FATHOMING FAITH:
A PHILOSOPHICAL SYNTHESIS ON FAITH AND REASON

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According to Gabriel Marcel, the process of examining an object through primary reflection involves breaking it down into elemental parts, assigning labels and categories, and defining each part. This method is often used when introducing ourselves, as we mention various aspects of our identity like our name, age, origin, and profession. For instance, when describing myself, I would typically include details such as being from China, identifying as a Catholic, and belonging to the religious order of the Society of Jesus, commonly known as a Jesuit. It is interesting to observe how these seemingly unrelated terms come together to form a unique and intriguing identity: Chinese, Catholic, and Jesuit. This combination may spark curiosity in others due to common associations with China like "communism," "authoritarianism," "atheism," and "religious persecution." Furthermore, being a Catholic in China adds another layer of interest and questions from others, such as "How did you become a Catholic?" "How do you practice your faith in China?" or "What does it feel like to be a Catholic in China?" Marcel's insight is right – merely combining different categories cannot fully capture the richness of an object's meaning. In a similar vein, there is much to explore and understand about my identity as both Chinese and Catholic.

In contemporary China, despite the existence of religious beliefs like Daoism, Buddhism, and folk religions, the prevailing societal trend is toward atheism, largely influenced by current

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political ideology and education. This has resulted in a very small percentage of Catholics in the country, making me, as a Catholic, feel the uniqueness of my identity. As the lone Catholic in my school classes, I often find myself standing apart from my peers. While they enjoy their Sundays with friends, I attend Mass, further highlighting the distinction between my beliefs and the mainstream culture. After completing college, my decision to apply to become a Jesuit left my classmates puzzled, as they had little understanding of my spiritual calling. Being part of a religious minority in such an environment presents numerous challenges, particularly from the dominant culture and its emphasis on rationality. The prevailing education often exposes us to critiques of religion, with figures like Karl Marx depicting it as the "opium of the people," and highlighting the dark history of the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. Additionally, the pervasive materialistic culture reinforces the pursuit of wealth, pleasure, and personal gain as the primary priorities, leaving little room for spiritual considerations.

Despite these challenges, being a Catholic in China grants me a unique perspective and helps me develop a profound understanding of my faith and identity. It requires resilience, as I navigate through a society that may not fully comprehend or support my beliefs. Along with the desire to defend my faith, there are inevitable questions: Is my faith really true? What makes me sure of it? Despite these doubts, faith also broadens my horizon and provides an opportunity for personal growth and deeper spiritual convictions about our life's origin, purpose, meaning and destiny. Embracing my religious identity in the face of prevailing secularism fosters a sense of authenticity and strengthens my commitment to my beliefs. As I continue to stand out as a Catholic in an atheistic society, I strive to foster understanding and dialogue between different belief systems that seek answers to life's deeper questions, and

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find purpose and meaning for existence. Unlike mathematical truths or empirical truths that can be objectively demonstrated and verified, beliefs in abstract concepts like a triune God, the real presence of Jesus in the blessed host, or the existence of purgatory are not subject to the same methods of reasoning or empirical evidence that demonstrates how hydrogen will burn with a pale blue flame in oxygen. The phrase "built on beliefs" can indeed evoke feelings of unease, as beliefs often imply subjectivity and lack concrete, tangible evidence. It can lead to questioning the foundations of one's worldview and the idea that subjective opinions shape our entire being. This raises the crucial question: Why should I continue to hold onto beliefs that lack empirical evidence?

Even after joining the Jesuits, my skeptical tendency persisted, leading me to undergo a challenging faith crisis in the novitiate. It was just before the 30-day retreat when unsettling thoughts began to trouble me profoundly. I found myself questioning the authenticity of the Spiritual Exercises, wondering if they were merely human inventions. Doubts surfaced about the concepts of consolation, desolation, and discernment, and I even questioned the authenticity of my own contemplative experiences, fearing they might be mere products of my imagination. These speculations took a toll on me, shaking the very foundation of my beliefs and leaving me feeling knocked down, confused, and in a state of panic. I knew seeking help from my novice master was essential, but I felt ashamed and afraid. After all, I was a Jesuit in training, about to embark on the Spiritual Exercises, a profoundly significant experience for a Jesuit, yet I found myself grappling with doubts about the existence of God.

