

## Faith, Reason and the Challenges of Epistemic Claims<sup>1</sup>

**Temisan Ebijuwa**

*Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Nigeria*

*Abstract:* The debate of the age long relationship between faith and reason as diverse sources of knowledge of reality has been on for quite some time and the quest for a clearer elucidation at this time is imperative as well as compelling because of the sordid condition we have found ourselves in the world today. The world is bedeviled by a number of challenges that has questioned the realities of our social existence, as it relates to how we perceive ourselves, neighbors, circumstances and experiences in our contemporary society. As a result, there seems to be a general dislocation of our sense of values, hope and confidence necessary for the activation and sustenance of the matrix of social solidarity and human development. Some scholars have poignantly seen science as the only solution to existential problems. Peter Throdahl, for example, writes that: “In an age in which science and reason are required to find real solutions to very real problems in an extremely complex world, science is often taking a back seat to religious dogma and political agendas. My fear, as well as yours, is that the younger generation will be educated without an appreciation for scientific process and our solutions to modern-day problems will not reflect the knowledge of the day. What a chilling and dark future that would leave for us all.”<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that we are aware that “productivity and positive results of science plays an important role in human emancipation, aspiration, self-fulfillment and social progress, but that contrary to Throdahl’s expectations, they do not certainly exhaust the depth of human

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was first read at the Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, Nigeria at the instance of the Postgraduate School on Wednesday, 23rd February, 2022. I appreciate the contributions of the Postgraduate students of the seminary. I thank specially Rev. Prof. John Eyinnaya, Rev. Prof. Emiola Nihinlola and all those that made impressive contributions during and after the lecture.

<sup>2</sup> T. Peter Throdahl, “Faith and Reason are not Mutually-Exclusive; we need both,” *Tampa Bay Times*, August 4, 2005, 1.

knowledge and their aspirations;”<sup>3</sup> otherwise, there would not have been need for the debate under review. My motivation in this study, therefore, is to activate a certain kind of conversation that will change our understanding or at least make some skeptics have a second look at the tension between faith and reason as two ways of knowing and interpreting human realities.

*Keywords:* Faith, Reason, Convergence, Epistemic Claims

### *Introduction*

The thrust of this paper is the clarification of the ‘seemingly’ controversy between faith and reason as two ways of knowing or as sources of justification for religious beliefs. The drive to do this arose from a number of observations in literature to the effects that both are seen by many scholars as incompatible and to others to use Possenti’s phrase quoting Pope John Paul, that “faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth... .”<sup>4</sup> Since both can serve this cognitive function, philosophers and theologians have become increasingly concerned about how the two are related and how one can treat claims that emanate from each source. While some have argued that faith and reason are in sharp contrast over certain propositions or methodologies, others have held that there cannot be any genuine conflict between the two – arguing that “reason properly employed, and faith properly understood will never produce contradictory claims.” Yet, scholars of the logical positivist persuasion like Otto Neurath, Moritz Schlick and Alfred Jules Ayer have argued contrary to the above that there is any domain of thought or human experience that is driven by faith, claiming instead that all meaningful ideas or statements are accessible through thorough ratiocination. Thus, arguing that it is impossible for a non-rational or trans-rational form of language can hold meaningful cognitive content. This, therefore, poses threats to how a seemingly alternate source of knowledge upon which religious beliefs can rest could be attained.

In this study, I want to contend that in spite of the apparent differences of the two sources of justification of religious beliefs,

---

<sup>3</sup> T. Ebijuwa, “Confluence of Ideas: Philosophy, Tradition and the Challenges of universal Values,” *36<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Lecture Series*, Ogbomoso, Nigeria, 2021 (Nigeria: Ladoke Akintola University of Technology), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Vittorio Possenti, “Faith and Reason: What Relationship?” *Zeszyty Naukowe KUL* 59, no. 1 (2016): 4.

they are complimentary and harmoniously related; in that in their quest at understanding realities and interpreting nature and human existence, there are certain claims whose truths cannot be solely demonstrated by each source of knowledge.

From the above, it will not be out of order to seek for evaluation of both sources of knowing carefully in order to provide a better narration of the theoretical interpretation, which will reflect most faithfully reality of the discourse of the relationship between faith and reason and how it affects Christianity, the goal and purpose of human solidarity and social existence.

