



Crossroads Cultural Center
and
Columbia Catholic Ministry
In collaboration with the Italian Department at Columbia
present

Face to Face with ...Antonio Monda!
A Dialogue between

Antonio MONDA, Author of
Do You Believe? Conversations on God and Religion

and

Paolo VALESIO
Department of Italian, Columbia University

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Crossroads: Good evening, and welcome on behalf of the Crossroads Cultural Center to tonight's dialogue, which is part of our "Face to face..." series. We would like to thank the Department of Italian at Columbia University and the Columbia Catholic Ministry for helping to organize and promote our event.

The idea of the "Face to Face" series is to create an occasion for our audience to meet not just some interesting ideas but rather an interesting person, somebody whose work and experience can teach us something. "An interesting person" is certainly a good way to describe our guest tonight, Professor Antonio Monda. He was famously described by *The New York Times* as "the most well-connected cultural figure you've never heard of," which, of course, is no longer accurate since many of us have heard of him at least because of his remarkable book of interviews, *Do You Believe?* I would like to mention only one aspect of Mr. Monda's work which we find striking. It is the way in which he understands that, deep down, culture is always about the human person. Whereas many people today tend to reduce man ideologically (say, to biological, sociological or psychological factors), Mr. Monda is aware that there is something irreducible about a human person, about his or her questions and needs. This is especially clear when discussing religion. Nowadays religion is a hot topic, but it is almost always discussed as a function of something else: religion as a political motivator, religion as a source of morality, religion as a cultural identifier and so on. It is rare to find somebody who realizes that religion is first of all about what it means to be human, so that it is just impossible to be human and not to be religious. Except that our culture seems completely unequipped to deal with the religious questions and tends to emarginate the more existentially serious voices. How is it possible to live in our culture without having to bury away or forget our deeper human questions? Reopening these questions seems to us the most important contribution that a Christian can make to today's culture. And now some information about our guests.

Screenwriter and Director, Antonio Monda teaches in the Film and Television Department of New York University. He has directed documentaries, commercials, and a feature film entitled "Dicembre" which was presented at the Venice Film Festival and won several awards, including: Carro d'Oro, Premio Cinema Giovane, Icaro d'Oro, Premio Navicella. He has worked as film critic for *The New York Review of Books/La Rivista dei Libri* and has curated shows for the Guggenheim Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, Lincoln

Center, the American Museum of Moving Image, and the Academy. He is the US representative of "FilmItalia". His book on American Cinema entitled *La Magnifica Illusione/The Magnificent Illusion* won the Efebo d'Oro as the best cinema book of 2003. He also wrote, as we know, *Do You Believe?* And his latest book is entitled *Assoluzione*.

To dialogue with Mr. Monda, we have the honor of having with us Professor Paolo Valesio. A literary critic, poet and narrator, Paolo Valesio has taught Italian literature at Yale University for a quarter-century, and recently moved to Columbia University where he is currently the Giuseppe Ungaretti Professor in Italian Literature, and Chair of the Department of Italian. He founded and directed the journal *Yale Italian Poetry* which is now published at Columbia University with the new title of *Italian Poetry Review*. The author of numerous critical essays and articles, Prof. Valesio has also published five books of criticism, sixteen collections of poetry, two novels, one collection of short stories, and a novella. His drama in verse, *Son of Man at Corcovado*, has been staged in Italy. Professor Valesio is also a member of the Crossroads Advisory Board. Prof. Valesio...

Valesio: Good evening. I'm honored to introduce a remarkable cultural figure as you've just heard. In fact, I gathered some notes for an introduction of Antonio Monda, but Rita simplified the task. I just want to say that it seems to me that this is the beginning of the dialogue because Antonio Monda is one of the closest people I know that resembles what Americans often call "public intellectuals" in the good sense, the constructive sense of the word.

I'd like to turn now directly to the book. What I propose to do tonight is to briefly talk about the book, and then put to Professor Monda two general questions that he can answer to, and then there will be a moment of turning the question and answer period to you. We'll see how it goes.

