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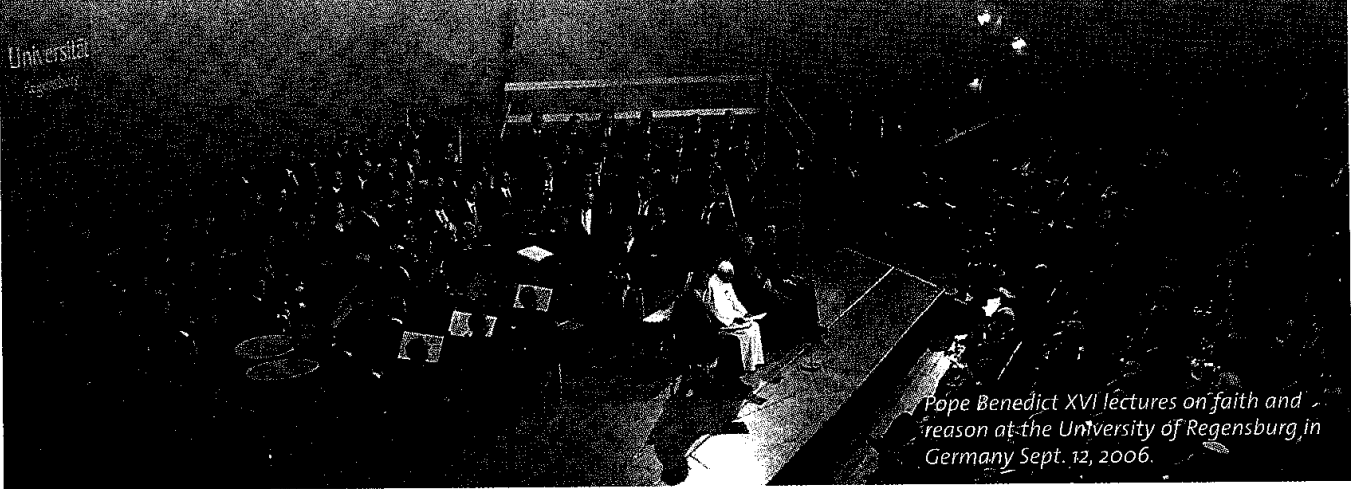
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Defending Faith and Reason

Pope Benedict XVI calls the world to reasonable faith and faithful reason

BY CHRISTOPHER KACZOR

Universität
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Pope Benedict XVI lectures on faith and reason at the University of Regensburg in Germany Sept. 12, 2006.

In Albert Einstein's Princeton office, there hung a sign with the following quote: "Not everything that can be counted counts; not everything that counts can be counted." This statement, sometimes attributed to St. Augustine, is one that would certainly be endorsed by Pope Benedict XVI. The relationship between faith and reason, of what cannot be counted and what can, is a fundamental theme of his pontificate and a topic vitally important to the lives of Catholics in the 21st century.

Faith cannot be quantified, like physics or chemistry, but is still tremendously important. As significant as scientific discoveries can be, such knowledge does not touch on all of the important questions facing human beings: What should I do? Whom should I love? What can I hope for? To answer questions such as these, science alone is not enough. Rather, we need faith and reason operating together to address such questions and build a truly human community.

A DANGEROUS STATE OF AFFAIRS

Our culture often pits faith against reason, as if the two are mutually exclusive. I recall meeting someone who was astonished to learn that I was both a university philosophy

professor and a serious Catholic. She acted as if I claimed to be both an NBA center and a dwarf. Faith and reason in her mind, as in the minds of so many others, were polar opposites — never to be combined and never to be reconciled.

In this way, our culture frequently offers false alternatives: live either by faith or by reason. To be religious is to reject reason; to be reasonable is to reject faith. But like other false alternatives, such thinking artificially limits our freedom.

'It is important to recall that faith and reason never contradict one another.'

Pope Benedict seeks to help us unite what has so often become divided, by championing the full breadth of reason combined with an adult faith. As he said in his address at The Catholic University of America last April, "It is important therefore to recall that the truths of faith and of reason never contradict one another. The Church's mission, in fact, involves her in humanity's struggle to arrive at truth." Rather

than pit faith against reason, the pope is calling for a reasonable faith and a faithful reason.

First, Benedict calls all people who believe in God to have a reasonable faith. Against those who would claim that God commands the irrational — such as terrorist attacks undertaken in the name of God — the pope argues that God is the eternal Logos, the eternal Word of wisdom. Indeed, a proper understanding of faith leads us to see the reasonableness of God and the irrationality of violence in the name of religion. As Benedict said in his Regensburg address on Sept. 16, 2006, "The decisive statement in the argument against violent conversion is this: not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God's nature." Indeed, an understanding of God as perfect Wisdom not only leads away from violence but also prompts a greater appreciation of the value of each and every human life.

