Faith and Reason

Since the XVI century, there began an *in crescendo* development of knowledge and technology which have had an extraordinary impact on human culture. Humankind saw more and more the power of the technological advancements that it got through study and dedication. Copernicus, Galileo, Brahe and Kepler, unveiled a new universal picture, at the time in which Colombus and his followers in the many expeditions to the West, discovered a new world.

From then onwards, the human being is shocked more and more as he realizes his intellectual powers and pushes aside all superficial conceptions on faith and God. The traditional religions were asked to answer to the new knowledge and very often they only made efforts to maintain their *status quo*. Freethinking was a danger in the eyes of many religious authorities. A profound revision and rethinking of the deep meaning of faith in God in the light of the new developed sciences was very limited and restricted. The dialog between Science and Religion had to wait until the XX century and even more so, sometimes until our own days. In the last fourteen years two Popes have dedicated encyclicals to this theme. John Paul II presented *Fides et Ratio* on September 14th 1998, and Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, written together with Benedict XVI and presented last July 5th.

The theme deserves a special and continuous analysis.

Let us start quoting the third paragraph of *Lumen Fidei*:

... in speaking of the light of faith, we can almost hear the objections of many of our contemporaries. In modernity, that light might have been considered sufficient for societies of old, but was felt to be of no use for new times, for a humanity come of age, proud of its rationality and anxious to explore the future in novel ways. Faith thus appeared to some as an illusory light, preventing mankind from boldly setting out in quest of knowledge. The young Nietzsche encouraged his sister Elisabeth to take risks, to tread "new paths... with all the uncertainty of one who must find his own way", adding that "this is where humanity’s paths part: if you want peace of soul and happiness, then believe, but if you want to be a follower of truth, then seek".[3] Belief would be incompatible with seeking. From this starting point Nietzsche was to develop his critique of Christianity for

diminishing the full meaning of human existence and stripping life of novelty and adventure. Faith would thus be the illusion of light, an illusion which blocks the path of a liberated humanity to its future.

It is very appropriate to begin the analysis of the faith in the last and present century, starting with Nietzsche, the famous son of a Lutheran pastor, who in his desperation wrote the following:\footnote{Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, with a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs, Translated, with Commentary, by Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books Edition, March 1974, Random House Inc.}

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. Yet his shadow still looms. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?

It seems to me that Nietzsche is giving expression in these words to the anxiety of his searching for the presence of God in his life, in a very crucial and dramatic time of his life. The answers he received from a well established theology did not satisfy him. He looked for a revitalized presence of God; he felt that the presence of God which he received from his tradition was no longer relevant for him. In Nietzsche’s intellectual milieu and conventional way of understanding, to believe excludes all possibility of seeking.

However, a subtle reading of the Bible and a correct understanding of its message, reveals that Nietzsche’s contrasting of faith of God on the one hand, and seeking, on the other, is not a forgone conclusion.

There is a special verb in the Hebrew of the Bible whose root is סָדַך and one of its meanings refers to the human search for God\footnote{Genesis 25: 22: Exodus 18: 15; 1Samuel 9: 9; 1 Kings 22: 8; 2 Kings 1:3, 6; 16; 8: 8; 22: 18; Isaiah 9: 12; 31: 1; 65: 10; Jeremiah 8: 2; 10: 21; Ezekiel 20: 1; Hosea 10: 12; Zechariah 1: 6; Psalms 9: 11; 34: 5, 11; 22: 27; 24: 6; 69: 33; 77: 3; 119: 10; Ezra 6: 21; 7: 10; 1 Chronicles 10: 13; 14: 21: 30; 22: 19; 2 Chronicles 12: 14; 14: 3, 6; 15: 12, 13; 17: 3, 4; 18: 7; 19: 3; 20: 3; 22: 9; 25: 15; 26: 5; 30: 19; 31: 21; 34: 3, 26.}. The first time in which this expression appears in the Bible is in Genesis 25: 22. Nahmanides explains \textit{ad locum} that סָדַך et
haElo-him\(^3\) means to pray. But from the use of the verb in other biblical verses we can deduce the alternative meanings of "to ask" and "to demand"\(^4\). Therefore, to pray is to ask, seek and demand the presence of God.

From the story of Hananyah ben A'zur in Jeremiah 28, Buber\(^5\) understood that the God of the Bible is dynamical; He changes his mind in accordance to human behavior. On chapter 28 of the book of Jeremiah a great internal dramatic tension develops in the heart of the prophet. God had revealed to him a message for him to deliver, but, on the other hand, a certain Ben A'zur approaches him and predicts the opposite in the name of the same God. Jeremiah does not know for a while if the Almighty had not changed His mind. To believe in God does not mean to know beforehand and without any doubts His answers, because He changes dynamically in response to human acts.

For instance, the prophet Jonas prophesied the destruction of Nineveh at God's command, but God changed His mind after the repentance of the people of Nineveh.