Do You Believe? is a short and quite readable book that contains eighteen brief interviews with well-known figures in the arts world, preceded by a quite interesting author's introduction. The book's subtitle describes its structure: *Conversations on God and Religion*, but it is the author's introduction that really explains what it is all about; and he writes, (and I quote Monda), "This book is constructed around a simple but fundamental question: I asked the people I interviewed to tell me honestly if they think that God exists, and how their answer to this question has affected their choices in life." The personalities interviewed are Paul Auster, Saul Bellow, Michael Cunningham, Nathan Englander, Jane Fonda, Richard Ford, Paula Fox, Jonathan Franzen, Spike Lee, Daniel Libeskind, David Lynch, Toni Morrison, Grace Paley, Salman Rushdie, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Martin Scorsese, Derek Walcott, and Elie Wiesel. Most of the names are well-known to us, but there is a variety of backgrounds. It makes for an exciting read.

The history of this book is as follows: It was born out of the 2003 survey conducted for the Italian daily *La Repubblica*, all the interviews are dated, and the oldest ones actually belong to the 2003 survey. The book was published in Rome by Fazi in 2006 with the title *Tu Credi?* and the present English version by Ann Goldstein appears with Random House in the following year.

There is a little curiosity I want to mention now, however, and Professor Monda may comment on it later. I'm very interested in translation and this book confirms my admiration for Ann Goldstein's excellent performance. Also, I never really believed Robert Frost's too often quoted dictum that "poetry is what is lost in translation" all the more so because this is a book written in quite readable and communicative prose, so I'm sure the translation is fully clear and adequate; but I think that the title in the Italian contains a pun which is all the more untranslatable because it has to do with what linguists call "the intonational contour of a sentence." If I say "Tu, credi?" with a mental comma between the "tu" and the "credi," I say exactly what the English title says, *Do You Believe?* in the sense of 'Are you a believer?,' but if I pronounce the same words with an ascending intonation with no pause between the first and the second word, "Tu credi?" sounds in Italian what in English would be translated 'Oh, do you really think so?' with a slightly skeptical tone, and

This dual possibility represents well the agility and flexibility of this book which moves with ease between serious theological reflections, (and I know at least one prep school in Connecticut that has adopted the book for its theology courses) and free-wheeling, informal conversational exchange.

Two more remarks, if I may, before turning to the questions. There is a kind of lazy interviewing style, favored by TV, that starts with a pseudo-profound question, “Why this book?” Antonio Monda was faced at some point with this question and he was justifiably disconcerted. As he says, “Is there any subject more urgent?” But a question like this cannot be dismissed, I think, because it is a significant symptom; it indicates a need for reassurance, a desire for a confirmation that the work in question, any work of human intellect and ingenuity, comes out of some form of necessity, not out of a whim. I was reminded of this a couple of weeks ago at the question and answer period following Peter Brook’s staging at the New York Theatre Workshop of that famous episode in Dostoevsky’s famous novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, the episode of “The Grand Inquisitor.” It was a 50- minute intense reenacting of “The Grand Inquisitor” episode with only one actor acting on stage, Bruce Meyers, playing both the part of the Narrator and that of the Grand Inquisitor. At the end there was a question and answer period, and a too-predictable question by the theatre critic in charge was, “Why this piece?” And Mr. Meyers quickly replied that he could not think of a more important theme. So I wanted to underscore in this way the widespread, still persisting sense of the urgency of the question.

My second and last remark has to do with the structure of the book—interviews. The interview is a very difficult inter-disciplinary genre moving between specialized...culture and broad social intercourse. And I can personally attest to that. I had been trying my hand at interviews and dealing with interviews constantly in editing my journal, *Italian Poetry Review*. Antonia Monda is a master interviewer, and I think it might not be useless to spell out what it takes to be a real interviewer. First, an interview should be contextualized or rooted; I call this the narrative element. Monda prefaces each interview with a brief description of the way he became acquainted with the subject, the setting of the conversation, and the way in which the conversation itself got started. The interviewer also should show, with discretion, his familiarity with the works of his subject, pointing to the specific instances. Finally, and most importantly, the interviewer should exploit fully the dialogic nature of the interview. I call this the dramatic element, not in the sense of something violent or explosive, but in the sense that each statement in an interview, just as in a dialogue written by a playwright, acquires its full meaning only in the content of a more or less interactive, naturally fragmented exchange between two persons.

