

# Faith and Reason: Why We Do Good

*On June 11, 2007, Professor Robert P. George participated in the Pallium Lecture Series of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, delivered at the Archbishop Cousins Catholic Center in St. Francis, Wis. As the McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence at Princeton University, Professor George succeeded Woodrow Wilson, Edward S. Corwin, and others in one of the nation's most prestigious endowed chairs. Professor George and the Pallium Lecture Series are introduced here in the transcribed remarks of Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan. We are grateful to Archbishop Dolan and Professor George for the opportunity to print their remarks.*

## Introduction by Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan

What a turnout! Thank you, everyone, for your presence, and welcome to this last of the Pallium Lecture Series for the year 2007. We have had two winners thus far, with Jim Towe and Cardinal McCarrick, and we have an excellent speaker this evening in Professor Robert George of Princeton University.

Professor George, you may not be familiar with the genesis of the Pallium Lecture Series. I had the privilege of being appointed Archbishop of Milwaukee by Pope John Paul II about five years ago, and there is, as you know, the tradition of the archbishop's receiving the pallium, a cloak of sorts. Since my reception of the pallium was a year off, I thought, "Let's do our best to prepare for it, spiritually and intellectually."

So we began the idea of these Pallium Lectures, simply as a way for the people of the Greater Milwaukee community and the Archdiocese of Milwaukee to become acquainted with some questions, with some topics of interest to the church that are related to the culture and society at large—a sort of an exploration of the rich intellectual heritage of the Catholic Church. They went over so well that we decided to keep going, and this evening you are concluding the fifth annual series. We have had close to two dozen lectures, and they have just been splendid. To all of you who have been a part of this from the beginning, thank you.

Of course, one of the themes in the Pallium Lecture Series has been the interaction of faith and culture, of faith and reason. We think of that epic encyclical of Pope John Paul II, the great *Fides et Ratio*, "Faith and Reason." In other words, how do our faith and human reason interact? How do they come together? How do we bring our values to the marketplace? How are we more enlightened, virtuous citizens of this country, this society, this culture?

If you had to locate geographically a place that would exemplify contemporary American culture, you probably could not go wrong in choosing Princeton University. Princeton in a sense personifies learning and

cultural progress and the academic domains, and it counts Professor Robert George among its faculty. You can read his very impressive biography.

Professor George is himself a philosopher, in the philosophy of law, jurisprudence, and he teaches in the area very successfully at Princeton. He is one of the school's most acclaimed teachers and the author of many books, and he has been very involved in the intellectual life of the Church and of our American culture. So if we wanted to get a man who embodied both *fides*, faith, and *ratio*, reason, we could not go wrong in getting Professor Robert George. And with that brief, yet heartfelt, introduction, I would like to present him to you, to welcome him—and to express my thanks to you, Professor, for your presence this evening.

Please join me in welcoming Robert P. George, the McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and Director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University.



### Pallium Lecture of Robert P. George

**T**hank you very much. Thank you, Archbishop Dolan, for that introduction. I appreciate it very much. It is a great honor to be in this archdiocese and to have this invitation from you to give the Pallium Lecture. When I look back on the distinguished line of lecturers in this series, I wonder to myself, “What the devil am I doing here?” Maybe you got the wrong Robert George. But here I am, and here you are, and it is a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to speak with you.

I want to thank Father Paul Hartmann, who has been such a wonderful host and arranger of things. Thank you, Father, for all that you have done to facilitate my visit.

And I am going to embarrass her, but this is a very special opportunity, and I am delighted to ask you to join me in welcoming a former student of mine, just graduated from Princeton, who was the great leader of our wonderful pro-life group on campus, and the young woman who instituted “Respect Life Sunday” in the Princeton University Chapel. She is

from here, Milwaukee, and I am so proud of her—Ashley Pavlic. Milwaukee has much to be proud of in Ashley.