### *Clarification of Terms*

To understand the relationship between faith and reason, it is important to clarify these two terms. This is with a view to providing an appropriate theoretical context for the analysis of the relationship between faith and reason as they affect our ways of knowing and the goal of human existence. Let me start my build up by clarifying what is meant by faith.

### *Faith*

As articulated by Mark Baham, faith is undoubtedly the cornerstone of the Christian worldview.<sup>5</sup> The product of the heart that is recognized as faith drives how Christians interact with the world, their neighbors, and what shapes their hopes for the future and the understanding of their social and physical environments. As a vital force in the life of a believer, faith is a subtle but critically significant part of the Christian experience, at once hard to adequately define in all its nuance, but at the same time immensely powerful and life changing.<sup>6</sup> This is the reason perhaps Soren Kierkegaard sees "...faith as the most important task to be achieved by a human being, because only on the basis of faith does an individual have a chance to become a true self."<sup>7</sup> William Craig describes faith as a step of commitment or trust, taken when the individual knows something to be true and is ready to commit wholeheartedly to it.<sup>8</sup> In his "The Sentiment of Rationality,"

---

<sup>5</sup> Mark Baham, "Faith and Reason," *ResearchGate*, June, 2020, 4, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342275819\\_Faith\\_and\\_Reason](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342275819_Faith_and_Reason).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "Soren Kierkegaard," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed November 10, 2017, 7, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kierkegaard/>.

<sup>8</sup> William Craig, "What is Faith," filmed 2012, Veritas org, 4:00, <https://www.veritas.org/talks>.

William James defines faith in the following manner: Faith is the “belief in something concerning which doubt is still theoretically possible; and as the test of belief is willingness to act, one may say that faith is the readiness to act in a cause the prosperous issue of which is not certified to us in advance.” So, faith is not only compatible with doubt, but it requires its possibility.<sup>9</sup> It is oriented towards action: it is a kind of “working hypothesis” needed for practical life. The Letter to the Hebrews succinctly expressed the idea of faith in a delightful manner, likening it to a physical substance and explaining how it serves as evidence of the ultimately scientifically unverifiable or to say it differently as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrew puts it; faith is concerned with “the confidence of things which are hoped for, and the certainty of things which are not seen” (Heb., 11:1). Of course, things not seen here have spiritual undertone and do not mean things that one cannot see because they are small.

It should be noted that when we consider the ordinary usage of faith as we have it in Craig above and as defined by the Advanced Learners Dictionary, we are likely to see a definition that includes terms like, “trust,” “belief” and “confidence”. For example, “confidence or trust in a person or plan.”<sup>10</sup> Of course, once an individual you trust or have confidence in something or somebody, such must believe in that thing or person. As averred by Tavani, if we carefully look at the notion of religious faith, we are likely going to encounter at least two different senses of the concept of faith.<sup>11</sup> While one has to do with faith as an *act*, the other sees faith in terms of its *content*. Although, it is possible for one to believe that the two senses are inseparable in the sense that the content of one’s faith (i.e., doctrine, principles and articles that comprise a certain faith) might well inform an individual’s act of faith in the decisions, choices or commitments he/she makes, we are not likely to see as we coast along in this study any form of division in our attempt to unpack the concept of faith as it relates to our interpretation of human realities. Let us quickly see the distinction.

---

<sup>9</sup> William James, “The Sentiment of Rationality,” *Mind* 4, no. 15 (July, 1879): 320.

<sup>10</sup> Albert Sydney Hornby, *Advanced Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 231.

<sup>11</sup> Herman Tavani, “The Classic Debate on the Relationship between Faith and Reason: Some Challenges from the Perspective of Relativism and Postmodernism,” *Insight: Rivier Academic Journal* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 2.

*Faith as Act and Faith as Content*

As stated above, let us consider the concept of religious faith as an act of believing or an act involving trust or commitment. Saint Thomas Aquinas sees faith as an “act of the intellect assenting to the truth at the command of the will,”<sup>12</sup> or simply put, the mind’s assent to what is not seen. In a similar vein, John Locke describes faith “as an assent to a proposition”<sup>13</sup> and William James speaks of “faith as our right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters.”<sup>14</sup> This aspect of faith involving activity or act, however, can also be said in the words of Paul Tillich, to refer to the *dynamic sense of faith*. In this sense, faith cannot only be seen as one’s interaction and interpersonal encounter with God, it can also be conceived as a form of commitment that people make to a way of living in different social contexts or one’s commitment to a vocational form of religious life.

