

# Faith and Reason: A Process View<sup>1</sup>

## *The Lord's Prayer to the One and Only God\**

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### *Introduction*

For an Aquinas Lecture, it seems to me that a topic that was of particular concern to Thomas Aquinas; namely, the relationship between faith and reason is eminently appropriate. Moreover, the recent publication of the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, especially since it gives Aquinas special consideration, provides an added reason for this choice. In this lecture I shall first present my observations on the encyclical. I shall then offer another view of the relationship between faith and reason in the hope of furthering the discussion on this topic. I refer to this view as 'process' because it is based on the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead.<sup>2</sup> It will also be evident that the term 'process' is used because the relationship between faith and reason that is envisaged is regarded as "in process."

### *"Fides et Ratio": Some Observations*

Given the centrality accorded to philosophy in this encyclical and the acknowledged importance of philosophical thinking in matters of faith, it would be self-defeating, or at least ungrateful, for a philosopher, who earns his living from trying to convince others of the significance of "the examined life," to disagree with the focus of *Fides et Ratio*. Nevertheless, it is precisely because it calls for some kind of response that I want first to offer some reflections on this document as a way of setting the context for my development of the topic of the lecture.

1. This was the text of the Aquinas Lecture delivered at the University of Malta, March 11, 2003. I would like to thank the Faculty of Theology of the University for the invitation, the Archdiocesan Seminary for their hospitality, and the Theology Students' Association for organizing the event and my visit.
2. Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) taught mathematics and logic at Cambridge University and then became Dean of the Faculty of Science at the University of London. On his retirement he was hired as Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University. It was at this time that he developed his systematic philosophy which he himself referred to as "the philosophy of organism". His metaphysical system has been called "process philosophy" because it regards becoming, relatedness and event as the fundamental categories to describe reality.

Let me first comment on a point that recurs throughout the encyclical, i.e. the need for philosophical thinking in our attempts not only to understand but also to live out our faith. It is always a temptation to ignore the demands to probe deeper into faith through the use of reason. After all, facing up to perplexing issues which demand a lot of thinking can be an onerous task. For some it may even seem like a useless exercise since it could lead nowhere; that is to say, it results in no clear-cut answers or any so-called significant conclusions. Worse, it doesn't have any "cashability" But the danger of unexamined assumptions or claims, including those in matters of faith, is that they have the greater tendency to lead us astray. Although the pursuit of truth, which is what the encyclical is all about, does not always lead to indisputable conclusions, we can at least be less unclear and inconsistent if we make the effort to reflect on our assumptions, especially those we value because of our faith.

But thinking through what we accept in faith has its risks too. It implies change, not all of which is welcome to some believers. We may discover that all along we have entertained beliefs which have to be discarded because they do not stand up under scrutiny or that given more information we may have to reshape our understanding of those beliefs. We may also continue to uphold them, but at least this time on more sustainable grounds. Whatever the outcome, however, we do need to take seriously the challenge to think through our presuppositions in faith. Too often we forget that like every other aspect of our life, there is a need to mature in the way we think about our faith. It is disappointing to come across people who have developed intellectually in other spheres but still cling to infantile religious beliefs. It is no surprising when they feel bound to abandon these beliefs which they cannot reconcile with their more developed ways of thinking. We are beginning to appreciate that education does not end with schooling, but we often ignore that this applies too to the way we think and live our faith. The encyclical rightly laments the separation of faith and reason, which came about from late Medieval times and is seen in the development of the most part of modern philosophy. The legitimate distinction between them which according to the encyclical had been noted by Aquinas himself, issued into a fateful separation. Chronicling the unfortunate consequences if this separation were to continue and citing its reasons<sup>3</sup>, the Pope issues an appeal that 'faith and philosophy

3. According to the Pope's encyclical, there were two reasons for this unfortunate situation: 1) exaggerated rationalism, 2) deeper mistrust of reason. He gives as examples of the first scenario this over-emphasis on reason: idealism which has transformed faith and its contents into mere rational structures; *atheistic humanism*, which regards faith as alienating and damaging to the development of a full rationality; and *scientific positivism*, which has abandoned the Christian vision and rejects every appeal to a metaphysical or moral vision. In the second scenario, name:

recover the profound unity which allows them to stand in harmony with their nature without compromising their mutual autonomy.'