I want as well to say a special “hello” and “thank you” to my friends and colleagues from the Bradley Foundation for sponsoring this series and this particular instantiation of it. I now have a lengthy and wonderful relationship with the Bradley Foundation. The Bradley Foundation assisted in my scholarly career, early on, giving me grants that enabled me to produce the work that got me tenure at Princeton. It also was instrumental in funding the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions, which I had the honor to found in Princeton in 2000. The foundation very generously conferred on me one of its very prestigious Bradley Prizes and then put me on the Board of Directors. So I owe an enormous debt, which I am so pleased to acknowledge here in Milwaukee, to the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation.

And it is a real honor to have here this evening two of my brothers on the Bradley Foundation Board, Tom Smallwood and Dennis Kuester, as well as several members of the staff, including some of my oldest friends at the Bradley Foundation, Dan Schmidt, Dianne Sehler, Jan Riordan, Alicia Manning, and Michael Hartmann. Thank you all for coming—I hope that you didn’t feel compelled to come here because a board member was speaking. But whether or not you felt compelled, I am honored that you are here.

It has been a real blessing for me to work with the Bradley Foundation, and I know what a blessing the Bradley Foundation has been to the city of Milwaukee and the state of Wisconsin. It is a wonderful thing to have the foundation here, and working not only on the most important and pressing and

urgent national issues, but also on so many issues that are so vital to the future of Milwaukee. I have the privilege of serving on the committee of the Bradley Foundation that is devoted to assisting Milwaukee and Wisconsin, and it has made me something of—well, I hope, more than—a friend of Milwaukee. I have come to understand your city. I hope to learn still more about it, but there is a sense in which I have to come to understand myself as a sort of adopted son of Milwaukee, and I like that very much, because it is such a wonderful city. So I thank the Bradley Foundation for that, and I know how grateful the people of Milwaukee are to the Bradley Foundation for the great work that it does.

As Archbishop Dolan said, I am going to address you this evening on the question of faith and reason, the relationship of faith and reason, and I want to lay particular emphasis—in fact, mainly to comment on—the great encyclical by that title (or the Latin, *Fides et Ratio*) of Pope John Paul II. So let me begin.

In his 27 years in the chair of St. Peter, the late Pope John Paul II produced an extraordinary volume of writings. His books, encyclical letters, sermons, and other documents are a treasure trove for the Church. Of course, scholars will labor over them, as scholars are wont to do. Bishops and priests will seek guidance from them in carrying out their pastoral ministries. But serious Catholics of every stripe—and not just scholars, bishops, and priests—have much to learn from writings of the pontiff that history will know as John Paul the Great. Even the writings directed specifically to his brother bishops—such as the encyclical letter on Faith and Reason that will be the focus of my remarks this evening—contain

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valuable lessons for all faithful Catholics, and, indeed, for Christians of every description.

Perhaps the first thing to notice about *Fides et Ratio* is precisely the fact that it is addressed to “the Bishops of the Catholic Church.” In this respect, the encyclical differs from, say, the 1995 encyclical letter, *Evangelium Vitae*, on the value and moral inviolability of human life, which was addressed not only to “the Bishops,” but also to “Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious, Lay Faithful,” and, indeed, “all people of Good Will.” The latter encyclical was concerned with very practical moral and political questions facing contemporary societies, such as abortion and infanticide, suicide and euthanasia, war and capital punishment, poverty and oppression. These are, of course, pressing and nearly universal issues. Still, the issues taken up by Pope John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio* are certainly no less universal, and in important ways no less pressing. So why the much more limited scope of address?

I suspect that the answer is that the pontiff’s principal concern in *Fides et Ratio* was with the moral and spiritual health of the Church herself. In particular, it seems to me, he wished to instruct his brother bishops regarding the importance of the intellectual, as well as spiritual, formation of priests. It was, I believe, the Pope’s view—it is certainly mine—that the Church’s essential tasks of catechesis and evangelization are severely hampered by what he perceived to be widespread intellectual weaknesses in seminaries and other Catholic institutions of learning. If I am getting his drift, these weaknesses are simultaneously causes and effects of various intellectual vices as well as methodologies and ideologies that are hostile to, or, in any event, incompatible with, a proper understanding of the truths of the Gospel.