In addition to the above, and as already highlighted, faith can also be conceived in terms of its content, that is, in terms of the contents of the beliefs as opposed to an individual act of believing. Here, the direction of faith is in terms of a certain set of religious beliefs and doctrines, rather than an individual subscribing to those beliefs. This sense of faith having to do with the collection of principles and doctrines is what Ravi Zacharias called substantive sense of faith.<sup>15</sup> In its substantive understanding, religious faith is likened to the collection of articles and doctrines or even dogma-beliefs which define what it means to belong to a certain religion say Baptist Church, Celestial Church of Christ, Roman Catholic and host of others. In this context, therefore, it is important to note especially when the issue of faith is being discussed to be careful of vacillating between its substantive aspect and that of its dynamic status. In this study, while recognizing the importance of the substantive aspect, we are interested more in the dynamic sense, that is, that aspect, which makes man have a believing attitude in religious concerns.

---

<sup>12</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, “Summa Theologiae 11 (QU.4.5),” in *Basic Writings of Thomas Aquinas 2*, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945), 5.

<sup>13</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 11, ed. Alexander C. Fraser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 416.

<sup>14</sup> William James, *The Will to Believe and other Essays* (New York: Longman, Green and Co., 1886), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ravi Zacharias, *Beyond Opinion: Living the Faith we Defend* (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2010), 1-384. See Heb. 11:1.

### *Reason*

Like faith, reason is also ambiguous as it is sometimes confused with common sense by the uninitiated minds. Unlike faith that relies on the strong belief, trust or confidence in the doctrines of religion based on spiritual conviction, reason seeks for clarity of thought based on certain logical principles. In this sense, reason can be described as the power of the mind to understand, articulate and form judgments logically. Now since religious beliefs or revelation as the case may be are products of the fruits of faith, those that are persuaded by the emphasis on conceptual clarity for example, the logical positivists, argue that all metaphysical language fails to meet a standard of logical coherence and hence meaningless. They argue that since metaphysical claims are not only in principle falsifiable and their claims neither true nor false, they can be said to make no verifiable reference to the world. Religious language shares these features with metaphysical language. As reported by Anthony Flew (1971), because it is difficult for religious believers to state the condition under which they would give up their faith since their claims are unfalsifiable, they cannot be objects for rational evaluation.

It is true to say that this attack on religious claims by logical positivists might appear deep at first sight, since they can be considered meaningless because they cannot be verified empirically so to say, they are nevertheless imperative in providing believers with moral motivation, self-understanding and a clear compass for navigating through life for better social engineering and human survival. Although R. M Hare and Anthony Flew are in agreement in their admittance that religious faith consists of a set of unfalsifiable assumptions, which the former called “bliks,” Hare is of the opinion that our practical dealings with everyday world involve several of such “bliks.” Even though we are aware that some of these principles might be faulty, we cannot but have some in order to live a comfortable life in the world otherwise we will be living a life of robots.

### *Compatibility Thesis*

The above response by Hare and Flew to the logical positivists` denial of religious beliefs is a subtle attempt at raising concerns of the compatibility of faith and reason. The question to ask at this juncture is: whether faith and reason are compatible as averred in the report of R. M. Hare? Before this, let us quickly look at the different senses of compatibility following Herman Tavani

(2008). Apart from the loose sense in which compatibility is commonly used, Tavani identified three senses of compatibility, which are; weak compatibility, moderate compatibility and strong compatibility. In the loose sense, we ordinarily speak of close friends as being compatible with one another when they share certain sets of values, such as supporting each other in terms of needs and interests and the mutual pursuit of common ideals of moral decency. We also sometimes use the word “compatible” when we speak of two institutions as being compatible even though those institutions are operating with two vastly diverse ideologies and are not in total disharmony with each other. Or to put it mildly, when a husband and wife are living peacefully with one another, we say both of them are compatible with one another. These, according to Tavani, are instances of what may be called non-logical compatibility, which can be contrasted with logical compatibility.<sup>16</sup> Logical compatibility strictly speaking in philosophical parlance means the agreement of two or more propositions. Thus, when it is said that two or more propositions are compatible, we mean that the propositions or statements under review are coherent and consistent. Otherwise stated, they are incompatible. As Tavani puts it: The criterion used in determining whether propositions are logically compatible is based on logical consistency. If two propositions are such that their conjunction is logically consistent, the propositions are said to be compatible. On the contrary, if two propositions are logically inconsistent – i.e., their conjunction results in a logical contradiction of the form P and not –P it would follow that the two propositions are logically incompatible.<sup>17</sup>