On the issue of the relationship between faith and reason itself, the encyclical traces and comments on Christianity's early encounter with philosophy and shows its acceptance of the positive role of reason in the development of the Christian faith. St. Paul, for instance, entered into discussion with certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. His action was an acknowledgment that it was possible to have natural knowledge of God. He also affirmed the belief that the voice of conscience is present in every human being. The Fathers of the Church on their part regarded the rational analysis provided by philosophical thinking as helpful in purifying the concept of divinity.

The Pope points out that to claim that the first Christians were not interested in philosophical thinking is therefore not true. Admittedly, their first and foremost concern was the proclamation of the good news. But they certainly did not ignore the task of deepening the understanding of faith and its motivations. He cites Justin, for whom Christianity is 'the only sure and profitable philosophy,' and Clement of Alexandria who regarded the Gospel as 'the true philosophy' and who turned to Greek philosophy for the defense of the Christian faith. An even more robust example that he mentions is St. Augustine. In Augustine's work one can see the first great synthesis of philosophy and theology, which the Pope describes as 'a great unity of knowledge, grounded in the thought of the Bible, confirmed and sustained by a depth of speculative thinking.' Furthermore, in the Pope's mind, the ways in which the Fathers engaged with philosophy was not limited to transposing the truths of faith into philosophical categories. Rather, their intensity in living the content of their faith led them to the deepest forms of speculation. Philosophy enabled them to disclose more completely what was merely implicit and preliminary in their faith. Moving ahead in time, the Pope then reminds us of Anselm's concept of *intellectus fidei*: faith is to be understood with the help of reason while reason at its summit acknowledges the significance of faith.

the extreme mistrust of reason that led to the separation between faith and reason, we have the case of *nihilism*. According to it, there is no possibility of ever attaining the goal of truth since everything is fleeting and provisional. Here the Pope regrets, and regrets deeply, this present state of affairs, including the marginalisation of the role of philosophy in our times. Rationality has been interpreted, misguidedly so in the Pope's view, in forms which are directed towards the promotion of utilitarian ends. As a consequence, the search for truth itself, the encyclical alleges, has been abandoned.



Considerable attention is given to what the Pope describes as ‘the enduring originality of Thomas Aquinas.’ In Aquinas there is harmony of faith and reason. Both are gifts from God, so there can be no contradiction between them. Aquinas is said to exemplify the Christian believer who seeks truth wherever it might be found, thus demonstrating its universality. Moreover, Aquinas saw how faith itself can enrich reason. He maintains that through the work of the Holy Spirit, knowledge matures into wisdom. This kind of wisdom is higher than philosophical wisdom, which is based upon the capacity of the intellect to explore reality. It is also distinct from theological wisdom, which has its source in Revelation and which explores the content of faith. The wisdom that comes from the Holy Spirit is explained as presupposing faith but eventually formulating, with the use of reason, its right judgment on the basis of the truth of faith itself.

On further reflection, however, I find that the interpretation of the relationship between faith and reason adopted by the encyclical leaves one with a number of philosophical concerns because of a certain ambiguity in its development. Its understanding of faith is still rather too intellectualized and its interpretation of the function of reason in relation to faith, despite disclaimers and modifications, still gives reason a rather subservient role. Moreover, one could question the conception of truth that the document takes for granted. The document merges the understanding of truth set out in Vatican I (truth as eternal and timeless) with that of Vatican II (the historicity of truth), two understandings which are not, at first glance, compatible. In addition, any attempt to reconcile two distinct and autonomous realities and in this context faith and reason are so regarded—begs the question: what is it that enables us to harmonize them, is it faith or is it reason? The document gives faith priority yet interprets and justifies that status and the attempted reconciliation philosophically.

### ***Another Look at the Relationship between Faith and Reason***

As I had indicated previously, in the hope of furthering the discussion, I would like to suggest instead that one could view faith as an awareness of transcendence. It is an implicit human experience, not a separate one, that can be made explicit in various ways. A religious context is one such way. But it is the exercise of human reasoning that enables us to interpret it in a certain way whether religiously or not.

Let me try to develop this point a little further. The exercise of reason within the context of faith is actually a process which involves the stages of rejection,



recognition, re-adjustment, and response. By describing it in this way it is possible to liken our efforts to develop our faith, which is called for by the encyclical, to the work done by the early Christians. Furthermore, it means that this task is a continuous challenge and that the use of reason is not being restricted to the philosophical discipline.