Allow me to give an example from the interview with Derek Walcott. At a certain point Monda asks, “What is God like?” Disarmingly, Derek Walcott answers, “A white man with a beard, wise and old.” This was a statement to which several interviewees came back with different reactions. Now, what is interesting is that Monda pursues this and says, “But beyond that image, what do you see?” And Walcott replies, “I see only the risk of banality. In some ways, beyond that image doubts begin.” As every great poet, Walcott is in a fight with tradition, and he reverses the cliché. The cliché is “white man with a beard.” But Walcott points out that this is not really a cliché: this is an emotional, fatherly, personally connected image beyond which we risk abstraction, we risk intellectualization; so he reverses the idea of the cliché. We get all this only by reading the exchange between the two persons—Antonio Monda and Derek Walcott.

An interviewer, then, should know how to circle (I almost want to say “like a bird of prey”) around the crucial questions, playing in the meantime with some minor but atmosphere-building questions, and he should know how to alternate between moments in which he pursues the question as I just said, focussing on the intensity of the exchange; and the moments in which he stops and he drops it, letting the answer stand and, so to speak, echo for some minutes in the air. This is particularly difficult to do in short interviews, and it is relatively easy to do in long, sprawling interviews. (I consider the long literary interviews in *The Paris Review* a model in this latter genre.)

Now the interviews in this book are short. In fact, every variation in rhythm has to be played out in the space

of a few pages, and this requires a particular skill that I very much appreciate. Let me just point to one example in addition to the Walcott one: This is an exchange with Spike Lee (page 94 of the book.)

Spike Lee says, “I think that a superior being exists, but I don’t believe in organized or institutionalized religion.”

And Monda replies, “What is unconvincing to you about it?”

“Organized religion is managed by man.”

And Monda quite sensibly answers, “Then who should manage it?”

And he replies, “Let’s say that man forms it into his image and likeness.”

But Monda does not let go. Instead, he says “The Bible teaches that God created man in His image and likeness.”

And finally, Spike Lee replies, “That’s exactly why the contrary frightens me.”

It’s an interesting aphorism by Lee, but I’m not totally convinced because it seems to me that his answer plays down the notion of religion as a communal corpus, a mystical body. But it is an aphorism that comes out after a continual prodding by Monda. It would not have come out otherwise. That to me is the great skill of the interviewer. This brings out also the fact that the interviewer should not be totally passive. He dialogues and occasionally disagrees with the interviewee.

I have so many other remarks about the answers that Monda elicited, but I’ll stop, at least for now, and I will propose my two questions that are very general and so they can be responded to in different ways. One has to do with the little history of the book that I just presented. We are talking tonight about a book that began five years ago and was completed two years ago; now, it is difficult for me not to read *Do You Believe?* on the horizon of expectation (as some philosophers say) of your novel, *Assoluzione*, that just came out this year. I understand it will be presented at the Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò this December 5th, so this is not the time and place to discuss it, but perhaps you can tell us...

Monda: I’ll be happy to say a few words.

Valesio: Does that novel, in some sense, affect the way you reread *Do You Believe?*

Monda: Absolutely. First of all I would like to thank Professor Valesio, the friends of Crossroads, and of course, this wonderful institution, The Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America at Columbia University. I would like also to thank Crossroads for the wonderful introduction, and thank you also for understanding what is the core of my book and my cultural activity.

A few things before I answer directly to your question. You were correct, and I like very much what you said about the title *Tu Credi?* and the way you can ask in Italian. Actually in Brazil when the book was translated, the Brazilian translator decided to change completely the title of the book for that very reason because apparently (I don’t speak Portuguese) the title of the book *Tu Credi?* in Brazil means immediately that dismissive kind of question. In fact, the title in Portuguese is *Deus e Eu* which means *God and I* which is a very weird title for me, but they explained to me why they had to change it.

Yes, I wrote a novel. I spent two years and a half on this book. Honestly I’m very happy about it. I will present it in a couple of weeks. And yes, the two books are strongly related although one is nonfiction, a