Of course, the Pope was a former philosophy professor, and the encyclical is, at one level, a sort of celebration of the dignity and importance of philosophy and an



exhortation to philosophers to “think big.” And so the late Pope denies the self-sufficiency of faith: quoting St. Augustine, he declares that “if faith does not think, it is nothing.” Indeed, faith itself points to the indispensable role of reason and, thus, of philosophy. “In the light of faith,” the Pope says, “I cannot but encourage philosophers—be they Christian or not—to trust in the power of human reason and not to set goals that are too modest in their philosophizing.” And while he stresses the

role (and profound importance) of philosophy in the theological enterprise, he also insists on the autonomy of philosophy as a scholarly and intellectual discipline.

It would be a mistake, however, to read *Fides et Ratio* as fundamentally a professional philosopher’s celebration, or even defense, of the importance and autonomy of his beloved discipline. John Paul II was writing not as Karol Wojtyła, the philosopher, but as Peter, the Rock on which Christ builds his Church. As supreme pontiff and pastor of the Catholic Church, he was addressing problems in the Church that impede the successful prosecution of her divine mission. He was concerned to promote a proper understanding of the relationship between theology and philosophy, between faith and reason, not, primarily, for the sake of solving what is, admittedly, an intriguing intellectual problem, but rather because the salvation of souls is at stake. He was moved to offer instruction to his brother bishops precisely with a view to renewing the intellectual life of the Church *for the sake of her saving mission*.

Now, please do not misunderstand me. The encyclical does not suggest that anyone is going to go to hell for the “sin” of holding an incorrect understanding of the relationship between faith and reason. It does suggest, however, that the widespread misunderstanding of this relationship, particularly among those primarily responsible for catechesis and evangelization, weakens the ability of the Church to transmit saving faith. Indeed,

the faith that Christians attempt to transmit, when they badly misunderstand the relationship, is Christian faith only in a weak and defective sense. It may, for example, be an overly rationalistic faith, or an overly emotional one. The Jesus in whom people are invited to have faith may be, not the Christ of the Gospels—the Word made flesh who suffered and died for our sins and whose resurrection makes possible our own salvation—but rather a magician, or a sympathetic friend, or a mere example of ethically upright living, or what have you.



So far, in discussing the late Pope's emphasis on reason and its importance to the life of faith and the mission of the Church, I have spoken only of philosophy. And it is true that the Pope himself—rightly, in my view—stressed the role of philosophy in the theological enterprise and, therefore, the need for priests and other evangelists to be trained heavily and rigorously in philosophy. And he was plainly alarmed that indispensable philosophical work is widely neglected—both in theological research and in priestly formation—in favor of psychological and sociological approaches to theological subjects, approaches that are often (not inevitably, not always, but often) reductionistic and, as such, incompatible with the very faith in whose service they are putatively placed. But the Pope also recognized the legitimacy, autonomy, and importance of non-philosophical methods of inquiry and intellectual disciplines, including psychology and sociology and, especially, the natural sciences. Scholars and students in these disciplines rightly, in the Pope's view, pursue knowledge of their subject matters for its own sake, as well as for its practical use in the improvement of the conditions of human life.

Here, perhaps, it is worth pausing to take note, however, of the Pope's warning against possible corruptions of these fields that render them incompatible with Christian faith. The first of these warnings is that the legitimate autonomy of the sciences can be misinterpreted

as somehow liberating them from the overarching requirements of the moral law. So what the Pope calls the “scientistic [as opposed to scientific] mentality” can lead people “to think that if something is technically possible it is therefore morally permissible.” The second warning is against “scientism” as such, that is, “the philosophical notion which refuses to admit the validity of forms of knowledge other than those of the positive sciences.” This notion—a philosophical, and not itself scientific one, you will note—“dismisses values as mere

products of the emotions” and “consigns all that has to do with the question of the meaning of life to the realm of the irrational or imaginary.”