An early stage in making explicit our experience of transcendence and in arriving at a satisfactory conceptuality or doctrine is the rejection of alternatives. To some extent, it may be a matter of being more clear as to what something is not, than of what something is. In the case of the first Christians they had the important challenge of formulating Christian doctrine which was faithful to what had been experienced by the believing community. At the same time they also had to weed out doctrines which could not be considered part of the Christian experience. The encyclical notes that adoption of philosophy by the early Church was cautious. Paul himself warned against esoteric speculation, while other writers, especially Ireneus and Tertulian resisted the temptation to subordinate Revelation to philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the early Christians rejected the customary belief in 'gods' since 'god' was used by the popular religious cults of the day. When these Christians spoke of their God, they did not want their concept of God to be associated with the gods of popular religion. Thus, rejecting something, even within the context of religious faith, does not necessarily mean 'being negative'. It could, in effect, be a genuine search for something better. The philosophical questions we ask about our faith, even if sometimes they lead to rejecting accepted beliefs, could be a healthy step towards a deeper understanding and appreciation of our faith.

The next stage in this process is that of *recognizing* or becoming aware of the value of a particular conceptualization. Here there is partial acceptance, and some similarities are noted. This stage in the process of describing God's reality, for example, reveals the reasons why the early Church opted in favour of a particular philosophical framework that of Stoic philosophy, in its attempts to conceptualize its faith-experience. The first Christians belonged to the Greco-Roman world and were concerned to speak to it. They wanted to convey the Christian message to their neighbours. Greek philosophy was an excellent medium then. Moreover, they wanted to show the reasonableness of Christianity and the ability of Christian teachings to withstand a thorough examination by philosophy. Philosophy,

4. Reflecting on our own time, the Pope adds that Christians today must likewise beware the widespread existence of various kinds of esoteric superstition. He also notes the lack of a proper critical sense among some believers.

understood as a search for truth, was critical of the mythical interpretation of reality. There was a parallel, therefore, between the philosophers' task and that of the first Christians. Both wanted to differentiate their beliefs from those of popular religions which they regarded as superstitious. The early Christians furthermore found that philosophical categories helped them understand Christian revelation even more deeply than had been possible with biblical images. Philosophy met the need to achieve greater clarification of terms and ideas. Aquinas found much in Aristotelian philosophy to help him clarify, deepen and defend Christian beliefs. On this point, however, one could ask whether a different conceptuality, compared to what the early Church and Aquinas found helpful, would not be better suited to meet the needs of our faith today. It is for this reason that I am suggesting that today we search for other conceptualities, such as that which has been developed by process philosophy.

One does not simply take over a favoured formulation. There is need for the third stage: that of *re-adjustment*. One has to reshape what one has recognized as helpful. Thus, there is adaptation prior to adoption, transformation before acceptance. Despite aligning itself with philosophy (thereby rejecting popular religion) the early Church did not completely identify its teachings with those of the philosophers either. For example, the philosophers' God, in spite of its acceptability as the ground of all being, did not have any religious significance. This God was absolute perfection and the culmination of one's intellectual pursuit but one could not pray to this God nor establish a personal relationship with this God. Thus, some transformation was called for. But one wonders how satisfactory was the early Church's transformation of philosophical ideas, particularly in its conception of God. One suspects that the present demand for more relevant and adequate concepts of God harks back to this period in Christian history.

The fourth stage, that of *response*, is the acceptance of the transformed conceptuality. It is really a further development. But it should not be regarded as a final stage if by that is meant no improvement can be expected. As time goes by, certain intellectual expressions or formulations of our faith can become irrelevant or even misleading. Thus, the search for newer formulations is in reality an attempt to recover what has been obscured. The dissatisfaction felt by some with the conceptuality worked out by the early Church has led to calls for more appropriate and contemporary expressions of the same Christian experience of the faith and of God.

In describing the relationship between faith and reason as a process that involves

a number of stages, I do not wish to imply that this way of looking at it is not vulnerable to a different set of questions. But that is why the encyclical rightly talks of the importance of this topic and challenges us to pursue it. I do wish to claim, however, that the task is not one of reconciling faith and reason but one of reconstructing the nature of their relationship.