In the end, I mustered the courage to confide in my novice master, and his response was a lifeline that saved me from my

turmoil. With utmost simplicity, he reassured me, saying, "You are just allowing those thoughts to drag you nowhere. Don't worry. Just trust in the Lord!" His words were comforting, but what truly made a difference was his attitude. He remained composed and unfazed, contrary to the fear I had of shocking or disappointing him. In that moment, a profound realization washed over me: doubt, instead of being a frightening adversary, could be a natural and acceptable part of one's spiritual journey. It didn't have to threaten or diminish my faith. I began to understand that I could hold onto my faith even while grappling with lingering doubts.

Currently, I find myself in a place where I am not experiencing a faith crisis. The years of formation and life experiences have contributed to the growth and deepening of my faith. However, being a student of philosophy, I remain intrigued by the topic and would like to explore how philosophy views faith. Is faith considered justifiable from a philosophical standpoint? And how can philosophy support and inform the leap of faith, especially considering my future ministry to the people of China?

As I embark on this journey of exploration, I come to a realization that the term "faith" encompasses two essential dimensions. In a broader sense, it signifies the act of believing, while in a narrower context, it specifically pertains to religious faith, particularly in my case, being a Catholic. Although these two aspects are interrelated and often intertwined, I do not plan to consistently make a rigid distinction between them throughout this paper. Understanding one facet will naturally shed light on the other, as they complement and enrich each other in the context of my experiences and reflections.

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From *Mythos* to *Logos*

The connection between faith and philosophy is a thought-provoking question, particularly given the perception that philosophy relies on reason, while faith may be seen as based on subjective and unfounded assumptions. The famous remark by Karl Marx, referring to religion as the "opium of the people,"[1] aligns with the skepticism many hold towards religion. To some, faith may appear as an illusion, born out of the human need for understanding reality and seeking emotional comfort. It is understandable that we naturally seek to comprehend the world we inhabit, its phenomena, our surroundings, and ourselves. However, the complexity of reality often surpasses our cognitive abilities. We encounter events and circumstances that are beyond our control, such as natural disasters and death, which can provoke fear and anxiety. This has historically led ancient civilizations to turn to supernatural explanations, as reflected in the diverse mythologies that emerged across different cultures.

Ancient Greek Philosophy emerges as a remarkable departure from prevalent mythological beliefs, establishing reason as its cornerstone. Its inception is marked by a profound shift towards using rationality to comprehend the world. Thales, regarded as the first Western philosopher, exemplifies this departure by employing a rational, non-mythological approach to explaining the natural world. In contrast to invoking supernatural entities to account for the cosmos' origin, Thales observed the motion of water and its transformations into various forms. This careful observation led him to propose that water was the primordial substance from which the universe originated. This rational, empirical method set Thales apart

[1]Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right 1844," *Marxists.org*, accessed March 22, 2023, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm.

and positioned him as a pioneer in the realm of philosophical inquiry with *Logos* (reason) as its essential element.

If that is how philosophy started, would this mean that philosophy ought to dismiss mythology right away? After all, Christian narratives such as Genesis stories appear to be none other than another set of myths. I recall here what I have learned from my Philosophy of Nature class that inspires me to look deeper into the essence of myths. Different from how we often perceive the word "myth" as a "false" account, ancient Greeks referred to the word "*mythos*" simply as a "story" without the immediate tendency to evaluate the story as true or merely fantastical. Myths, in nature, are human attempts to make sense of the world. American historian and religious studies scholar Jeffrey Burton Russell holds a similar opinion. He proposes that "the proper language of religion is metaphor.[2]" He argues that since very early on, metaphor had been recognized as a means to express a deeper reality, and early Church Fathers such as Augustine "regarded the Bible as revealed and everything in it as meaningful."[3] Thus he proposes to interpret religious language in a metaphorical sense. This perspective inspires me to examine the truth claims of the Christian faith from a metaphorical standpoint, considering their reasonableness in a symbolic rather than a strict literal sense.

When approached metaphorically, the entirety of the Bible—the narrative of salvation—conveys a fundamental message (as I understand it): our origin lies in God, our purpose is to forge a connection with God, and our lives should mirror the divine nature. For believers, this message makes sense because it speaks to their hearts, to their innermost longing for truth,

[2]Jeffrey Burton Russell, "Science, Religion, Metaphor, and History," *Science, Religion, and the Human Experience*, ed. James D. Proctor (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 111-128.