In Amos 5:4 we find the claim of the prophet in the name of the Lord: "Seek me and live", which was considered by certain sages of the Talmud\(^6\) as the synthesis of all the precepts. Amos's claim, in accordance to the Talmudic explanation, could be understood as follows: "fulfill the requirements and duties that the Lord put before you and through that you will seek His presence, and in that seeking rests the true reality of life”

But living a life in accordance to the precepts of the Torah is no guarantee of prosperity, and it does not protect the person from pain and suffering. Life, according to

\(^3\) It was used the following rules for the transliterations of the Hebrew words: an apostrophe after a vowel designs the application of it to the consonant a'in; the chaf was designed by: kh, the kaf (chaf degushah) by: k, also the kaf was designed by k, the he by: h; the het by: h, the zain by: z, the tzadi by: tz, the shin by: sh, the yud shorsht by y, the other consonants and vowels by their respective equivalents in the latin alphabet. In some terms, like Qumranit was used the more traditional transliteration. In quotations from other texts it was been respected the transliteration adopted by the the author.

\(^4\) D"H= Dibur HaMathil, refers to the first words of a biblical or talmudical paragraph or from a code which were written before an exegesis or commentary about them

Each Talmudic text quoted in the article belongs to the Babylonian Talmud., those which are from the Palestinian Talmud are specifically noted.

The translation of the Hebrew or Aramaic texts was done by the author. In cases of a quoted translation the source of it will be specified.

\(^5\) Genesis 9: 5; Deuteronomy 18: 19; Ezekiel 20: 40

\(^6\) Mordechai Martin Buber, Te'udah Vi—Ye'ud, volume 2, A'm Ve-O'lam, Neviei Sheker (1940), HaSifriya HaTsicnit, HaHistadrut HaTsonianit, Jerusalem 5724-1964, pgs. 141-144.
the story of Job, has paradoxical aspects. Job demands an answer from God to his suffering. He receives no answer. The very presence of the Lord is a sufficient answer in itself for the believer, who requires no further explanations. For the believer, the only thing he has is his faith, as it was said by Habakkuk: “and the righteous in his faith will live”. The prophet Jeremiah also asks: “Why is the way of the sinners successful?” The answer he receives from God is too subtle, it is a non answer.

The Book Ecclesiastes is another book from the Hebrew Bible which gives testimony of the seeking attitude. Its first and foremost quest is to discern the meaning of existence itself. No absolute conclusions can be found in that book. As in the case of the Book of Job, there appears to be only subtle appreciations.

The Sages of the Midrash⁷ taught us that in order to create the human being, God had to bury the angel of the Truth. The knowledge of ultimate truth is, according to the message of this Midrash, beyond the reach of human beings.

Nietzsche misunderstood the deep sense of the religious experience attested to in the Bible. God is not a well defined concept. Rather, a spark of Him lies in the human being, and through it we must illuminate a path to feel his Presence through renewed efforts day after day in our lives.

There is a very significant parallelism between Science and Faith.

The first aim of Science is not to answer the question: “why”? of certain phenomena, but rather to answer the question: “how”? The first goal a scientist tries to achieve is a formula which can describe more accurately a certain phenomenon. Very often he has to define very abstract concepts in order to construct his theory, which may have not a clear meaning but can be very useful nonetheless. Even very common concepts, like mass or electrical and magnetic poles, are not clear concepts, if we were to search for a deep understanding of them. Needless to say, the same is true about concepts such as the quarks. The marvelous aspect of this point is that we are able to codify the way of behaving of Nature through mathematical equations. Yet, what does it really mean and how can we understand the idea that the Universe is a Riemann space in which the light advances in geodesics equal to cero? Or that the DNA has the genetic information of our being? Beyond the equations, when we would like to grasp the real and ultimate meaning of existence, what do we really comprehend from them?

⁷ Bereshit Raba (Vilna) Parashat Bereshit, Parashah 8, Siman 5
We are touching with our intellect just a part of the subtle truth of our material world, but the real picture is hidden to our vision and understanding.

The same occurs, in another way, with our faith. We feel the importance of justice, love, and all the concepts stressed in the Bible, we may feel the presence of God, and nevertheless the ultimate picture is hidden from our vision and understanding.

Both, Science and Faith, require research. As in Science, in which each theory is only a rough approximation to a vision of nature which demands more and more improvement, so too in the case of Faith, each approach to God must be different. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk used to say: “Everything in the world can be imitated except truth. For truth that is imitated is no longer truth.” Each moment in a person’s life, as well as each History requires a singular search of God which can not be the imitation of any other.

The intimate relationship between Science and Faith was defined by Albert Einstein saying that: “Science can only be created by those who are thoroughly imbued with the aspiration towards truth and understanding. This source of feeling, however, springs from the sphere of religion . . . Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind”

Chapter 19 of Psalms describes metaphorically in its beginning Nature’s message to the human being, and continues with the affirmation of the righteousness of the Law of God.

The author of this song puts together God’s revelation to man through Nature and through the giving of His Torah to human beings. The psalmist affirms that the Torah is perfect, because he searched its message; the same he did with the material world. Both constituents and aspects of existence call for searching.

Science is a special and subtle view of the magnificence of Nature. Ratio is the seed and the fruit of Science. Faith has to do with the untouchable and with all the things that eyes can not see, ears can not hear, but heart can feel and the mind apprehend.

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