collection of interviews, the other one is fiction. Starting from the title which is *Absolution (Assoluzione)* which in Italian means also acquittal, and I'm saying this because it's the story of a friendship between two lawyers so I decided to use the two meanings of this word—acquittal and absolution in the Catholic sense. The two books are strongly related, and I now go back to this previous book which took almost five years of my life for several reasons. Some of these wonderful intellectual artists resisted a little bit. They didn't know why I wanted to interview them. Some of them said "no" after a long time exchanging emails. Some said "yes" and they asked me to correct completely, to double-check the interview. One of them is Spike Lee, by the way. But what is more important is that it changed my way of considering what I called the fundamental question. Whatever your answer is: Yes I do believe. No, I don't believe. I believe that is the fundamental question and all the other answers are consequential. Because if I believe in God, of course I should follow what God tells me, and this is the first important "rub," as Hamlet says. I believe that the two great problems for religion today are on one side fundamentalism, and I don't think I have to explain why fundamentalism can be dangerous, and when I say fundamentalism I'm not talking only about the Muslim fundamentalists, but all kinds of fundamentalism. The second danger is what I call the new age approach to religion, which is the opposite, but in my opinion not less dangerous. Why I'm saying this starting from the fundamental question is because what I see today is a very often-used approach where a person takes from religion only what he or she wants. It's a self-made religion, and it's the kind of approach that we have when we go to a party and we face the buffet and say, "I don't like this. I like that. I want two of these." This has nothing to do with religion in my opinion. And religion comes from a Latin word which means "to be tied to something." So the second step I want to make is that there is a fundamental difference between fundamentalism and orthodoxy. In this country in particular, orthodoxy has if not a negative, at least a very controversial or ambiguous meaning, or at least it is used in a very controversial if not negative way. I disagree and I believe in orthodoxy and I think that orthodoxy is exactly the opposite of fundamentalism, meaning that orthodoxy is a way of embracing other people into the same faith, the same belief. Fundamentalism is a way of creating a barrier. It's a way of saying, if you do not accept this, you are out of religion.

So going back to your question, the story of the novel is a story of a friendship of a young lawyer who befriends an older lawyer. He becomes his pupil, his best friend, almost his son. When he realizes that the mentor, the old lawyer is sick, fragile, he's no longer the charismatic figure he used to think, the younger lawyer betrays him. Why am I saying this and why do I put this in relationship with the book *Do You Believe?* Because the way I intend the novel is a metaphor of a fundamental passage of the Gospel which is the passage of the transfiguration, the moment where Christ goes up on the mountain with Peter and a few other disciples and he shows his divine reality. What happens is that Peter and the others are fascinated, speechless. Peter says, "How beautiful this is! Why don't we stay here? Why should we go back there?" And the evangelist St. Luke, writes, "He didn't know what he was talking about." My novel is all about this: trying to build a perfect world on earth and understanding that it's just an illusion, and of course being forced to go back to the world. This comes from the conversations of *Tu credi?*, the conversations I had with eighteen different, but always interesting and fascination personalities; some of them are atheists, (and I want to speak about atheism in a minute if you let me) some of them are believers, and I would say five or six are in the middle, are not sure if they believe or if they don't believe.

Why do I say that I want to speak about atheists? Because I don't want to surprise you, and certainly I don't want to sound provocative, but personally, and I repeat personally, I think that atheists don't exist. I believe that (and if you go back to the Bible this is a passage of the book) in the Old Testament atheists don't exist. There are either believers or idol worshipers. And nowadays I see a lot of people who worship the body, power, sex, money, whatever you want to worship, but actually they don't contemplate the existence of God. They like to contemplate this in order to worship their idols. I think it's George Bernard Shaw who used to say that if you take out God from the world, you don't have a world of atheists; you have a world full of people who believe in everything. So in other words, you are always bound to believe in something. I don't know if I replied to your questions.

Valesio: Actually, yes, you did. There is a style especially in the Roman media in which to make the proceedings more lively, one has to disagree violently with the others. That's how it's supposed to be. But I don't. I'm sorry. I basically agree with your position.

Monda: As an anecdote, who said "no" to my request? It's interesting. Only two very important, very famous women denied my request—Hilary Clinton and Condolezza Rice. And then Woody Allen who is not a woman.

Valesio: This leads in a sense to a second question, prefacing it by the statement that I think the least productive way of criticizing anthological texts is to say, why didn't you put X or Y; of course an anthology is a choice. The very word suggests it. So I don't think this is very productive. If I were for a moment, however, to indulge this, I would say I'm very sorry, as you indicated at some point, that Muhammad Ali could not respond to you.