The reality of scientism reveals not only the possibility of philosophical error, about which no one needs convincing, but also the way in which philosophy can become anti-philosophical. The positivism at the heart of scientism was devised by philosophers as part of their philosophical enterprise—reason itself in the critique of what were perceived to be the pretensions of reason. By instrumentalizing reason—viewing it as, in Hume's famous phrase, the mere “slave of the passions”—it reconceived philosophy, not as the search for wisdom (what the Pope calls the pursuit of sapiential knowledge), but as a purely analytic enterprise. But when reason is instrumentalized, it soon turns on itself in utter distrust. Then, as even the analytic value of reason is denied, positivism collapses into the darker phenomenon of nihilism, the critique of which is impossible from the purely analytic perspective. To overcome nihilism, philosophy must return to its original Socratic status as both an analytic *and* sapiential pursuit. If the Pope believed that the restoration of philosophy in Catholic intellectual life is essential to the catechetical and evangelical mission of the Church, it must be philosophy restored to its Socratic status and thus revived. Obviously anti-philosophical philosophy won't do. So the Church herself, according to John Paul II, has a stake in the

renewal of philosophy in *both* its analytical and sapiential aspirations.

John Paul, whose own philosophical commitments and methods were drawn from the phenomenological tradition associated with such thinkers as Husserl and Scheler, is at pains in the encyclical to observe that the Church herself does not *choose* among those philosophical systems and methods that are compatible with Christian faith (whether or not their origins are in the work of Christian thinkers). More than one system, he plainly supposes, can be valuable in the pursuit of truth and the understanding of faith. True, as the Pope acknowledges in a subsection of the encyclical entitled “The enduring originality of the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas,” Thomism has a special standing—a sort of pride of place—in the intellectual life of the Church, at least since the publication of the encyclical letter *Aeterni Patris* by Pope Leo XIII. But in commending this philosophical approach, and Aquinas himself as a model of intellectual rigor and philosophical and theological attainment, the Church does not confer upon Thomism standing as the “one true philosophy.” Indeed, *Fides et Ratio* states explicitly and emphatically that “no historical form of philosophy can legitimately claim to embrace the totality of truth, nor to be the complete explanation of the human being, of the world and of the human being’s relationship with God.”

At the same time, the magisterium of the Church claims the authority to “intervene,” as the encyclical puts it, in philosophical matters to “respond clearly and strongly when controversial philosophical opinions threaten right understanding of what has been revealed, and when false and partial theories which sow the seed of serious error, confusing the pure and simple faith of the people of God, begin to spread more widely.” So: although diverse philosophical systems may legitimately be embraced by

Catholics, and while various systems can contribute to the project of understanding faith, the Church’s view of philosophy is not an utterly relativistic one. For there are also false and destructive philosophies—false and dangerous philosophical teachings. And the encyclical lists among these not only scientism and nihilism but also “eclecticism,” a position that ignores the logical requirement of internal coherence and sometimes abandons even the principle of the unity of truth; “historicism,” which relativizes truth by denying its

“enduring validity”; and “pragmatism” of the sort that sacrifices moral principle to perceived

interests and expediency. Philosophical errors are possible in part because of the weakening of reason itself by sin. Thus, in the absence of revelation and faith, even those aspects of the moral life that can, in principle, be grasped and understood by reason would, to some extent, remain hidden from view. Reason needs faith to illuminate even those truths to which it has access. But more on this point later.

The point I wish to focus on now—a point more central to the encyclical—is that faith also needs reason. Just as there are philosophical

errors, so too are there theological ones. And the abandonment of philosophy, or the failure to develop and deploy sound philosophical methods, results according to *Fides et Ratio* in some of the errors characteristic of contemporary theology—including Catholic theology. Above all, fideism—particularly as it manifests itself in what the Pope labels biblicism—is the consequence of a theological error about philosophy, indeed, the theological error of supposing that theology can *do without* philosophy, that faith can get along without *rational* inquiry, understanding, and judgment.

Now, perhaps this is puzzling. For, in a certain sense, is Catholic doctrine anything other than the Church’s understanding of biblical revelation? How, then, can

**“In the light of faith,” the Pope says, “I cannot but encourage philosophers—be they Christian or not—to trust in the power of human reason and not to set goals that are too modest in their philosophizing.”**

biblicism be a vice? How, indeed, can fideism—an utter reliance on faith—be an error?

The Pope describes “biblicism” as a view that tends to make the reading and exegesis of Sacred Scripture the sole criterion of truth. In consequence, the word of God is identified with Sacred Scripture alone, thus eliminating the doctrine of the Church. . . . Scripture . . . is not the Church’s sole point of reference. The “supreme rule of faith” derives from the unity which the Spirit has created between Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the church in a reciprocity which means that none of the three can survive without the others.

