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## REASON, RELIGION, & REALITY

Everyone holds some kind of mental “big picture” about reality – call it a worldview, philosophy, paradigm, or meta-narrative. Since no one knows or can mentally organize every “fact” or individual piece of hard data in the universe, all of us must function with some kind of imagined or believed story about reality. That means that, to some degree, everyone “lives by faith” – assurance and conviction about the larger reality and much of it consists of things about which we have conviction and assurance, but have never seen and can’t really “prove.”

Humans have always needed a story that answers the basic questions – *origins* (where did we come from?), *identity/purpose* (what are we/why are we here?), and *destiny* (where are we going?). To have unity, civilizations, nations, and societies require some kind of agreement on what the “story” about reality is. When there is a dominant paradigm, then the group has unity in that the basic questions are answered for the majority. Of course, the validity of a story and its correspondence to reality is a crucial issue – the “truth” issue.

**Culture War** - However, when several incompatible stories are competing for dominance, society undergoes some stress and the young become confused. Such struggles are common throughout history – whenever one worldview is challenged by a rival worldview. Judaism fought a couple of these during its pre-Christian history – the long war of Torah versus Canaanite idolatry (1360-586 B.C.) and then Judaism versus Hellenism (170-142 B.C.). Pagan Rome and Christianity fought a “culture war” between 30-313 A.D. Another struggle developed between Roman-Catholicism and Bible-oriented believers in the “Great Reformation” (1400-1648 A.D.). A third great conflict is raging now between Greek materialism/naturalism (re-asserted by the French Enlightenment) and Christianity (1689-present). Those three basic questions (origins, identity/purpose, destiny) are really at the heart of the conflicts over evolution/creation, abortion-Pro-life, etc. After decades of struggle against racial segregation, much of what was accomplished may be lost because multi-culturalism/pluralism encourages “diversity” and emphasizing differences tends to produce “tribalism” (re-segregation into nationalistic heritage “culture camps”).

Some try to eliminate the conflict by saying that there is no “real” disagreement and then offer one of a number of ways of “explaining” it away. One approach suggests different categories - “science” gets to handle the real objective world, while “religion” gets to talk (but not in public, of course) about the subjective areas - morals and meaning. Or science is based on evidence/reason, while religion is based on faith/non-reason/feelings. A favorite ploy here is to portray scientists as the champions of free thought/inquiry and objective truth-seeking, while representing “religious” folks as ignorant, uneducated, Bible-thumping dogmatists who want to destroy science, knowledge, freedom, democracy, thinking, and just about everything positive. And just to be sure they are marginalized to begin with, anyone who actually believes in God and

what Scripture says is labeled “radical, fundamentalist, etc.” Another approach is to assume that what is currently believed by experts is automatically “true” and all conflicts with the Bible can be handled by just “interpreting” the Bible differently so as to make it sound compatible.

**Reason, Religion, and Reality** – I have a problem with how “reason” and “religion” are defined by some these days. The Enlightenment was positive in encouraging an actual study of the natural world and a rejection of much of what had developed in Roman Catholicism. However, the French skeptics did not equate “reason” with induction (gather evidence and work toward an unbiased conclusion) and then let it work. Instead, they rejected the Bible along with Roman Catholicism and assumed that the “truth” about nature had to be in line with philosophical materialism and naturalism. Thus, matter + natural processes + time was embraced as the way to understand things and 19<sup>th</sup> century European intellectuals assumed that some kind of “evolutionary progress” just had to be the answer for everything. On such a basis, every field of academic knowledge (geology, biology, history, theology, psychology, etc.) was retooled to fit. On the other hand, religion, Biblical Christianity in particular, was assumed to be superstitious foolishness for the simple-minded, ignorant, and un-educated and the Bible was assumed to be man-made, uninspired, and worthless. Those conceptions and stereotypes are still very much with us.

When someone is said to be “religious,” what does that mean? Does this mean “they go to church” or “believe in God?” Or, is this a way of implying that they are inherently irrational, superstitious, bigoted, ignorant, and “out of touch” with modern thought? Is a “religious” person one that has been “zapped” by some kind of irrational experience that causes them to suddenly believe in “religious” stuff? I would submit that the “Christian faith” is not based on an “irrational experience,” but is a reasonable response to testimony and evidence (Romans 10:14-17; 2Peter 1:16-19).

When someone claims to be “rational,” what does that mean? For some, “reason” is associated with a particular viewpoint and anyone who disagrees is assumed to not be “rational.” This approach is not limited to any particular viewpoint, for anyone can do it – assume that whatever you believe is truth and “demonize” those who disagree with you as “irrational, anti-truth, etc.” Sadly, Christians do this even to other believers who don’t see some point of doctrine the same way (didn’t Jesus command us to love even our enemies? – Matthew 5:44).

I would suggest that being “rational” should not be associated with any particular *a priori* viewpoint, but rather with logical soundness, open-mindedness, and with being able to observe, collect and analyze information, and produce conclusions that are consistent with available evidence. A “rational” person has “reasons” for what they believe and is open to new evidence and revising his beliefs as the evidence warrants.

Next, we will focus on the Bible – how it came down to us and why we should take it seriously.