Monda: There are three personalities; Muhammad Ali is one of them, who, for different reasons couldn't do it. One is him, and we all know that he's very ill; he doesn't speak clearly. I wanted him. Also I used to be his greatest fan. He's my idol. And two passed away during the preparation of the book—Susan Sontag and Arthur Miller. And especially Sontag really contemplated this possibility and then unfortunately she passed away.

Valesio: I guess my nostalgia for Muhammad Ali was symptomatic of something that I think may be part of a future version of the book. There are represented here all the main shades of Christianity, the main shades of unbelief, the main shades of Judaism. I miss Islam, because Salman Rushdie makes it very clear in his interview that he is not a representative and does not want to be considered a representative of Islam. But my general question about this is different. It doesn't concern the presence or absence of X and Y. I'm not sure I can define it well. I'll try.

In your book, quite appropriately, you insist in each interview to go back to the childhood experiences of each person. (What kind of religion, if any, were they brought up with? What was their response to it?) And they are very frank and interesting in their responses, and then usually they follow up by going to a general idea, a sense of commitment, a sense of interest for service to humanity; in short, a love of mankind. This is very beautiful and very important. What I miss, however, between these two poles, is a statement of any kind of passionate involvement of an adult nature, so to speak; love in the sense of passion for a spouse, a lover, a fiancé, and so forth. Theologians know that the old opposition between *eros* and *agape*, *eros* being profane and *agape* being sacred, doesn't really hold water, and *eros* is now normally used also as a spiritual passion; and so I wonder about this because it seems to me that to understand the mystic aspect of religion you have to account for ardent feelings. I was thinking, in fact, that the greatest religious poem ever written in the West has its roots in the experience of a nine-year old boy meeting a nine-year old girl in Florence...so I wonder if this absence is something that the subjects of your interviews avoided, or you did not want to explore that? How did it work out?

Monda: To be honest, I tried at the beginning, but it didn't work very well because, with a few exceptions, all these writers, directors, actors, intellectuals are I'm sure in good faith, but when they start talking about their religious experience as adults, although some of them don't believe -- I often encountered what I call a *goodism*; they very easily put together a sincere approach to spirituality with the ideal of being good to other people, which is, I think, too little and too limited today for me. And I want to go back...it is clear to everybody that I do believe and I'm Catholic, and I try to be an orthodox Catholic. If you believe, you cannot ignore the Gospel; you cannot ignore Christ's voice. Christ asks us, asks the believer to be the salt of the earth. Not the honey or the sweetness or the sugar. That's why I have problems with what I call *goodism*. This doesn't mean that we don't have to love because this is the first commandment, our neighbor and of

course our God. But sometimes I feel that this adult, but at the same time vague approach to religion is actually an attempt to escape in a very generic declaration of love. After two, three interviews, and of course there are some exceptions. I mentioned Elie Wiesel who's not Catholic; he's a believer; he's Jewish, and he's a wonderful man. With few exceptions I found this world that was not particularly interesting to me. That's why somehow I avoided this question.

You mentioned before the fact that I explained how I met these people. I want to tell you that I would say half of them are or became friends, but a few, for example, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. passed away, and even Saul Bellow passed away, I met them maybe twice for the interview, so I didn't know them very well. But they were very kind and very open to a conversation with me. Others like Nathan Englander, who gave me what I believe the most moving and touching answer (and I will tell you in a second what) now are good friends. When I ask him, he doesn't believe, or at least he's not sure. When I ask him, "Do you believe in God?" He says, "I don't know." "Do you believe that there is a life after death?" His answer was, "I don't know, but if you ask me where my grandfather is now, I would say he's in paradise." Maybe with better words, but this is the concept.

Valesio: As you were exemplifying, there are so many points here that are suggestive of the fact that you said once in presenting your novel (at least I saw you quoted), that for you beauty and truth are the same thing basically.

Monda: Yes.

Valesio: And I was impressed by this, and this sense of beauty as truth comes out in the text. To me, one of the most impressive was Martin Scorsese when he says...

Monda: It's also my favorite.

Valesio: It's a very good interview, and you ask, "What made you move toward religion?" And he answers, quoting what may seem a cliché, but it makes him come alive, "Apart from the iconography which is so powerful and evocative, the dramaturgical aspect of mass and the religious services. But obviously I felt something more profound, beginning with the idea of suffering and redemption, which obsessed me and which I saw in both the intimacy and the externality of Catholicism. Maybe it's no coincidence that in those years I was a fan of film noir, in which the same elements clash." And I really owe it to Martin Scorsese, this new view of a division I felt in me. I am Catholic, like you, and yet I love film noir and I always felt slightly guilty about it; and Martin Scorsese points out that this can be reconciled after all.