### ***Whitehead on Religion and Reason***

Let me now turn to that task by examining the views of A.N. Whitehead, who is regarded as the leading representative of contemporary process philosophy. By doing so, I also hope to show how my description of the relationship between faith and reason is rooted in his ideas. I should point out that Whitehead uses the word 'religion' rather than 'faith' and it is in his references to the notion of religion that one will get an insight into his perspective on this topic. Whitehead maintains that Christianity is "a religion seeking a metaphysic"<sup>5</sup> a phrase that will guide me in developing his thought.

Whitehead's account of religion is contained principally in his *Religion in the Making*. But this is complemented by shorter discussions in *Science in the Modern World*, *Adventures of Ideas* and other writings. Commenting on Whitehead's discussion of religion, John Cobb notes that Whitehead depended heavily on secondary sources with which he had limited familiarity. Nevertheless, he adds that Whitehead's discussion is valuable not only because it throws light on his philosophy but also because he develops his understanding of the relationship between philosophy and religion, a point that will be of particular interest to us here.<sup>6</sup> Cobb also observes that Whitehead was not really preoccupied with religion, despite returning to this topic again and again. Whitehead's attention was more focused on what have become known as penultimate questions. But religion remains in the background, securing the importance of these questions; however, it is rarely itself at the centre of the stage.<sup>7</sup>

Religion, Whitehead writes, is 'what the individual does with his own

5. Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, Cambridge: 1926, 50.

6. John Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Thought of A.N. Whitehead*, London: 1966, 216.

7. *Ibid.*, 223.

8. RM, 17; also, 47.



solitariness.<sup>8</sup> He states that the essence of religion is to be discovered, not in public dogmas, practices, or institutions, but in confrontation with 'the awful ultimate fact, which is the human being, consciously alone with itself, for its own sake.'<sup>9</sup> This association of religion with solitariness will no doubt strike many as highly suspect and therefore unlikely to be of much help to us after all. Indeed in an article developing this definition of religion, Donald Crosby observes that Whitehead's description of religion has been frequently quoted and usually disparaged. However, he argues—and I agree with him—that it is seldom understood in anything like the way Whitehead intended.<sup>10</sup>

One of the misconceptions of Whitehead's definition of religion is that he is championing an individualistic interpretation of religion, which seems to contradict the teaching of many an established religion. Admittedly, Whitehead does place great importance on individuality in so far as he maintains that religious consciousness does not arise until one has risen above what he calls 'communal religion,' that is, beyond the stage in one's development that is informed by the myths, collective rituals, emotions and beliefs of one's society. As Whitehead puts it, 'The moment of religious consciousness starts from self-valuation.'<sup>11</sup> One becomes 'religious' when one stands out as an individual, breaking out of the confines of the traditions and mores of inherited culture.<sup>12</sup> Only then will that individual be confronted with the concerns which are of utmost importance and depth. Only then will he or she become aware of the inadequacy of social custom and authority to answer the most fundamental of questions and be forced to turn elsewhere. Stripped of one's sense of belongingness, experiencing solitariness, one begins to ask: 'What, in the way of value, is the attainment of life?'<sup>13</sup> One discovers then one's uniqueness rather than one's society as the focus and source of freedom and value. In Whitehead's view religiosity, it would seem, really stems from the exercise of one's uniqueness, particularly as experienced in solitariness.

It is important, however, to contextualise what Whitehead says regarding solitariness. Although Whitehead does stress that religion is primarily individual, the solitariness that one experiences is due to the detachment from one's immediate

9. *Ibid.*, 16.

10. Donald A. Crosby, 'Religion and Solitariness,' in: Lewis Ford & George Kline (eds.), *Exploration in Whitehead's Philosophy*, New York: 1983, 149.

11. *RM*, 59.

12. *Ibid.*, 39-40.

surroundings. This in turn leads one to search for something permanent and intelligible to throw light on one's immediate environment.<sup>14</sup> Religion expresses, according to Whitehead, 'the longing of the spirit that the facts of existence should find their justification in the nature of existence.'<sup>15</sup> The detachment or disconnection from immediate surroundings is thus a prerequisite for 'the emergence of a religious consciousness which is universal, as distinguished from tribal, or even social.'<sup>16</sup> Whitehead in fact sees a close connection between solitariness and universality. Although the moment of religious consciousness starts from self-valuations 'it broadens into the concept of the world as a realm of adjusted values, mutually intensifying or mutually destructive.'<sup>17</sup>