This meaning of logical compatibility discussed above can be seen as a formal sense of compatibility since it addresses ordinarily the formal conditions of logical rules necessary for two or more propositions to be logically compatible. Here, compatibility seems to me to be an elastic concept. Within this formal sense of logical compatibility we can also identify strength of compatibility, which is different ways that we can say a proposition is compatible. That is, weak compatibility, moderate compatibility and strong compatibility. Since this study is not design around strict compatibility thesis, we will not bother ourselves so much on this. With the preceding discussion in mind – that is discussions of faith,

---

<sup>16</sup> Herman Tavani, “The Classic Debate on the Relationship between Faith and Reason: Some Challenges from the Perspective of Relativism and Postmodernism,” *Insight: Rivier Academic Journal* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

reason and compatibility, we can now recast our original question of whether faith and reason are indeed harmoniously compatible. Or to put it differently, the question will now be, whether faith and reason are good sources of knowledge that complement each other in the sense of responding to the challenges of human existence and nature.

Recall that we have earlier differentiated between faith as act and faith as content, logical reasoning, compatibility and incompatibility, it is imperative for us to now return to our original question and ask if faith in all its senses can be said to be compatible with reason. Let us now recast our original question as: Is the act of faith (i.e., believe in existence of God) compatible with logical reason? It is important to note here that acts alone are neither logically compatible nor logically incompatible, since acts are not propositional, statements or assertions as noted by Tavani. What the above question seems to suggest from the face value is not question about logical compatibility *per se* but about whether there are justifications for believing in the existence of God or whether there are reasonable arguments/justifications for religious beliefs. The question is: what will now count as a reasonable justification or argument for our religious claims, convictions or commitments?

Apart from the fact that the claims that scientific knowledge is necessary for the resolution of human existential problems is wrongheaded, even though we know that it is not sufficient, scholars have advanced arguments to show why it is reasonable to believe in the existence of God. A classic example in this direction is that advanced by Blaise Pascal in the Seventeenth century, popularly known as *Pascal's wager*. For him, people can choose to believe in God or can choose not to believe in God, and that God either exists or he does not. Under this condition, if a person believes in God and He exists, he will win eternal happiness and infinite gain. If God does not exist, he will suffer minor inconvenience. If he does not believe in God, and He exists, he will lose eternal bliss and suffer infinite loss. If he does not believe in God, and God does not exist, he will gain a finite amount of pleasure. As Pascal avers, let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God exists. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. It is imperative then to wager that He exists without hesitation. In this view, whether the claims of religious beliefs are true or not or make sense or not is not that important as those questions may not be resolvable. What is important to us here is whether there are reasons or rational justifications for a person to be a believer.



However, as attractive as Pascal's position might appear, it has been argued that it is inadequate to provide sufficient justification for religious beliefs. In his *The Ethics of Belief*, William Clifford (1886) argues that we must be careful about holding beliefs without sufficient evidence. He claims that beliefs based on insufficient justifications are always wrong. Believing in something just because its outcome may be beneficial in the long run is not genuine belief. To push his argument forward, Clifford gives an example of a ship owner who sees that his ship is old and in need of repairs. The ship owner, however, convinced himself that the ship has made so many voyages and had always returned safely, and believes that this trip will not be different from previous ones even when it is clear that evidence before him suggests the contrary. The ship owner had faith and allowed the ship to sail. Clifford says that if the ship sinks, the owner will be directly responsible for the deaths that occur as a result of his negligence. He says further that even if the ship manages to make the voyage, the owner is still guilty, he just would not be found out, as the question has to do with the foundation for his belief rather than the outcome. This is because as he puts it, the ship owner "had no right to believe on such evidence that was before him. He had acquired his belief not by honestly earning it in patient investigation or evaluation, but by stifling his doubts."<sup>18</sup> Clifford says that it is not so much the belief that should be judged but the action following the belief. Even though the ship owner believed the sea worthiness of his ship, he could have taken precaution of having it examined before putting the lives of other people on the line. Yet, Clifford argues further that when acting in a way that is opposite of one's belief, it seems to condemn the belief. For example, if the ship owner truly believed that his ship was good, he would have no reason to have it examined. Indeed, the examination would suggest that the owner actually had some doubts. He therefore argues that it is one's duty to look carefully at both sides of an issue, and when one holds a belief that is not based upon evidence he loses his objectivity and is unable to perform that duty. Furthermore, Clifford points out that belief are all incredibly important, as they lay the foundation for accepting or rejecting all other beliefs and provide the framework for future action. Since one's beliefs are not private it shows that they can be passed on within one's society and to future generations. Beliefs, which are based upon evidence and have been carefully examined, allow humanity to have mastery of the world,