In his first papal homily, Pope Benedict said, "Only when we meet the living God in Christ do we know what life is. We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary."

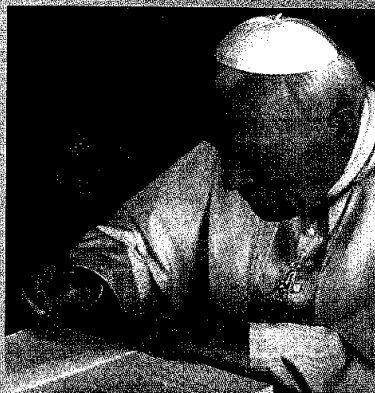
The pope also calls on us to have a

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THE FULLNESS OF TRUTH

"Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has 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" (see Ex 33:18; Ps 27:8-9; 63:2-3; Jn 14:8; 1 Jn 3:2).

— John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*



Pope John Paul II signed his 13th encyclical, *Fides et Ratio* (Faith and Reason), Oct. 15, 1999, at the Vatican.

faithful reason. He decries a loss of faith in the power of reason and proclaims that the greatness of human reason is not limited to the scientific realm alone. Against those who would reduce reason to science, relegating all other forms of knowing to matters of mere taste, Benedict argues that reason has a broader scope than simply what is empirically verifiable.

In other words, the pope seeks also to defend reason itself against attempts to reduce reason to scientific or mathematical models alone. When reason is reduced to empirical science, "ethics and religion lose their power to create a community and become a completely personal matter," he said at Regensburg. "This is a dangerous state of affairs for humanity, as we see from the disturbing pathologies of religion and reason which necessarily erupt when reason is so reduced that questions of religion and ethics no longer concern it."

FAITH AND MATURITY

Benedict is being eminently logical — as one might expect from a former university professor — for it is self-contradictory to hold that we should only accept what can be proven scientifically. After all, no scientific experiment verifies that reason is limited to scientific experiments alone. No one can claim to learn that "science alone establishes truth." Rather, such a claim arises not from the findings of science, but from poorly reasoned, self-contradictory philosophy. Far from wishing that people "turn off" their minds, Benedict calls people to have faith in the power and possibili-

ty of reason. At Regensburg, he said, "The courage to engage the whole breadth of reason, and not the denial of its grandeur — this is the program with which a theology grounded in biblical faith enters into the debates of our time."

'Friendship with Christ opens us up to all that is good and gives us the knowledge to judge true from false.'

Right reason is also needed to develop a mature faith. On the day before his election as pope, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger spoke of a "dictatorship of relativism" that threatens our contemporary world. "Being an 'adult' means having a faith that does not follow the waves of today's fashions or the latest novelties," he said. "A faith that is deeply rooted in friendship with Christ is adult and mature. It is this friendship that opens us up to all that is good and gives us the knowledge to judge true from false, and deceit from truth. We must become mature in this adult faith." Since reason is not limited to the scientific realm alone, we can base our understanding of faith, our theology, on firm ground instead of passing fads.

Finally a person of mature faith and faithful reason understands that both faith and reason are incomplete without love. True love seeks what is

good for the whole person in mind, body and spirit. What Benedict said to educators at The Catholic University of America applies more broadly to us all: "To lead [others] to truth is nothing less than an act of love. Indeed, the dignity of education lies in fostering the true perfection and happiness of those to be educated. In practice 'intellectual charity' upholds the essential unity of knowledge against the fragmentation which ensues when reason is detached from the pursuit of truth. It guides [people] towards the deep satisfaction of exercising freedom in relation to truth, and it strives to articulate the relationship between faith and all aspects of family and civic life."

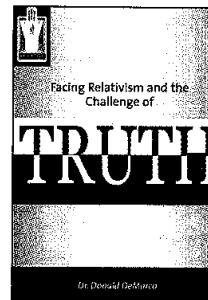
Pope Benedict wishes to stir in us a sense of faithful reason, open to finding truth and to fostering in us a reasonable, adult faith that is grounded in a friendship with Christ. We need both faith and reason working together to guide us in work, family and political life. ■

Dr. Christopher Kaczor is associate professor of philosophy at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles and the author of several books, including *Life Issues, Medical Choices: Questions and Answers for Catholics* (Servant, 2007; with Janet E. Smith). He is a member of Father Emil Kapum Council 3744 in Playa del Rey, Calif.

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How does truth relate to tolerance? In the Catholic Information Service (CIS)

booklet *Facing Relativism and the Challenge of Truth* (#331), Donald DeMarco explains the concept of moral relativism and its relation to truth, education, democracy, natural law and the culture of death.



To download and print a free copy, visit the CIS Web site, www.kofcc.org/cis. For more information, write: CIS, PO Box 1971, New Haven, CT 06521-1971 or cis@kofcc.org.

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