

Pope illuminates 'reasonableness of faith in God'

By C.S. Morrissey

Stare at the sun, if you are able to; it puts your eyes to good use. At least that's what Pope Benedict XVI told his weekly public audience Nov. 21.

Don't worry, he didn't mean it literally. It was just a metaphor.

The Pope used the metaphor to explain the relation between faith and reason. "Faith allows us to look upon the 'sun' that is God," he said.

Faith enables us to see and understand things that would normally be too powerful or too overwhelming for reason. But this does not mean that reason is opposed to faith, as if rationality is somehow the opposite of fidelity.

"I want to focus on the reasonableness of faith in God," said the Pope. "God, in fact, is not absurd; if anything, He is mystery. Mystery, in turn, is not irrational, but the overabundance of sense, of meaning, of truth."

In other words, a mystery is not something that is unintelligible. It is super-intel-

ligible. Mystery is like the brightness of the sun. The sun's brightness is not the absence of light, but rather an overwhelming brightness. A special way of looking is required, at least if we are not going to be overwhelmed by the light, by the overabundance of intelligibility.

"If, when looking at the mystery, one's reason sees darkness, it is not because there is no light in the mystery, but rather because there is too much of it, just as when a man turns his eyes to look directly at the sun, he sees only darkness. But who would say that the sun is not bright? On the contrary, it is the source of light," explained the Pope.

Just as scientific knowledge can help us to look at the brightness of the sun (for example, with special solar telescopes), so too the power of reason can assist us to explore the mystery of God Himself. Because faith in God is fully rational, and Christian faith is based on reason, reason can assist faith in its exploration of the mystery.

The Pope spoke of "the virtuous relationship between science and faith" and about how "faith, truly lived, is not in conflict with science; rather, it cooperates with it."

He pointed out that faith is properly "a strong incen-



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tive to seek always, to never stop and never grow quiet in the inexhaustible discovery of the truth and of reality." Faith recognizes that "science is a valuable ally of the faith for understanding God's plan in the universe."

One of the best books published this year focused

on this papal theme: *How Science Enriches Theology* (St. Augustine's Press, 2012), by Benedict Ashley, OP, and John Deely. The wise Father Ashley is a 97-year-old Dominican, and Prof. Deely is his former student; they now "team up to show the fruitful impact of science on theology as a use of reason."

Their book argues that, in today's university, both "theology and science must renew their common commitment to the use of reason."

In its philosophical foundations, "science can support the truths of monotheistic faith," they argue. And "with the advance of science in the modern sense," moreover, we can see in the natural world that there are "not only the traces of God's existence, but of the Trinitarian nature of God, the Divine Persons of the Godhead, as proposed in Christian faith."

Scientific reason offers to faith a breathtaking panorama, as Ashley and Deely explain in detail: "For example, the immensity and depth of our universe, as indicated alike by relativity theory

and quantum theory, along with the biological, chemical, and physical diversity and dynamic stability contained within the universe's vast limits, enrich our understanding of God the Father.

"Our universe's order, uniqueness, and intelligibility suggest how we may better understand the Divine Logos, Jesus Christ." "The evolution, freedom, and plenitude of the cosmos reveal the character of God the Holy Spirit."

Beyond this vision by which modern science enriches theology, the Pope reminds us what faith knows with its own special vision: "God has approached man and has offered Himself to be known by man, deigning to stoop to the limits of creaturely reason," the Pope said.

Faith thereby becomes "a knowledge that gives flavour to life, a new taste to existence, a joyful way of being to the world. Faith is expressed in the gift of self to others, in the fraternity that creates solidarity, capable of loving, defeating the loneli-

ness that makes us sad."

In this way, faith adds something of supreme importance to scientific activity. "This knowledge of God through faith is therefore not only intellectual, but vital. It is the knowledge of God-Love, thanks to His own love.

"The love of God thus makes one see, it opens the eyes, allowing one to know all of reality, beyond the narrow perspectives of individualism and subjectivism that disorient consciences.

"The knowledge of God is, therefore, an experience of faith, and implies, at the same time, an intellectual and moral way: deeply touched by the presence of the Spirit of Jesus in us, we overcome the horizons of our selfishness and open ourselves to the true values of life."

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