The Pope notes that, when unpurified by rational analysis, religion degenerates into superstition. He says that, “deprived of reason, faith has stressed feeling and experience, and so runs the risk of no longer being a universal proposition.” More to the point, Scripture itself is not self-interpreting. And the required interpretation proceeds according to canons of rationality that one must bring to the scriptural text. Of course, an interpreter may wish to let the sacred text speak for itself, free of the alleged distortions that would be introduced by human philosophical principles. Indeed, he may emphatically deny that he brings any philosophical assumptions whatsoever to the text. But, of course, he cannot escape the problem of the need for philosophy. The most any interpreter can hope for is to bring philosophically *sound* principles of interpretation to the text. It is only in the light of such principles, or so the late Pope—in line with the entire Catholic tradition—teaches, that the word of God may be accurately understood.

Furthermore, philosophy and other forms of rational human inquiry are often indispensable to understanding the full practical implications of propositions revealed in Scripture. On this point, John Paul the Great was crystal clear:

Without philosophy’s contribution, it would in fact be impossible to discuss theological issues such as, for example, the use of language to speak about God, the personal relations within the Trinity, God’s creative activity in the

world, the relationship between God and man, or Christ’s identity as true God and true man. This is no less true of the different themes of moral theology, which employ concepts such as the moral law, conscience, freedom, personal responsibility and guilt, which are in part defined by philosophical ethics.

The soundness of what the Pope says in this regard is clearest today, I think, in the moral sphere, where rational inquiry—and, again, particularly philosophical analysis—is crucial to understanding revealed truths that are the data and content of faith. Take the question of marriage, for example. Philosophical work is indispensable to working out the full meaning of the proposition, revealed in the book of Genesis and the Gospels, that marriage is a “one-flesh communion” of a man and a woman. I wish to stress that it is not merely that philosophical work is needed to defend the Jewish and Christian understanding of marriage against the critique currently being waged against it with great force (sometimes, of course, from within the Church) by liberal secularism. That is true and important. More than that, however, the meaning of the proposition cannot be fully understood—even apart from the liberal critique—without philosophical reflection. What does it mean for a man and woman to become “one-flesh”? Is the biblical notion of “one-flesh union” merely a metaphor? If not, do married couples become “one-flesh” only in the sense that they are genetic contributors to their biological offspring? Are marriages between infertile spouses truly marriages? Can an infertile man and his wife become “one-flesh”? If so, why not two persons of the same sex? Why not more than two persons?

There are answers to these questions. But one cannot simply look up the answers in the Bible. To achieve an adequate understanding of the biblical teaching, one must advert to philosophical truths. To grasp the profound, and quite literal, sense in which spouses in marriage truly become one-flesh—and not merely in their children, and, indeed, even if they cannot have children—one must think through the matter philosophically. One must understand correctly, for example, the status of the human being as an *embodied person*, rather than a *non-bodily person who merely inhabits and uses a non-personal body*. For the

biological (“organic”) unity of spouses in reproductive-type acts (even where the non-behavioral conditions of reproduction happen not to obtain) unites them interpersonally—and such interpersonal unity provides the bodily matrix of a comprehensive (and, thus, truly marital) unity—only if persons *are* their bodies (whatever else they are) and do not merely inhabit them. Is the body a part of the personal reality of the human being? Or is it merely an instrument of the conscious

and desiring part of the self? These are *philosophical* questions that cannot be evaded if we are to understand, much less defend, the biblical view of marriage.

But if reason is, as the Church acknowledges and teaches, weakened by sin in the fallen condition of humanity, how can we trust it not to corrupt the interpretation of Scripture? Well, we, as individuals, have no guarantee that we will understand Scripture correctly. For us there is only the honest trying. No philosopher as such enjoys the charism of infallibility. No Catholic, certainly no Catholic philosopher, can be certain that he has interpreted the data of revelation correctly, or worked out its true implications, before the magisterium of the Church, drawing on all of her resources—including the work of exegetes, theologians, and philosophers—resolves the issue definitively. It is in the Church herself and her magisterium that authority and the charism of infallibility reside. Or so Catholics believe.