[3]Ibid.

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for meaning, for love, and for something greater. In fact, that longing seems to be universal. Plato's contemplation of the real, Aristotle's passion for virtue and human flourishing, Ancient Chinese thinkers' quest for the mandate of Heaven,[4] Augustine's restless heart,[5] Ignatius' marveling at the night sky,[6] Kant's admiration and awe at the starry heavens and moral law[7], Heidegger's puzzle about "why is there something rather than nothing? [8]"...all speak of that longing.

For believers, that longing is answered in faith. Justin Martyr, after begging for enlightenment from various philosophies-Stoic, Pythagorean, Platonic-was conquered completely by adhering to Christ, whom he believed to be *Logos* itself. Justin believes that man, through her intellect, participates in some way in Divine Reason-the eternal *Logos*. However, it can never be known entirely unless revealed by Christ, who is the *Logos* Himself.[9] Clement of Alexandria affirms the significance of philosophy as "a cause which concurs and cooperates in

[4]Wikimedia Foundation, "Mandate of Heaven," March 2, 2023, *Wikipedia*, accessed March 22, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandate_of_Heaven.

[5]Augustine, *Confessions Book I*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 21.

[6]J. F. O'Callaghan, *The Autobiography of St. Ignatius Loyola with Related Documents* (New York: Harper&Row, Publishers, 1974), 25.

[7]Immanuel Kant, "Conclusion," *Critique of Practical* Reason, trans. Stephen Engstrom and introduced by Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 203.

[8]Martin Heidegger, "The Fundamental Question of Metaphysics," *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000), 8.

[9]Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994).

the apprehension of truth"[10] but points out its insufficiency in attaining the truth. According to Clement, there is only one way to truth, and that is Christ, the "Logos." Justin and Clement elucidate that Christian faith is the perfection of reason; it is the total and complete philosophy that grants us clarity and answers our longing, which Augustine phrases as *crede ut intellegas* (believe so that you may understand).

Is this not an apt description of our own journey to faith? Fr. Arnel Aquino, S.J. articulates it beautifully in a song entitled *Dwells God*: "Behind our restless search for greater meaning, and answers to our deepest questioning, dwells God." We have been on a quest for our personal "philosophy," guided by our own reasoning, in search of what we perceive as meaningful and fulfilling. Whether it is knowledge, pleasure, achievements, recognition, emotional solace, or other pursuits, we tirelessly seek them. Yet, despite our endeavors, a sense of longing persists until we are illuminated by the light that faith unveils: a light that bestows upon us insights about our origins, our purpose, and our ultimate destiny. This radiant light prompts us to confront a pivotal decision—to either disregard it and persist on our individual paths or to warmly embrace it.

Bishop Barron says, in one of his homilies, that when Jesus said that "I am the way, the truth, and the life," he "compels a choice in a manner that no other religious founder does," and we can either believe "he is who he says he is," or "he is a madman."[11] This inspires me to look at my family's journey to faith. I learned that the Catholic history of my family starts from my great-grandfather, who used to be a superstitious

[10]Clement of Alexandria, "Stromata", eds. Otto Stählin et al. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1954-1996), I.20.

[11]Bishop Robert Barron, "Gospel Reflection - Friday, May 13, 2022," *Word on Fire*, accessed March 18, 2023, https://www.wordonfire.org/reflections/c-easter-wk4-friday/.

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Chinese folk religion practitioner. For a long time, he suffered from a chronic illness until he met a missionary, also a medical doctor, who not only cured his body but also led him to the realm of faith. In the end, he made the decision to leave his former practice and became a Catholic. My mother was not a born Catholic either. As a young girl, like many of her peers, she was just living her ordinary life without much thinking until one day, a priest gave her a book introducing the Catholic faith. While reading it, she started thinking about the question that she had never paid attention to: what is the meaning of life? The world of faith which unfolded before her was a breath of fresh air. She felt so fascinated and eventually received baptism. For believers, faith is not nonsense. It is profoundly meaningful for them; it provides answers that grant a clearer vision and compel them to believe.

