

REASON AND FAITH.

W. G. MONCRIEF.

"Come, now, and let us reason together." [Isa. 1:18](#).

In the domain of religion there has been a persistent tendency to wrap everything in mystery, and to leave common sense on the outside of the boundary line. Terms in constant use, and universally understood, have been forbidden to carry their natural import in the region of what are usually called spiritual things, and any amount of classifying and defining has been employed to render that clear which needed no explanation. As a result, what in ordinary life is level to the humblest range of intellect has been confounded and darkened beyond all apprehension. The design of the teachers we may assume to have been good, but, alas! for those under their guidance; they have been landed in a maze.

Faith is one of the terms that has been so dealt with, till the very sound of it is a terror and a despair to many serious persons. It is a depth they cannot fathom --a mountain they cannot climb--a problem they cannot solve. They have heard it so frequently explained--professedly explained--till they grew stupid under the shower of theological verbiage, and perhaps fled from the subject and the term as something beyond their grasp, let the consequences come as they might. "Revelation!"--they mutter; "in our forlorn state, we have had darkness enough already!" So the blame is cast on the All-Merciful, and souls eager for truth and rest find none, because the obscurations of mortal instructors are substituted for heaven's light in the human consciousness, and in the simple page of gospel truth.

Having made faith a mystery, Reason next has been authoritatively outlawed. The very word has grown into a bugbear. It savors of infidelity, atheism, impious conceit: in short, of every execrable odor. Confessedly reason is not a terror in the shop, the warehouse, the market-place, in the councils of the nation, at the bar, on the bench, or in the haunts of science and philosophy. But in religion!--beware of it as an enemy in ambush--a snake in the grass! Reason not! Have faith, only have faith; if, (it should be consistently added,) by any chance you can understand what the thing or the function is.

Certainly have faith as God enjoins, but whereby should reason be scorned and driven away from the camp? The two are not at variance in their office. They ought to be co-operators in the highest concerns appealing to man, as they are in every secular interest and pursuit. A faith without reason honors not God, nor is it worthy of an intelligent being. Faith divorced from reason as its ally, and support, and shield, is merely grovelling superstition, which ought to be shunned by us with inflexible purpose. There is a difference between them as there is between the hand and the mouth; but as these act conjointly, the hand feeding the mouth that the mouth may masticate the food for the nourishment of the body, so reason ministers to faith and faith profits by its counsels. When harmony between them is established, in accordance with the design of him who appointed each its post, and its duty, the human actor may be expected to acquire that sobriety of thought and steadiness of purpose which lead to success in whatever field he may employ his energies.

While the two, Reason and Faith, were intended by the Creator of man to co-operate in his history, the proper order of their action is, as we have just now placed them, reason first and then faith. In some way, or to some extent, faith presupposes the action of reason; and is maintained by its strength, as well as invigorated by its own exercise and experience. Were it not the antecedent, then the mind would believe and trust without a reason, or before it was supplied with such, which would reduce it to a position truly absurd and humiliating.

It does not accord with fact to assert that the reason or ground of faith must ever be valid, as we may say, a faith-warranting reason; for men often err in their inferences and judgments, and so the faith-power with

which they are gifted is inevitably misled. In that case they believe when they should not believe, trust when they should not extend confidence.

Still the statement holds good that the natural and consistent order of the two functions is as we have described it, reason first, faith second. Reason, then, has a conspicuous part to fill. It is the guide of faith, as in a dark night one going with a lantern before a traveler shows him the road and the dangers to be avoided. Reason investigates, seeks for and weighs evidence, or warrant, and announces the result to faith. Faith merely receives the report, but, from its special character, makes no independent observations and inquiries. The responsibility for faith's actions is entirely suspended on reason. The rational power may be led astray, and the being in whom the double process goes on loses, as in the reverse circumstances he gains, by the faith which the evidence-collecting faculty seemed to justify.

In ordinary affairs, let us now observe how the two, reason and faith, naturally co-operate, as by Divine arrangement they were formed to do. In describing their action in that region a sufficiently correct view of their respective functions and spheres can be exhibited, and one more likely to impress and satisfy those who have small taste for metaphysical analysis and description. Our aim is practical. We shall therefore try to make things as simple as possible, in order that what seems so important for every one to understand may be comprehended without an effort.