But fallibility, while demanding an attitude of humility and a policy of rigorous self-criticism, should not be taken as vindicating the radical distrust, much less the fear, of reason. Philosophical fallibility is no ground for

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fideism—biblicist or otherwise—much less does it warrant the anti-philosophical positions of positivism and nihilism. It is not as if there is a reliable, or more reliable, *alternative* to philosophy for the Christian or anyone else.

Nor, from the Catholic viewpoint, can the magisterium of the Church herself do without the contributions of philosophy. To settle the mind of the Church on disputed questions in exercising her own teaching office, philosophical reflection

on the data of revelation is often necessary. And so John Paul, speaking of “the fundamental harmony between the knowledge of faith and the knowledge of philosophy,” said that “faith asks that its object be understood with the help of reason; and at the summit of its searching, reason acknowledges that it cannot do without what faith presents.”

There are, of course, from any Christian viewpoint certain truths of faith that cannot be known by unaided reason. For example, the truth that the one and only God is three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Were this truth unrevealed, it could not be known—even “in principle,” and even if reason were unweakened by sin. Still, even with regard to this truth of faith, as *Fides et Ratio* explicitly teaches, philosophy plays a central role in theological understanding. If the one God is three persons in perfect unity, then what is their relation to one another? How could the Church even begin to understand the relations of the persons within the Holy Trinity without an adequate understanding of the concept of a person? And while such an understanding is necessarily, as the Pope says of all talk of God, analogical,



*where but to philosophy can the Church go in seeking its understanding?*

It is sometimes said that so long as science and religion remain in their proper spheres there need be no conflict between them. Peace (if not always mutual respect) is ensured by separation. And there is truth in this. Religion and science have all too often invaded each other's spheres. But faith and reason, while enjoying, as the late Pope says, a legitimate independence or autonomy from each other, are also profoundly *interdependent* in the ways that I have indicated in explicating the teaching of *Fides et Ratio*.

This interdependence is signaled in the encyclical's magnificent opening sentence: "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth." This is not to say that there are two truths: that something can be true as a matter of faith, yet false as a matter of science, history, or philosophy. As I have already remarked, the Pope firmly reasserts the unity of truth. (So, for example, if Christ is not risen bodily from the dead as a matter of historical and scientific fact, he is not risen as a matter of faith; and if his resurrection is indeed, as the Church teaches, a truth of faith, then it is true historically and scientifically as well.) Nor, as I have also remarked, is this to deny the autonomy of theology and philosophy or, indeed, faith and reason. Faith and reason, the Pope says, are two orders of knowledge. But they are linked, and, to some extent, overlapping, orders. Some truths are known only by revelation; others only by philosophical, scientific, or historical inquiry. Those known by revelation are often, however, *fully* understandable, or their implications *fully* knowable, only by rational inquiry. And often the *full human and cosmic significance* of those knowable by philosophical, scientific, and historical inquiry only becomes evident in the light of faith. And then there is the category of truths, particularly in the moral domain, knowable, in principle, at least, by philosophical inquiry but also revealed. Here revelation illuminates the truths of natural law, bringing into focus their precise contours, and making apparent to people of faith their supernatural significance. At the same time, natural law principles inform the Church's understanding of the content of revelation (as in the

example of marriage) and enable the believer more fully to grasp the meaning and implications of what is revealed. *Thus it is* that on the "two wings" of faith and reason the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.

Of course, on any Biblical understanding—Jewish or Christian, Protestant, Orthodox, or Catholic—faith is not merely a way of *knowing*. It is also a kind of trusting. As "the assurance of what is hoped for and the conviction of things unseen," in the words of the New Testament *Letter to the Hebrews*, faith is a placing of oneself in God's hands. Thus it is, for Jews and Christians, that Abraham is our "father in faith." (Indeed, as John Paul II has observed, thus it is for Christians that Jews are our *elder* brothers in faith.) But on the Catholic understanding—and here again the late Pope is in line with the entire Catholic tradition—faith is also reasoned and reasonable. Faith is trusting and believing, but not entirely without reasons and reasoning.