However, my quest continues: do I accept faith because it could provide me with some answers? How will I know these are really the right answers? Justin and Clement's emphasis on faith as the perfection of reason puts faith in a position that is superior to reason. Thus, faith is the precondition to the comprehension of reality. If you want to know, you must believe. If you believe it, it will make sense. But would that mean that people can grab a belief and use that as a lens to interpret reality as long as they themselves hold it as true? If so, wouldn't it also be misleading or even dangerous? One may believe that climate change is caused by an external force like aliens; it grants him an understanding, but would this merit its legitimacy? Hitler may firmly believe that his antisemitism is necessary to protect the purity of the blood of the "Aryan race"- a superior "master race," but can it justify his crime against humanity? Some people accuse religion of causing many religious wars in history; isn't it revelatory of the dangers fanatic beliefs may result to? I realize, therefore, that it is not

enough to embrace faith only for the sake of understanding. It has to be the right understanding, or else it may be just an illusion. True faith should be grounded in reality.

Faith as Eminently Reasonable

The philosopher who profoundly exemplifies the reasonableness of faith is none other than Thomas Aquinas. He emphatically asserted that "the Christian faith is eminently reasonable," endeavoring to harmonize reason and faith as a unified whole. According to Aquinas, it is not solely faith that assists reason; reason, in turn, can provide invaluable support to faith. One of the most compelling illustrations of this synergy is found in his famous argument for the existence of God - the Five Ways.[12] Aquinas initiates this philosophical journey by drawing our attention to general features of the world, grounded in our everyday experiences. He examines concepts such as motion, cause and effect, change, the good and the beautiful, as well as the purpose inherent in various phenomena. Through this comprehensive analysis, Aquinas raises thought-provoking questions that demand answers beyond the observable and empirical realm. Subsequently, Aquinas presents a plausible, reasonable, and ultimate response to these inquiries: the existence of a necessary being, whom he identifies as the unmoved mover, the uncaused cause, the supreme perfection, and the *telos*, ultimate purpose of all things whom we may call "God."

I admire Aquinas' genius and wisdom. He does not argue simply from his own vantage point, imposing his own opinions on others. He does not find recourse solely on the Bible or revelation to justify his stands. Rather, he meets people where they

[12]St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica,* complete ed., trans. Fathers of the Eastern Dominican Province (New York: Catholic Way Publishing, 2014), Ibid. I, q.2, a. 3.

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are, presenting his points on the basis of our mundane experiences. Employing the language of reason, he shows that the existence of God is not merely an arbitrary opinion or a human fabrication; rather, he presents it as a logical assumption. It makes sense, therefore, for us to believe in Him. Aquinas' method offers me insight for my future dialogue with others that the leap of faith should come from where we are, from our daily experience, from the same physical reality we share, and from the faculty of reason with which we are all bestowed.

Aquinas' method helps me to discover and appreciate the reasonableness of my faith. It reminds me of an image derived from Jesus' parable on the grain of wheat dying into the earth and bearing fruit. As wheat grows toward the sky, it also roots itself deeply into the ground. Such is my faith: it speaks of something beyond full comprehension, but it is grounded on reason and thus, believable. Among the Five Ways Aquinas presents, I am especially fascinated by the second one: insofar as everything is caused by other things, there must be something as the primary cause. The argument is simple, direct, and powerful. It addresses humankind's wonder throughout generations: why is there being? It is also the question that constantly compels me to turn to God. No matter how much we have been informed by modern science about how everything works, we still beg the question - why is there "stuff" in the first place, for everything to work on? Some people hold that modern science, especially cosmology, due to its capability to explain the evolution of the universe and even its possible beginning, has in fact, disproved the existence of a Creator. With regard to this, American physicist Stephen Matthew Barr responds in an interview by distinguishing the beginning of the universe from its source. He says: "The argument for God is not that the universe has a beginning; rather, it's that

the universe has existence.[13]" To explain his point, he uses the analogy of a symphony- the beginning of a symphony is the first note; the origin of the symphony is the creative mind of the composer. One, having figured out the first note of the symphony, in no way can we conclude that it does not need a composer. Similarly, scientific theories such as the Big Bang may prove that the universe has a beginning, but it is not the same as saying that the beginning has no cause. Barr argues further that even if some scientists may claim that the universe does not have a beginning or end (in that sense, there could be a symphony that goes on and on), it still needs to face the question - why is there existence, because the "universe is a not fictitious or hypothetical or possible world but a real world."[14]

Bertrand Russell's statement that "the universe needs no explanation; it is just there, and that's all[15]" stands in stark contrast to Barr's and does not look satisfactory. Regarding the potential role of God in the creation of the world, Stephen Barr's response is not only lucid but also compelling. The viewpoints presented by both Aquinas and Barr offer valuable insights that can serve as effective tools in engaging in meaningful dialogues with others, assisting them in considering and perhaps even embracing a leap of faith.