Elsewhere Whitehead describes religion as 'the reaction of human nature to its search for God.'<sup>18</sup> I will have to defer any development of Whitehead's conception of God here. But what is worth noting, by way of explaining the phrase 'reaction of human nature,' is that Whitehead does not believe that the religious sense is a separate function from human nature. Nor does he hold that religious truth is something other than the highest form of knowledge, which had been first acquired with our ordinary senses and then developed by our intellectual operations. As he puts it succinctly, 'religion starts from the generalisation of final truths first perceived as exemplified in particular instances.'<sup>19</sup> What follows then is the amplification of these truths into a coherent system and the interpretation of life, which serves as the criterion for the success of these truths. Although in this manner religious truths can be judged like any other truth, they are peculiar in that they explicitly deal with values. By this claim Whitehead means that religious truths make us conscious of what he calls the permanent side of the universe which we can care for. In this way religion enables us to discover meaning in our own existence against the background of the meaning of the wider scheme of things.<sup>20</sup>

Whitehead offers yet another definition of religion: a vision of that whose possession, although unattainable, is the final good.<sup>21</sup> Religion is the attempt to see

13. *Ibid.*, 60.

14. *Ibid.*, 47.

15. *Ibid.*, 85.

16. *Ibid.*, 47.

17. *Ibid.*, 59.

18. A.N. Whitehead, *Science in the Modern World*, Cambadge: 1926, 266.

19. *RM*, 124.

20. *Ibid.*

beyond the ephemeral, and what one sees, although not too clearly, inspires a worshipful attitude. This vision has an effect on one's life. John Cobb makes the observation that Whitehead's own general mood in life was of quiet confidence in the worthwhileness of living. But this confidence was not derived from any assurance about history or about nature.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Whitehead maintains that the worship of God, which is the outcome of this vision, is 'not a rule of safety—it is an adventure of the spirit, a flight after the unattainable. The death of religion comes with the repression of the high hope of adventure.'<sup>23</sup> He accepted that there is perpetual perishing, loss as well as gain, sorrow as well as joy. In rather poetic terms, he refers to human life as 'a flash of occasional enjoyments lighting up a mass of pain and misery, a bagatelle of transient experience.'<sup>24</sup> And yet, whatever may be its temporal outcome, what guarantees the worthwhileness of life for Whitehead, remarks Cobb, is the vision of God. When we respond positively to that vision, contributing our share to the world, then it is a vision that indeed can give meaning to life. 'The vision of God was for Whitehead,' as Cobb sums it up, 'the basis for all reality of meaning and all depth of feeling.'<sup>25</sup>

Although Whitehead accepts that there are special occasions which can lead to religious consciousness, religion as far as he is concerned emerges from ordinary human experience.<sup>26</sup> He refers to 'the human search' or 'the longing of the spirit' for something which transcends everything, but the search or the longing for it is deeply rooted in mundane matters, in everyday experience. There is in human life what Whitehead calls 'a noble discontent,' which is 'the gradual emergence into prominence of a sense of criticism, founded upon appreciations of beauty, and of intellectual distinction, and of duty.'<sup>27</sup> Such a discontent distances us from particular experiences and inevitably prods us to seek conceptual expressions and rational support.<sup>28</sup> This search or longing results in solitariness in the sense that I have explained earlier.

21. SMW, 267-268.

22. Cobb, *Christian Natural Theology*, 218. 3 SMW, 276.

23. SMW, 276.

24. *Ibid.*, 275.

25. Cobb, *Christian Natural Theology*, 223.

26. According to Whitehead, 'experience' is one of the most deceitful words in philosophy. He provides a brief analysis of it in his *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect*, Cambridge: 1928, 19-20. For a more extensive and technical discussion, see his *Process and Reality*, particularly Part III.

27. A.N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, New York: 1933, 12.

28. AI, 58. Whitehead sets this out for the purpose of understanding social institutions, but I have used it in this context because it also shows how he understands the process from experience to conceptualisation. He does add that this division must not be made too sharply.



Since religion is a response to solitariness, it means that solitariness itself is actually 'prereligious,' despite being a further stage in one's search for the transcendent. There has been an evolution in one's experience and not just a prolongation. In addition, there has been a development since there is an active element: religion after all is what one *does* with one's own solitariness. It is the response to one's search or longing. There is a purposeful consciousness in religion that is merely latent in solitariness but is developing as one becomes aware of one's individuality.