---

<sup>18</sup> K. William Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," in *Contemporary Review*, ed. Leslie Stephen and Fredrick Pollock (London: Macmillan and Co., 1886), 1.

but when those beliefs are unfounded and contrary to evidence, the mastery resulting is wrong-headed. Science and technological innovations that rely on evidence will not be encouraged and people's knowledge will now be rooted in a weak foundation. This is part of the reasons that beliefs that are unfounded are deceptive, as they make humans feel stronger and more knowledgeable when the reverse is the case. Hence Clifford, like Michael Scriven, argues that holding beliefs based upon insufficient evidence can lead to the downfall of a society. And that even when this belief is discovered to be true, the society still suffers, as people are likely to stop investigating issues with an open mind.<sup>19</sup> As Clifford puts this: "... If I let myself believe anything on insufficient evidence, there may be no great harm done by the mere believe; it may be true after all, or I may never have occasion to exhibit it in outward acts. But I cannot help doing this great wrong towards Man that I make myself credulous. The danger to society is not merely that it should believe wrong things, though that is great enough; but that it should become credulous and lose the habit of testing things and inquiring into them; for then it must sink back into slavery."<sup>20</sup>

The implication of this, for Clifford, will be the absence of the spirit of inquiry required for the validation of our beliefs. As a result, they will become gullible and susceptible to fraud, thereby hastening the downfall of civilization. Thus, holding these unfounded beliefs and suppressing doubts in the words of Clifford is a sin to humanity and completely worthless as method for explanation of our realities and guidance of our lives in the eyes of Michael Scriven.

Reacting to Clifford's evidentialist position above, William James avers in his *The Will to Believe* (1886) that we may be rational in holding a belief even if we do not have sufficient evidence for it; and that life would be severely deprived of its vitality if we acted only on completely well founded beliefs. Clearly, this is permissible from a theistic dimension. He says that there are two ways of viewing humanity's duty in terms of opinion and belief, and that we are commanded to know the truth and avoid error. However, knowing the truth and avoiding errors are not one commandment stated in two ways. Rather, they are separable, and stressing one over the other will provide different results. He, therefore, argues that those, like Clifford, who place the avoidance of error above knowing the truth, are keeping their minds in a

---

<sup>19</sup> Michael Scriven, *Primary Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 25.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-86.

constant state of suspense out of fear of being duped. He explains this with an analogy reminiscence of a military general telling his soldiers to avoid battles so that they do not suffer injuries or casualties. Victories over neither foes nor nature are won by not taking action. Thus, James says, he is willing to face the occasional falsehood or dupe in order to eventually arrive at a true belief. He does take into account that there are times when we can postpone making a decision until more sufficient evidence is provided. However, we can only postpone our minds if the option is not a crucial one with dire consequences. Often, the need to act is not so critical and urgent that we must risk acting upon a false belief than on no belief at all.

On the reliance on religious beliefs, James argues that the skeptic may say that he is waiting for more evidence before making his decision, it should be noted, however, that he has in clear terms already decided. The skeptic has decided that it is better and wiser to dismiss the belief for fear of being duped than it is to believe and hope that they are true. Clearly, by choosing to wait, the skeptic on this showing has joined the side of the unbeliever. Since we know that no one is absolutely sure of the existence of God, one must make a decision whether to believe or not or wait for more proof. Perhaps, this is part of the reasons James concludes that “faith is something concerning which doubt is still theoretically possible” and that choosing to wait is not considered inactive; it is just as much an act as that of believing. In other words, whether one believes or not, it is an individual affair and it should be tolerated no matter what.