Nevertheless, I cannot ignore the feeling that something is missing. While the arguments presented by Aquinas and Barr appear robust in demonstrating the reasonableness of positing

[13]"Stephen Barr - Cosmology and Creation." *YouTube*, 21 Oct. 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lqGUMmPk_Y.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Godwin, Simon J. "Philosophy of Religion: Transcript of the Russell/Copleston Radio Debate," *Scandalon*, accessed March 18, 2023, http://www.scandalon.co.uk/philosophy/cosmological_radio.htm.

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God as the ultimate explanation of reality, they do not inherently guide us toward embracing the concept of the Christian God. So, how do I navigate from here? It is becoming apparent that my philosophical expedition has reached the boundaries of reason itself.

I turn to Aquinas again. I realize that though Aquinas affirms the value of rational knowledge of God, he also acknowledges its limitations. Our concepts are always abstracted from our sensible world; they are always perspectival and limited. The God Aquinas talks about is the God of faith, the infinite and the inexhaustible, which determines that reason is never sufficient to comprehend Him. Aquinas never intends to show that faith is produced by reason; rather, he shows that reason serves faith. The starting point is faith. Jean Daniélou comments on Aquinas' wisdom by saying: "By presenting at the same time in a rigorous fashion the value and the limitations of the rational knowledge of God, Aquinas reveals the paradox of the philosophical quest. For God is at the same time its object and its boundary, its supreme end and its question mark.[16]" If I accept that God exists beyond the scope of my comprehension, then it logically follows that I cannot attain complete understanding of Him solely through rational means. This perspective resonates with me. Aquinas proposes that God is a being who actively reveals and communicates. This revelation is not confined to human reason alone; it extends to creation, divine providence, historical narratives like those of Israel, the voices of prophets, the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, and the ongoing guidance of the Church.To me, this assertion remains compelling. If we can recognize the knowability of God's existence through reasoned exploration, there seems to be no inherent barrier to believing that He would also make Himself knowable and approachable

[16]Jean Daniélou, "The God of the Philosophers," *God and the Ways of Knowing* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 50.

through alternative avenues. This perspective acknowledges that the Divine can communicate with humanity in diverse ways beyond the confines of philosophical reasoning alone.

Reason Venturing into the Inexhaustible

I envision presenting this line of reasoning to my fellow atheist countrymen: "Indeed, reason can lead us to grasp aspects of the truth inherent in the Christian faith. However, the full extent of truth is unveiled through divine revelation. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of truth requires a belief in this revelation." In response, they might furrow their brows and counter, "If belief is a prerequisite, then what's the purpose of reasoning? How can you assert that your revelation is logical and worth embracing? Is revelation beyond questioning?" These reactions are predictable in philosophical discussions. A parallel discourse arises in the realm of Christian Philosophy, where the integration of faith and reason sparks debate. Christians are guided by faith, while philosophy operates on the principles of reason. The question emerges: can these two realms harmonize? Supporters often invoke the example of Thomas Aquinas. Despite being a Christian, Aquinas skillfully employs Aristotelian concepts to bolster the reasonableness of faith, effectively navigating as a philosopher. Detractors, however, argue that prioritizing faith as the ultimate truth creates boundaries for reason. In essence, they claim that faith-based assertions hinder and constrict the progress of rational inquiry. Thus, faith works against philosophy. One philosopher who may hold a similar perspective is Martin Heidegger, who says:

> Anyone for whom the Bible is divine revelation and truth already has the answer to the question, "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" before it is even asked: beings, with the exception of God Himself, are created by