By the same token, reason itself is supported by faith. It is in the light of faith that we can trust reason despite our acknowledged human fallibility. And those traditions of faith that resist the collapse into fideism provide critical resources for understanding *practical* reason as a *moral* truth-attaining faculty or power. Although, in principle, anyone ought to be able to see that reason can be more than merely instrumental, more than emotion's ingenious servant ("the slave of the passions"), it is no accident that resistance to the positivistic reduction of reason (or the nihilistic denial of rationality) comes, in the main, from philosophers firmly rooted in traditions of faith. If, as Pope John Paul taught and as Pope Benedict teaches, faith has nothing to fear, and much to gain, from reason, then it is also true that reason has nothing to fear, and much to gain, from faith.

But, of course, there are different, and competing, traditions of faith. And their engagement has often been less than friendly. Indeed, it has sometimes been bloody. No pope in history—indeed, few religious leaders of any kind—have been more candid than John Paul II in acknowledging this sad fact. But from this fact, the Pope, who was by far the greatest ecumenist in the history of the papacy, did not draw the conclusion that the Church should avoid engagement of issues of theological principle

with those who do not share the Christian faith, or her version of the Christian faith. On the contrary, it is the quest for truth—on the “wings” of faith and reason—that provides the “common ground” of honest theological engagement and ecumenical cooperation. And here philosophy is crucial precisely because of a lack of shared faith. “Philosophical thought,” the Pope said, “is often the only ground for understanding and dialogue with those who do not share our faith.”



And he made abundantly clear in the encyclical that by philosophy he means the real sapiential and analytic thing: not ideology, not apologetics, not sophisticated techniques of persuasion. Without abandoning the truth-claims of Christianity—indeed, while vigorously reaffirming them—*Fides et Ratio* eschews triumphalism and the intellectual or spiritual denigration of non-Christian traditions:

When they are deeply rooted in experience, cultures show forth the human being’s characteristic openness to the universal and transcendent. Therefore they offer different paths to the truth, which assuredly serve men and women well in revealing values which can make their life ever more human. Insofar as cultures appeal to the values of older traditions, they point—implicitly but authentically—to the manifestation of God in nature.

And, the Pope continues, the Gospel—while demanding of all who hear it the adherence of faith—must be understood to allow people to preserve their own cultural identity. “This means,” he says, “that no one culture can ever become the criterion of judgment, much less the ultimate criterion of truth with regard to God’s Revelation.”

Of course, Pope John Paul was no moral relativist. Still less did he relativize the truths of the Gospel. His point was that these truths *transcend* particular cultures just as they cannot be captured in any one, final, ultimately and

definitively *true* philosophical system. Yet, just as faith cannot do without philosophy, it cannot do without cultures—which, like philosophies, are (even at their best) particular and limited. People understand, appropriate, and live the truths of faith in light of particular cultures—or they understand, appropriate, and live these truths *not at all*. So faith is, unavoidably, mediated by and through cultural structures—if it is present at all—even as it necessarily

transcends every culture.

The transcendence of the truths of faith to cultures and cultural structures, in the teaching of John Paul II and the Catholic tradition, follows from the nature of truth as understood by the late Pope, the current Pope, and the Church. Truth is, in Christian teaching, both universal and universally longed for. God *is* truth—Jesus Christ, as the Son of living God, is “the way, *the truth*, and the life.” And “God has,” as Pope John Paul said in the second half of the opening sentence of *Fides et Ratio*, “placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know *himself*—so that by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.”

So, whoever sincerely pursues truth, existentially as well as in the scholarly disciplines, seeks—and thereby honors—the God who is Truth. Whoever, in whatever cultural context and drawing on the resources of whichever cultural structures, exhibits “the human being’s characteristic openness to the universal and transcendent,” is indeed on *a* path to the truth. And God, as he is understood in Catholic tradition, is (like the father of the prodigal son in the Gospel parable) already calling out to him in welcome, ready to place a ring on his finger and prepare the fatted calf, for it is, as John Paul II said in another great encyclical—*Veritatis Splendor*, the Splendor of Truth—“on the path of the moral life that the way of salvation is open to all.” •