Here is a farmer, we shall suppose, who has a thousand dollars he wishes to deposit in a bank for safety, and at the current rate of interest. Safety in such a transaction is the main point to be considered; and to that end his reason must first be satisfied as to the stability of any particular institution before entrusting his money to its keeping, if he is to act like a man of sense and forethought. He inquires, he discovers how a certain bank is rated in public esteem, what value its stock carries in the market, what reputation its chief officials have earned for themselves, and if its dividends are punctually paid. These and other things being satisfactory to his mind, he feels warranted to trust the institution, through an exercise of reason; in other words, he has acquired faith in it, and accordingly the sum is delivered to its charge. Should he trust without investigation; that is, should he act without reason, the chances are that his property will be lost forever. The law of security is, reason first, and then faith in a man or in an institution. This co-operation of the two brings, so far as certainty can be attained in fragile, human affairs, the desired result. In the farmer's case, that would be the preservation of his cash, or, which is the same thing in another form, he was sure of the interest when due, and sure also that his deposit would be returned to him on demand.

Be it considered that the man who loses his money by handing it over to a rotten institution sees it vanish like smoke, from no imperfection in his *faith*. He loses it simply because he *had faith* when there was nothing for it to rest upon. That was believed to be strong and reliable which was feeble and ready to perish, after the fashion of kindred swindles in years gone past.

Again, let us imagine one feeling so unwell that he deems it necessary to call in medical assistance for his relief. And who shall be summoned? is the proper question first to be considered. He has never been threatened with serious illness before, and knows little of the practitioners at hand except their names. Who among them has insight, skill and humanity? Who has triumphed often and remarkably at the sick bed? Our sufferer is so wise as to consult with his friends, and they provide him with facts, among them details gathered from their **[R884 : page 5]** own experience. He considers, *reasons* with himself, finally concludes that a certain physician is the proper one for the occasion; a choice justified and rewarded by his speedy recovery. Here is intelligence, or *reason, in co-operation with faith*; and when they co-operate in this way all probabilities warrant expectation that if skill and medicine can avail in any given case the patient will be requited for his confidence in the physician engaged. Had our patient hastily entrusted himself to a practitioner of small discrimination and feeble resources, to a brainless bungler, in short, can we not in a moment anticipate the issues? The time would be lost, money would be lost, and, worst of all, the patient might in the end have lost his life. And why? because there was reliance without a proper basis for it. Reason

was given to shelter him, but he acted unreasonably, and a tragedy ended his mistake.

Once more, be it noted that the man who trusts his case to the gifted physician is not saved by having a *right sort of faith* in his attendant, but by having faith in the *right sort of a man* so as to employ him in the hour of danger. He who commits himself to the mercy of a blunderer may unfortunately have equal faith in the incompetent as another has in a physician of distinguished merit; but his trust, his faith, happens to be in an incapable person, and that makes all the difference.

Is there any difficulty in comprehending in such a case, and in all like cases, the spheres and forces of reason and faith? We repeat, enlarging somewhat, when acting in concord and in their proper order, both minister to human welfare in terrestrial things. Each in its place is excellent, and when they are duly exercised, civilization presses forward, while social and friendly and domestic harmony abound. They are lofty endowments granted by the Creator to our kind, and may we doubt that he appointed them to be prized and called into activity without fear and without suspicion in all the conditions in which his intelligent offspring are placed?

Now let us ascend to the contemplation of Reason and Faith in the matter of religion, and more particularly of personal salvation. He that believeth, or has faith, shall be saved; and is it conceivable that anything appertaining to the specified condition can be enveloped in mystery, hard to be understood, at the least? That would be a reflection on him whose name is Love. Surely here, if anywhere, the Holy Spirit will utter words that the feeblest may comprehend. In other language, calls he not upon men to do towards God what they are doing every day towards each other? Men reason about and confide in one another, and we maintain that they are, being first profoundly awed, to reason about the Lord of mercy, and to trust him exactly in the same manner, though on infinitely surer grounds, because it is impossible for God to lie.

To step up closely to this vital point, let our minds be fixed on this delightful saying ([John 3:16](#))--"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." What has the reasoning self to do, when such an assurance falls on human ears? Believe, believe at once! and obtain the blessing, vast and unspeakable. But stop! The hearer may have questions to submit, questions in themselves fair and innocent. He may demand, first, What do the words mean?