It is interesting that Whitehead should regard the human experience of longing and searching, which leads to solitariness, as the fundamental context in which religion can emerge. Some of the modern critics of religion had attacked it for preying, as it were, on such experiences.<sup>29</sup> For Whitehead, unless religion embarks on its journey with our everyday experiences, including emotional ones, as the place of departure, it can easily become so abstract as to be rendered irrelevant. Worse, it makes nonsense of many religious practices and customs, which have arisen in response to specific life-situations. Religion cannot ignore deep-felt hunger or yearning for 'something more' even if it is not always clear what that 'something more' is or even if the expression of this desire is simplistic or unreflective. Whitehead correctly underscores this point. His conception of religion rightly shows

29. Freud, tracing religion back to the need for emotional comfort, especially relief from disasters, accidents, sickness, and other natural evils that surround us, accused religion of perpetuating human immaturity through its teachings and practices. He regarded religion as an infantile neurosis that ought to be cured before we can grow into mature, healthy adults. Once cured of such a sickness, human beings, he alleged, can achieve maturity as a race. It will then no longer be necessary to invent fanciful beings personalised by religion for us to be able to face this impersonal and at times brutal world of ours. Marx criticized religion for enslaving people through its preaching of acceptance of one's miserable lot in life and its championing the virtues of patience, humility and self-denial. Religion, he claimed, misleads us in not recognizing the real causes of our alienation and suppresses our desire to improve the economic and political conditions of life. Both of these influential thinkers would hardly agree with Whitehead that true religion stems from the human experience of longing and searching. If anything, such an experience in their view is being misinterpreted and misled by religion.

But these experiences of life, as our prereflexive starting point, are part and parcel of human life itself. While agreeing with Freud that religion is based on emotional needs, Jung rightly criticised him for not taking into account that they are basic to human nature and that we cannot deny them without inducing neurosis. What is called for therefore is not the abandonment of religion as demanded by Freud. Rather, it is our response to those needs that is really in question. It will determine the kind of religion that we have in mind, as Whitehead clearly states. Our response to human longing or yearning for something more does not have to be, and should not be, in the form severely criticised by Freud and Marx.

that it is in the midst of everyday life, experienced in various fashions and expressed in concrete ways, that we begin to ask questions which take us beyond the particular situation that we find ourselves in and lead us to what he refers to as 'solitariness.' And our reaction, also part of human living, to that solitariness shapes religious thought.

With this conception of religion we begin to see a link with reason because of Whitehead's distinction between religion and mere sociability. Religion, he says, emerges from ritual, emotion, belief, and rationalisation. But it is only when belief and rationalisation are well established that solitariness itself is discernible as of essential religious importance.<sup>30</sup> Without these, religion is in decay and returns to mere sociability.<sup>31</sup> Thus, religion as a human reaction is a conscious reaction. Furthermore, it is a conscious reaction to the world we find ourselves in. While religion appeals to the direct intuition of special occasions and emanates from what is special, it encompasses everything through conceptualisation.<sup>32</sup> This is accomplished with the help of human reason. Progress in religious truth, Whitehead tells us, is 'mainly a progress in the framing of concepts, in discarding artificial abstractions or partial metaphors, and in evolving notions which strike more deeply into the root of reality.'<sup>33</sup>

For this reason, Whitehead shares the tendency, rooted in Western philosophical tradition but criticised in some quarters, to connect religion with a metaphysics. It must be noted, however, that metaphysics for Whitehead is understood and developed differently from the dominant metaphysical schools of thought in the West. He describes metaphysics as 'the science which seeks to discover the general ideas which are indispensably relevant to the analysis of everything that happens.'<sup>34</sup> Whitehead argues that rational religion—and as we have already noted, rationality for Whitehead is an integral part of religion—must have recourse to metaphysics, a note likewise sounded in the encyclical.

Metaphysics enables religion to scrutinise itself. Whitehead regards the dispassionate criticism by metaphysics of religious beliefs to be of utmost necessity.

30. RM, 18-19.

31. *Ibid.*, 23. Also, AI, 207.

32. RM, 32.

33. *Ibid.*, 131.

34. *Ibid.*, 84. See also, 88-X9.

