

Of Faith and Reason

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Introduction

Faith and reason are examined; their coexistence is addressed. The necessity of balancing faith and reason is considered; and an example of the balancing of the two, drawn from the ancient literature, is presented.

Faith and Reason

Faith and reason are really no more or less than the methods or means that we use to establish our beliefs ó our criteria for acceptance. And, faith and reason appear to be the only means available to us for doing so.

Faith is acceptance without proof. One simply believes something. There is no direct evidence to support the belief and a logical process was not followed to arrive at the belief. -I take on faith that you will deal honestly and forthrightly with me.ø -I believe that you are an honest politician.ø -I believe in a Creator.ø These are examples of statements of belief based upon faith. No evidence is presented to substantiate any of the statements. There may be evidence that could be presented, but none is given; and, so long as no evidence is brought forth, the statements are accepted on faith. The first statement may have been based on previous dealings. Although the second statement may be based upon prior experience with a specific politician, it is not a generalization; for surely, evidence to the contrary is so abundant and well known that no one would say the words! Those who believe in the Creator are also not basing their belief on proof.

Reason is the process of thinking logically; namely, the means for obtaining inferences or conclusions from known or presumed facts. -There are two white balls and one black ball in a box. Blindfolded, I draw one ball from the box; there is a 66.6% chance the ball I draw will be white.ø -In all of recorded history the sun set in the west at the equinoxes; the sun will set in the west on September 22, 2009.ø -In contrast to creationism, evolution is the best scientific explanation currently available to us.ø These three examples are each substantiated by observation or presumed facts.

Both means for arriving at conclusions - faith and reason, are available to us. More than being available to us, both means are acceptable to us. The human mind respects each. Having free will, we find ourselves with choices: use one, use two or use none. (If it is even possible to do so, using none seems ill-advised; although at times we all may have observed someone making the attempt.) The true choice then is to use faith, reason or faith and reason to determine our beliefs ó our criteria for acceptance.

Using Faith Alone

Using faith alone can result in error and perhaps even worse. -The luminaries (sun, moon and planets) may well represent spirits - the ghosts of minds past who reside in orbit about the earth. Located there, they observe (and may actually be able to direct) our

behavior. Others have told me this was the case and I can not, on my own, devise an argument against theirs. Therefore I agree that the luminaries are able to control, or to at least have an influence, on my behavior. And, I have noticed that my passions run high on nights when Venus is especially clear and bright in the western sky ó nights when the air is warm and cloud free.ø ÑI have also come to believe my local Priest. He told us that the young man down-the-street was dishonest and that his word was not to be trusted. I had suspected this was the case, when the fellow accused the Priest of abuse. Well, we learned the truth when the Priest held the man's head under water and he drowned. God would not have let an innocent man drowned, would he?ø Perhaps the best illustration of the consequences of relying solely on faith was the time when I believed the word of our Governor. ÑHe said: all is well, we can not afford not to spend our dollars this way. Boy, was he right. Thank goodness we closed our Interstate Rest Stops and instead put those dollars into bussing some of our citizens to the President's inauguration back in January, 2009. It really looked good on TV, seeing those folks there. I feel good. My faith in our Governor is well founded.ø Faith without reason is blind faith.

Using Reason Alone

Using reason alone may not lead to a demonstrable error, but to an actual error. ÑI have noticed that the air is thinner up on the mountain top, compared with down here by the sea. It is more difficult to breath up there. That is understandable. You see the air gets thinner the farther up you go. In fact, there may be no air all the way up in Heaven. No air in Heaven? Yes, there is a strong possibility that the air runs out when you reach the stars on the celestial sphere. Well, I guess that makes sense. The air, however thin, extends at least to the celestial sphere, otherwise we wouldn't have the Ñmusic of the spheresø would we?ø On the matter of telling the truth, it may sometimes be better to shade things a bit. Without an obligation to tell the truth, one can easily address questions with answers that better suit his circumstance. (Can this be why the founding Fathers decided to require witnesses to take an oath on the Holy Bible?) ÑAnd, on the price of this part for the old guesser's John Deere tractor; why not put it 100% above list? He won't know.ø When using reason alone the boundaries between right and wrong may become obscure.

Balance of Faith and Reason

A balance, at least a combining, of faith and reason is necessary (required) if we are to avoid superstition and plain wrong doing. The consequences of our failures to incorporate both are obvious. Yet, some or all of us often fail to do so. The message taught by the Scottish Rite is that all Masons should use both faith and reason in their deliberations. There are occasions when faith alone or reason alone may be sufficient; but this is not always the case.

Perhaps the clearest example was alluded to above in the reference to taking an oath. One's evidence presented in court is assumed to be honest, correct and complete. But upon what does the assumption rest? The assumption rests upon the witness having taken an oath to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth; so help him, God.

There it is. The evidence itself, as presented, is based on reason. The reason to accept the truthfulness of the evidence is the witness's expression of his faith in God.

An Isosceles Balance

There are innumerable examples of the balancing of faith and reason found throughout the history of our race. One example stands out, so much so that it is deserving of recognition. The example was given to us by John of Patmos, author of the Book of Revelation. Written at the close of 69 A.D., John of Patmos relates to us in Chapter 12 of the Book his story of the coming to existence of the Son of God; and, simultaneously, his story of the discovery of the planet we call Uranus. The first story is an excellent example of a wholly and pure expression of faith. The second story is based solely on reason. With the two stories, John of Patmos tells us how he knows, through the separate exercise of his faith and his reason, that God's Son was brought into being in Heaven before creation, before time. The intellectual coupling between his faith and reason based beliefs was provided by his further belief that the luminaries and the stars had been created by God to communicate with mankind.

This citation illustrates a perfect balance between the processes of faith and reason that we use to establish our beliefs. The inherent wonder and beauty of this illustration are sufficient for it to deserve a special name. Because it is shared with Masons of the Scottish Rite, the name, Isosceles is chosen.