That can be determined at once, if he will only take them in a simple, literal way. So dealt with, he may soon extract the idea, that the world of men is spoken of, in which he himself, being one of the number composing it, is certainly included. Then with as much facility he may understand that he and all the rest are exposed to perishing, to the loss of life and conscious being, for that is "the wages of sin." To avert this terrible fate from the world, God even gave his only-begotten Son, gave him up to death, as other Scriptures with an excess of fulness blessedly confirm.

[In one sense the calamity of death is not *averted*; it *has* passed upon all our race, all are *perished forever* unless a ransom and recovery shall save them from (out of) that fate. God loved his justly condemned creatures so much that he provided their *ransom*. Nevertheless he has made their *full* recovery dependent upon their *faith in and acceptance of* the Redeemer. Whether in this age or the next (in which *all* shall be brought to a full knowledge of the truth) none will fully escape from death, from perishing, except by laying hold upon this Redeemer and his finished work, by faith, believing, trusting and obeying him. ([Acts 3:23](#).) God gave his only begotten Son as our ransom, in order that "whosoever BELIEVETH IN HIM *might not perish* but have everlasting life." All *will perish* who *will not accept* of Jesus' finished work, *the ransom sacrifice* which he gave; but their perishing [**R884 : page 6**] will be as a "*second* death," because all must at some time be brought to a knowledge of this truth [the ransom] and must *reject it*, and the life (or escape from perishing), which it offers.-- EDITOR OF TOWER.]

But our inquirer may insist on additional light. Is it true? Is it the beautiful dream of a self-deluded human enthusiast? Is it the invention of a fiend in mortal guise who would mark those conscious of guilt as they look out on despair? These and kindred queries he may lawfully advance. Reason suggests the need of inquiry, and the Almighty endowed him with reason to shield him from the assaults of imposition in whatever form it might appear. That which may and ought to appease his every demand is nigh him and level to his captivity. When *reason is satisfied* it will communicate with faith, but faith is under no obligation to accept even a gospel message till its verdict is known. The order is, reason *first*, and then faith. That he may discover how perfectly reliable he whose words have been transcribed is, let him consider that millions have found them true in their experience, and of transporting, transforming power. Let him candidly examine into the character of the Witness, and a marvelous Witness he will be found. Ever calm, ever truthful, ever self-sacrificing for the good of friend or stranger; ever devout, ever humble, ever the antagonist of oppression and cruelty, in fact, of sin, whatever shape it may assume; ever ready to exercise superhuman and resistless might to feed the hungry, to cure the diseased; sometimes employing it to recall the dead to the sweetness of life and the love of their friends. Near him the careworn find rest, and outcasts the tenderest pity. Then he may behold this Divine Benefactor expiring on a cross, then buried, then resurrected, as he had foretold he would be, and then in a few days carried aloft from the midst of his chosen attendants to the heavenly abodes. The witnesses who reported all this for the world's benefit, afterwards resigned their lives rather than retract one syllable of their testimony to the Master whom they loved and adored.

The story an honest inquirer may very well admit is credible. It bears the impress of truth, it is sober as it is sublime. It embodies as its essence the vast love of their Creator for the tribes of mankind in every age and on every shore.

It is sad that so many will not use their reasoning talent in this correct and God-honoring way. If the plan we have suggested be adopted by any human brother, realizing his demerit as a sinner and wishing to live on through endless years, how can he remain in unbelief? He who accepts the glad news as a message from the Eternal King, with Jesus as its centre, and the fountain of its grace, shall find it to allay his dread as one deserving wrath, and open his lips in contrite praise. The gospel is thus a saving message because it reveals a Saviour and his salvation, free to all as is the light of morning, or the ocean of oxygen in which we have our being.

Many have sorely agitated themselves over the question, product of an ignorant theology, "Oh, have I *saving* faith?" Now, the truth is, he who accepts Jesus as a gift from God, just as he would receive a present from an earthly friend, has such faith simply because it is faith or trust in him who is the only Saviour. The virtue is in the Saviour, not in our faith in him. Then with the loving Redeemer alone let each of us be concerned now and ever. "Behold the Lamb of God!" *Restitution*.

=====