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> Him. God Himself "is" the uncreated Creator. One who holds on to such faith as a basis can, perhaps, emulate and participate in the asking of our question in a certain way, but he cannot authentically question without giving himself up as a believer, with all the consequences of this step. He can act only "as if"... philosophizing means asking, "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" Actually, asking this means venturing to exhaust, to question thoroughly, the inexhaustible wealth of this question by unveiling what it demands that we question.[17]

"Venturing to exhaust, to question thoroughly" even if the question itself seems inexhaustible, speaks of the rigor philosophers have in their quest for truth. However, one danger this may pose is to invalidate faith as among the valid sources of truth. A notable model of this absolutist mentality is none other than Rene Descartes, who subjected all his knowledge and opinions to his doubting mind, "eliminating everything in which there is the smallest element of doubt... until (I) discover something certain"[18]. In coining *Cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am)[19]- Descartes arrives at the insight that the act of thinking is the ultimate ground of human knowledge. It is a proclamation of the supremacy of reason. Under its light, any claim, including religious doctrines, must be subject to the authority of reason. With the development of modern science and technology, rationalism degenerates into scientism, that "science and scientific method are the best or only way to render truth about the world and reality"[20]. Thus,

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[17]Martin Heidegger, "The Fundamental Question of Metaphysics," 8.

[18]René Descartes, "Second Meditation," *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*, ed. M. Moriarty (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 17.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Wikimedia Foundation, "Scientism," *Wikipedia* (March 14, 2023), retrieved March 18, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientism.

religious beliefs that fail the test of science are taken to have no credibility.

This ideology is widely prevalent among contemporary Chinese individuals. Our education system promotes atheism, emphasizing science as the ultimate source of knowledge. As a result, religion often carries connotations of superstition and illusion, as it may appear irrational and lacking empirical evidence. The questions posed by skeptics are emblematic: How can one explain the concept of a singular God existing as three distinct persons? Can science provide data on the existence of the human soul? How can one rationalize the notion of a "virgin birth"? I myself have not been immune to the influence of this prevailing ideology. At times, I too found my faith shaken by doubts. The apparent lack of logical coherence and concrete evidence made it difficult for me to reconcile these tenets within my rational framework.

In her essay *For the Love of Reason* [21]American philosopher Louise Antony makes the best illustration of this rationalist ideology which I think is necessary for me to know so as to prepare myself for my future ministry in China. In that essay, Antony described her journey from a "devout Catholic girl to an adamant atheist." Since her childhood, she has had trouble with the Catholic teaching of Limbo. She couldn't accept that God does not allow innocent and good people to enter heaven just because they do not fulfill the law of baptism. Her mother couldn't give her satisfactory answers and often impatiently replied: "You just think too much." Antony also had a problem understanding the Trinity. She guessed that the trinity was like a family, or a three-leafed clover, or three modes of God, yet a nun refuted all of them, told her it was a mystery of faith, and

[21]Louise M. Antony, "For the Love of Reason," *Philosophers without Gods*: *Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, ed. Louise M. Antony (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 41–58.

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dismissively said: "Just memorize your Catechism." Apart from her persisting confusion about the Catechism, the way adults responded added to her puzzlement and distress. They got irritated by her ongoing questioning, whereas, in school, teachers often encouraged all means to find solutions to problems, for curiosity was "the engine of all scientific achievement". She then asked: "Why in religion was I supposed to dumbly accept whatever the authorities told me?"

Later on, she encountered philosophy-the discipline of reason. Antony exclaimed: "Imagine my delight, then, when I discovered that philosophy was all about arguing! Not only was my constant questioning tolerated; it was positively encouraged." She surveyed the traditional arguments for the existence of God: that of Anselm, Aquinas, Descartes, and William James, among others. Fighting "tooth and nail to make one of them work," however, she found none of them convincing enough. The last straw was the problem of evil, which drove away her last desire to believe in God. Antony said:

By the middle of my first semester (in college), I was experiencing a full-blown crisis of faith. I could not accept the possibility that my religious belief had no rational defense, especially not now after I'd fallen in love with a discipline devoted to rational defenses... I was angry: why were there no good answers? Why had God made it so difficult to make sense of His will? If He wanted us to believe, why had He made all the reason and evidence work against belief?

> Antony eventually gave up her faith, which freed her of the "obligation to avow propositions" she didn't understand and "of the struggle to make sense of doctrines that couldn't be made sensible." She said: "My only doxastic obligations henceforth would be to reason and evidence."