Monda: And don't forget, when I asked Scorsese, "Do you believe in God?" he said, "I don't know but I'm Catholic."

Valesio: And Daniel Libeskind, which is also an interesting interview, says at a certain point when you quoted Derek Walcott's "God is a wise old man," and he answers, "It's an evocative image, but personally I've never imagined the Heavenly Father like that. In fact, I don't even think it's possible to imagine him, but perhaps only to hear him." This seems impressive to me. Certainly Daniel Libeskind is aware of the fact that one of the oldest strains of discussion and debate and division from Plato to the Bible is the privilege of the visual versus the privilege of the auditory. And there are large discussions about this and I was reminded, thanks to the interview, of that beautiful verse, "All the people saw the voice" (*Exodus*, 20:18) which to me in one of the most extraordinary verses in the Bible. I'm not sure which of the two experiences I relate to most, but I think it was a very interesting way of putting it and I wonder if you felt in the answers, in the discussion, this dualism between the voice and the sight.

Monda: It's important to stress that Daniel Libeskind is also a musician, so for him the sound, the music,

it's almost more important than the written word. He explains that when he builds buildings, when he creates architecture, he has the approach of the composer, the musician.

Yes, the answer is yes, I always thought of exactly that verse of the Bible which is also for me not only extraordinary, but disorienting. It almost scares me.

Valesio: I have a last, not even a question, but an observation, and I wonder what your position is on it. I said, and I meant it, that this book is extremely readable. It is direct; it is inviting; it follows the rhythm of the conversation.

Monda: I tried to be very simple.

Valesio: Absolutely. There is no sense in which I could say this book is difficult in the sense of weighty or arduous or too intellectual; and yet I felt, and I use the term in a positive sense, that there was a difficulty in the book. At first, I didn't understand what it was. I had to put it down often. I thought initially I just could go through it. And I thought, and again I want to hear your experience and response to it, that I feel a difference between talking to God or of God, in a liturgically defined setting (I think of the Catholic mass, but there are many other places -- synagogues or mosques). I find that kind of talk soothing and calming. It's a way for me to start the day in a calm way. To talk about God in a secular context, on the other hand, is to me like being up high in a mountain and having some difficulty breathing. It's intellectual inevitably, even in the simplest conversation. So I'm not saying "difficulty" in the negative sense. I'm saying that this is the reason why, after each interview, I had to pause and leave the book aside, do something totally different, and then re-connect. It's a very arduous thing to read a series of intelligent conversations in a secular context about God. With respect to that, the ritual to me is more restful. I wonder what your experience is.

Monda: I would say at least sixty to seventy per cent of them answered as the first answer (I will show you one of the lists) "Why do you want to ask this?" They are accustomed to being asked about working with Leonardo DiCaprio or why they wrote a particular line in their novel, etc... Of course these are also interesting questions, but the point is that, I don't remember who said it, that the existence of God is the argument that is never discussed but is always underlying every discussion. That is what I really wanted to do in a secular experience. Of course if you talk to a priest, this is what you do, or even a theologian, or even with a diehard atheist, but strangely it's very rare to have this conversation with artists, writers, intellectuals unless you have what I call the new age, vague, generic, *goodist* conversation about spirituality. What I like to ask, what I did like to ask, is something different: How do you see God? Do you believe He exists? How does He talk to you? How do you speak with Him? What do you tell Him? Do you pray? It's something that I feel everybody at least once in his or her life asks to himself or herself. Why don't we talk about this? Are we ashamed? Are we afraid? Are we bored? I don't know.

Valesio: What I was saying before about passion, love-passion, erotic passion is that what most closely resembles this is religion. Even in these very explicit times regarding sexuality and so forth, is it possible that one is a little bit shy when talking about faith?

Monda: Yes, it's not only possible. I'm sure that a lot of people are very private about this, and I respect that. But I also know that a lot of people prefer to ignore it because it's problematic. Because if the answer is "Yes, God exists," then everything else is construction unless we have once again this vague approach. In other words, there are rules related; we call them the commandments. If God exists, we shouldn't steal, kill, hate.