christianity, supernatural) what we can later seek to substantiate with evidence.
 - (1) Deep and removed from five senses
 - (2) Human understanding flawed from fall—philosopher’s flaws, errors, contradictions, scientific facts change disagree, we are wrong etc.

- (3) It takes time to discern spiritual proof as any other kind of proof.
 - (4) Some are disinclined toward the discipline needed for this.
 - A If reason alone were sufficient to know God, or anything, few could know god or anything because they do not have time or ability to construct rational bases for everything—this is not to imply that one can know God by mere reason alone.
 - (5) Some things go beyond reason, and so we need grace—not fully comprehensible
 - A This is true of knowledge of this life as well as some supernatural knowledge, which is not in this life.
 - (6) Aquinas stressed reason before, during and after beliefs are acquired; even the mysteries of faith are not irrational.
 - (7) However, reason alone does not bring anyone to faith.
 - (8) Faith can never be based on reason. At best it can only be supported by reason. Thus, reason and evidence never coerce faith. There is always room for unbelievers not to believe in God. Reason can be used to demonstrate the probability of God’s existence, but never in and of itself is it enough to persuade someone to believe in God.
- 6 Some things, trinity, God not have a body; go beyond reason not contrary to it.

VI Trinity

1 Is

- (1) One God who manifest Himself in three persons who are coequal, coeternal and the same substance.⁸
- (2) One nature-God-in three persons
- (3) One what-nature-and three who’s-persons
 - A Each person is different but they share a common nature.
 - B The Trinity is not proven by reason but known by revelation; but it is not thereby contrary to reason, but rather merely beyond it.

2 Is Not

- (1) Three natures in one nature (contradiction)
- (2) Three persons in one person (contradiction)

3 Logical

- (1) $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$
- (2) Triangle has three distinct corners, yet same essence

VII Biblical Faith is and is not

- 1 Believe hard enough it will become true—that is a wish
- 2 Believe without reason—that is credulity
- 3 Faith in faith—that is positive thinking
- 4 Wish or hope without reason
- 5 Nor merely intellectual assent
- 6 Trust in a person and/or the reasons for it, but biblical faith is also given by God, Matt 16:17, “flesh and blood hath not...”

VIII Falsifiability, Antony Flew

- 1 “Unless some criteria exist by which one could know if something is false, one cannot know it is true”⁹

- 2 Response
 - (1) One can reject his principle
 - (2) His principle is not falsifiable
 - (3) Some things are not falsifiable
 - A Death, ones immortality can be verified if there is consciousness after death, but it cannot be falsified since if we are annihilate no one is there to falsify it.
 - (4) Falsify the resurrection of Christ and Christianity crumbles
 - (5) Disprove the existence of God and a theist might give up belief in God.
- 3 We do accept singular events
 - (1) Birth and death of someone
 - (2) Big bang
 - (3) Geology/ paleontology science/ origin science

IX Introduction complete

- 1 Reason is the ability to discover truth and Revelation is the disclosure of truth by God—whether general or special; therefore, reason is essential in discovering truth but is insufficient alone.
- 2 Revelation goes beyond reason but not contrary to it e.g. Trinity.
 - (1) Trinity, God not have a body, not fully comprehensible and yet not against reason.
- 3 “Faith uses reason, and reason cannot succeed in finding truth without faith”
- 4 “Reason supports faith and faith is not contrary to reason, Reason can demonstrate that God exists, but it cannot convince an unbeliever to believe in God. There is always room for unbelievers not to believe in God. If one could base faith fully solely on reason, faith would not be a free act; it would be consent caused by the mind”
 - (1) Therefore, faith is a free act of the intellect and the will.
- 5 Blaise Pascal¹⁰, “faith affirms many things respecting which the senses are silent, but nothing which they deny. It is superior to their testimony but never opposed to it”¹¹
- 6 Augustine said, “Faith is the acceptance of a proposition as true based on the testimony of witnesses”¹²
 - (1) If one measures the Eiffel tower, he may be said to know the height, but if he tells someone else, then that person does not strictly “know”, but accepts the statement by faith, based on credibility of the messenger, plausibility, law of non-contradiction.
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- 7 Salvation
 - (1) Believe that God is (reason) before one can believe *in* God (faith)
 - A Before fall *in* love with someone must believe that the someone *is*
 - a Creation (Rom 1:19-20), Conscience (Rom 2:14-15), Conviction (John 16:8).
 - B Can’t believe in something until understand, to some degree, what it is to believe in; hence, some understanding of the gospel before can believe in the gospel.

- (2) "To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many *convincing proofs...*" (Ac 1:3)
- (3) "And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' " (Mt 22:37)
- (4) And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He *is* and that He is a rewarder of those who *seek* Him.¹³ (Heb. 11:6)
- 8 Serving (growth)
- (1) "Test the Spirits" (1 John 4:1)
- (2) "Study" (2 Tim. 2:15)
- (3) Bereans "examined the Scripture" (Acts 17:11)
- (4) "αντιθεσις", =contradiction, Paul told Timothy to guard truth against (1 Tim. 6:20)
- 9 Sharing
- (1) "Be ready to give an answer (απολογία) defense, to every one who asks.... (1 Pet. 3:15)¹⁴

¹ Thales To Dewey, Clark p225 (Augustine's belief)

² 17th century philosopher and mathematician

³ Dictionary of thoughts p 198, French philosopher 1623

⁴ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*. 1995 (Heb 11:6). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁵ (Aquinas gave these three Dic. Of apologetics)

⁶ This section is drawn primarily from Encyclopedia of Apologetics, Norman Geisler, under reason, faith, and dealing with Thomas Aquinas. Much of the logic in this paper is drawn from the writings of Norman Geisler

⁷ (Aquinas Geisler Encyclopedia. of Apologetics)

⁸ I am indebted to Walter Martin for this succinct definition.

⁹ Encyclopedia of Apologetics in loc

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