The essay depicts someone who persistently sought to understand her religious beliefs yet failed. Her complete confidence in reason made her reject any claims that were unable to pass the test of reason. For Antony, "faith presents a paradox: if a doctrine can be defended on rational grounds, then it needn't be taken on faith. But if it cannot be defended on rational ground, why should you believe it?"

Louise Antony gave me a glimpse on how atheists think about reality: how one ought to oblige only to reason and evidence. Radical, isn't it? But whether this principle is reasonable is dubitable for me. Why should the human mind be the final arbiter of truth and reality when we human beings are, after all, a minuscule component of a complex universe? No matter how great our reasoning capacity is and how advanced science has been, we can never escape this reality and observe it from a distance (as with one conducting an experiment). We are always part of the universe. What makes us so confident about our rationality?

Embracing an unwaveringly absolutist scientific perspective might seem to exclude discussions about the divine. From this viewpoint, human existence appears reducible to the intricate workings of neurons—products of a lengthy and chance-driven biological evolution, with the complexity of life stemming from countless genetic mutations. In this framework, emotions like joy, love, fear, and hope lose their mystique, reduced to chemical reactions between neurons. Elements like culture, morality, laws, and social etiquette are stripped of intrinsic value, functioning merely to sustain the mechanics of human society. Dreams, ambitions, ideals, and aspirations, once cherished, appear trivial, mere products of human amusement.Would anyone want to subscribe to such cold and brutal (if not meaningless) claims?

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In his speech at Regensburg, Pope Benedict XVI speaks about the modern self-limitation of reason and the danger of exulting science, which is essentially the interplay of mathematical and empirical elements, as the only criterion for certainty. He says: "if science as a whole is this and this alone, it is man himself who ends up being reduced."[22] So why do we want to reduce ourselves to a product of mechanical processes? After all, confidence in human reason and science may be treated as a set of religious beliefs as well, and one can ask if atheism itself can be verified. Where does atheism's credibility stand? I hope my fellow countrymen may critically evaluate their stance on this matter and ponder deeply about these questions.

Reason as Faith Cultivating Itself

Atheism, as essentially a kind of belief, opens for me another inquiry: is there really a clear and distinct demarcation between reason and faith? Robin George Collingwood's writing helped me delve into this question. He paid a deeper look at Descartes' insight- *cogito, ergo sum*. Descartes reaches the certainty of his own existence (*ergo sum*), which he sees as the foundation of all other knowledge because he cannot deny that he is thinking (*cogito*). But how did he know what he was thinking? Collingwood then points out that this insight is an intuition with absolute certainty that "does not depend on proof, not even on indirect proof, but on the fact that it cannot be denied.[23]" Thus, Descartes had demonstrated a

[22]Pope Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Journey to München, Altötting and Regensburg: Meeting with the Representatives of Science in the Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg*, Papal Archive, September 11, 2006, The Holy See. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html.

[23]R.G. Collingwood, "Reason is Faith Cultivating Itself," *Faith and Reason: Essays in Philosophy of Religion* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), 114.

breakthrough in the theory of knowledge that the "intuitive certainty is the foundation and source of all knowledge whatever." That intuitive certainty is nothing but faith.

Collingwood's insight helps dispel my occasional mistrust of the very act of believing. In my own experience of faith crisis, I would raise the question: why must I believe in something? Why can't I figure things out only through reasoning? Collingwood enlightens me to see that, in fact, all my knowing is grounded on the act of faith. I am certain that the external world exists-the computer in front of me, the study room I stay in, the people surrounding me, etc. I perceive their existence with an intuitive certainty; I simply take them for granted. No knowledge is possible if I keep on doubting the existence of the external world. This applies to my reasoning as well. I will not render any judgment if I am not certain that I am really reasoning or I exist.

However, intuitive certainty is to be distinguished from intellectual clarity. I am certain that the external world exists, but to know what it really is, I need to study and articulate it. Likewise, Collingwood claims that "every act is fundamentally an act of faith; but it is not a completed act of faith unless it develops into a rational and self-explanatory system of thought...all knowledge begins with an immediate, unreasoned, and indemonstrable conviction that there is something here to be known and goes on to ask what it is.[24]" Collingwood concludes by saying that: "Reason is nothing but faith cultivating itself.[25]" Through this perspective, I gain a more lucid understanding of science, often revered by contemporary atheists as the paramount authority of truth. Science initiates its journey grounded in the belief that something is ascer-

[24]Ibid.,119.