'Religion will not regain its old power' he points out, 'until it can face change in the same spirit as does science. Its principles may be eternal, but the expression of these principles requires continual development.'<sup>35</sup> He strongly insists that the foundations of dogma must be laid in a rational metaphysics which criticises meanings, and endeavours to express the most general concepts adequate for the all-inclusive universe.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, for Whitehead the dogmas of religion are 'clarifying modes of external expression,' signalling the return of individuals from solitariness to society. Since there is no absolute solitariness, everything taking place in an environment, religious dogmas as modes of expression are thus important. The interaction between religion and metaphysics is regarded by Whitehead as one great factor in promoting the development in religion of an increasing accuracy of expression, disengaged from adventitious imagery.<sup>37</sup>

At the same time, however, metaphysics can benefit from its connection with religion by taking into account the evidence furnished by religion. While religion must reckon with metaphysics in formulating and developing its teachings, it makes its own contribution of immediate experience to that pool of knowledge.<sup>38</sup> In this way, metaphysical knowledge becomes truly all-inclusive. Thus, metaphysics and religion are not only related but also, and more importantly, mutually beneficial.

Rational thinking thus has a major contribution to religion. Situations in life have a way of pressing challenging questions on us, and for the sake of intellectual credibility in religion, these questions cannot remain ignored. While religion is not, and should not be, a purely rational enterprise, it does involve careful, deliberate and logical thinking. Whitehead frequently uses the phrase 'rational religion.' One area where metaphysics features in religion is in the development of religious doctrines.<sup>39</sup> We have seen that Whitehead maintains that progress in religious truth comes about 'in the framing of concepts, in discarding artificial abstractions or partial metaphors, and in evolving notions which strike more deeply into the root

35. SMW, 189.

36. RM, 83.

37. SMW, 266. Whitehead adds that the interaction between religion and science also promotes religion's development.

38. RM, 79.

39. There has been of course talk of the demise of metaphysics, particularly during the era of logical positivism. However, it is probably more accurate to speak of the decline of certain metaphysical ways of philosophising rather than of metaphysical thinking itself. It should be noted that Whitehead's notion of metaphysics and his metaphysical view of reality are quite distinctive. Cf. PR.



of reality,<sup>40</sup> all of which are achieved with the aid of metaphysics. But it is also useful to recall that for Whitehead religious truths are generalised truths, which originated in particular instances, expanded into a coherent system and *then applied to the interpretation of life*. The criterion for acceptance or rejection of these truths is their success in the interpretation of life.<sup>41</sup> Whitehead's well-known metaphor to describe speculative philosophy as the flight of the aeroplane is equally applicable to the discovery and formulation of religious truths: after taking off from life's experiences and being borne aloft by rational thinking, religion must touch down in life's fields again.

Religious doctrines represent a further stage in the process of making more explicit what one has held implicitly or has experienced. Ideally, they should express faithfully these prereflexive experiences. If they do, then one's appreciation of religion becomes richer and possibly more profound. But sometimes the process of conceptualisation does not do justice to the earlier stage; hence the need to rethink and re-interpret doctrines.<sup>42</sup> This is why the task of formulating religious doctrines is an on-going one. It is not surprising then that an urgent challenge today is to formulate religious doctrines which are not only based on concrete life but also, in an intellectual and systematised manner, express adequately the realities of life. What is called for therefore is the integration of religion with both human thought and life.<sup>43</sup>

Despite some questions which will remain, Whitehead's conception of religion, in my view, offers a reconstruction of the relationship between faith and reason, one that brings out the continuity between these two. Furthermore, it establishes the connection with human life by showing how religion arises in the first place

40. RM, 131. Cf. my 'Process Thought as Conceptual Framework,' *Process Studies* 19/4 (Winter 1990) 248-255. For a very useful discussion, based on Whitehead's thought, on the relationship between doctrinal beliefs and experience see John B. Cobb Jr. in David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*, Philadelphia: 1977, 30-40.

41. RM, 124

42. In a forthcoming book to be published by Peter Lang, *Religion, Reason and God*, I try to show how turning to the conceptuality worked out by Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne can aid us in this task.

43. PR, 16.

43. In a book, titled *From Suffering to God*, London: 1994, we tried to illustrate how the experience of suffering leads to the question regarding what we can say about God.

43. RM, 18-19.

and how the same source also serves as the criterion for religious truths. At the same time his notion of religion underlies the need to transcend our experiential starting point through rational thinking and to integrate the doctrinal expression with concrete human life.

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