[25]Ibid.,121.

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tainable, preceding the quest to unravel its essence. Newton's gravitational formula germinated from his observation of a falling apple; Darwin's theory of evolution was kindled by his intrigue regarding the varying attributes among distinct finch species. Based on this premise, can we similarly argue that faith in a higher power or religion commences with the foundational conviction that a supreme being can be known?

Faith Awakened and Lived Out

For Collingwood, the answer to this question is yes. He holds that "Descartes has shown that our knowledge of our own existence is of exactly the same kind as the direct knowledge of God by faith"[26]. If this is so, why then are there still many who doubt God? Collingwood answers it by using the analogy of a child gaining self-consciousness. A child does not know that there is an "I" by birth; he comes to recognize the self by encountering others and reflecting on the experience. In a similar way, we become conscious of God by reflecting on the experience of our lives[27]- our encounter with the external world, with others, with our ups and downs, and – eventually and necessarily, I think – with the divine.

I have come to understand now that the wonder we talk about at the beginning of the study of philosophy (philosophy starts with wonder) is precisely an expression of that intuition of the divine. The consciousness of God is cultivated if one is able to reflect on that wonder instead of letting it slip away.

Liu Yang was a Chinese astronaut. On June 16, 2012, she became the first Chinese woman in space with two other

[26]Ibid.,114.

[27]Ibid.,116.

male colleagues aboard the Shenzhou-9 spacecraft[28]. After the mission, she was interviewed about her experience in space. She said: "I was astounded when seeing the earth from the spacecraft. I have learned about it; I have knowledge about it. But it is so different to see it there. She is really "Mother Earth," with flesh and life. Liu said that after returning, she became extra grateful for the many things taken for granted before, particularly for gravity - "the first time to wash my hands after returning, I stayed for quite a while. What a blessing it is, I realized, to have water flowing from the faucet.[29]" Can there be a better example to illustrate that awakened consciousness? In addition to this, Liu Yang is a member of the Chinese Communist Party, supposedly an atheist.

We do not have to go to outer space for that consciousness to be awakened. We wash our hands many times a day.

Building on Collingwood's point, Raymun Festin points out that religious consciousness is also cultivated and nurtured in a conducive environment, such as in a believing community[30]. It is in a believing community where faith is inherited and practiced that one develops a keener sense of God's presence in his life. Thus, faith is also to be lived. Looking back on my experience of faith crisis mentioned at the beginning of this paper, I see that it is precisely the support and wisdom of my novice master that helped me through it. As I move forward in formation, it is by persistently holding onto faith and reflect-

[28]BBC News, "Profile of Liu Yang, China's First Woman Astronaut," *BBC News*, June 16, 2012, accessed March 21, 2023, https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-18471236.

[29]Team, T. V. F. E.《杨澜访谈录》刘洋：回归地球的幸福_综艺_高清1080P在线观看平台_腾讯视频.. April 14, 2013, accessed March 21, 2023, https://v.qq.com/x/cover/7gz9iupvt3dh3x5/c0012wgj1h7.html.

[30]Raymund J. Festin, *The Black Nazarene and Philosophy* (Manila: Logos Publications, Inc, 2017), 330.

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ing on my faith experiences that I gain an increasing sense of the truthfulness of faith. Therefore, if philosophy is doing philosophy (supposedly said by Fr. Roque Ferriols as "*Sapagkat ang pilosopiya ay ginagawa*"), maybe I could say that to have faith is to live out faith: to confront doubts, to grapple with uncertainties, and to leave enough space for the Infinite and Beyond when reason falls short of giving answers. Such faith can flourish and be nourished within a community that may support, challenge, and eventually deepen one's convictions in life.

How then could I help my fellow countrymen in taking that leap of faith? Beyond presenting the reasonableness of faith, I believe it is essential to accompany them in understanding that faith serves as both the beginning and the way of their journey. It forms the very foundation upon which all knowledge rests and serves as the pathway to eventually arrive at the Reason beyond all reasons.