### *Faith and Reason: Point of Convergence*

Recall that the journey thus far has been how to provide answer to the question: Is the act of faith compatible with logical reason? We have said that to answer this question as it is, might be problematic because it sounds like using Aristotelian logic (i.e., uniquely human cognitive capacity that comprehends deductive truths and logical necessity) to understand religious matters- the result of which will be wrong-headed. Consequently, we recast the question to whether there are justifications for believing in the existence of God or whether there are reasonable justifications/arguments for religious beliefs. The attempts to address this question led to the debate between Clifford and James at least as highlighted in this study on the report of Blaise Pascal as we have seen above on the concerns of the provision of sufficient evidence for the justification of religious claims, beliefs or

commitments. I want to say at least as we have it here that what the quest for evidence or logical justification on matters relating to religious beliefs suggest is the application of scientific paradigm unsuitable for the evaluation of religious concerns to determine its truth value, a kind of putting a square peg in a round hole, which makes the evidentialist claims fallacious, and consequently committing what Gilbert Ryle calls category mistake.

When Clifford says that to believe something “because its outcome may be beneficial in the long run is not a genuine belief,” one may want to ask if life itself is not designed in such a way. When we sleep at night, for example, what is the guarantee that we will wake up the next day? We ordinarily want to believe that because we woke up yesterday, it is most likely that we will definitely wake up tomorrow. Of course, many people who slept in the past believing that they will wake up the next day and never did, did not obliterate the fact of the reasonableness in believing in waking up. What will happen if most of us believe the contrary that we are not likely to wake up because of the fear of not waking the next day? This will be dangerous- as many people will avoid sleeping and consequently look sickly, feeble and docile. It means further that many of us will be living a life of fear and doubt, which invariably in relation to human beings, will destroys social capital; that is, the fruit of the foundation of relationship building. To trust, or believe therefore, from the foregoing is a reasonable thing. The absence of trust in any society destroys social interactions and promotes distrust in the sense that a person cannot rely on others to respect their opinions and values. Without the affirmation of trust, therefore, it is not only very easy for a person`s confidence to nose – dive and be disorderly, risk taking and the promotion and expression of creativity and innovation will also be in flight. So why not believe? This question is imperative because life itself will be miserable without this act of faith. To believe, therefore, is a fact of life. To deny this as Clifford and Scriven did is to rule the concept of faith, in this case *trust* out of court. To believe that we will wake up the next day is to trust with some sense of confidence that because it has always been the case then it is highly probable and reasonable that we will wake up. It is true that we may not have sufficient evidence to say that we will wake up tomorrow as averred by James; it is, however, difficult to deny that it is not a reasonable act to believe in. To put this differently, it is reasonably necessary to believe in it- without which the society will be dysfunctional and chaotic. This act, that is, the act of believing, promotes self-confidence, self-esteem and mutual trust. Someone who lacks self-confidence, however, is less likely to feel that they can achieve their goals, and tends to have a negative

perspective about themselves and what they hope to gain in life. No wonder William James makes this epistemological point in his reaction against the agnostic that says that we should withhold belief whenever the evidence is insufficient that; “a rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth if those kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule.”<sup>21</sup>

It is also imperative to note in line with the above, that trust plays a pervasive role in the sustainability and development of social capital, even sustaining acts of cooperation with strangers who have no control over each other`s actions. Placing trust in a person, therefore, can be seen as a strategic act, a moral response or even an expression of social solidarity. It is at the core of everything that is crucial in our life. In fact, Faith is a natural and inescapable part of life without it there cannot be genuine relationship.

From the above, it is obvious that the evidentialist misses something in social intercourse, where we generally count it a virtue to trust others without some kind of calculation. Such openness we may say can broadly be termed rational. However, given our long shared experiences that willingness to trust others does elicit trustworthy behaviour: accordingly, though I may have little or no direct evidence that this person will prove trustworthy if I turn to him in a sudden predicament, I may have good evidence for the general reliability of others in my community. Otherwise stated, there will be total annihilation of social wealth in our society.

Thus far, our discussion has been about human faith; the faith that human beings naturally and ordinarily have on each other`s testimony. But what is the implication of the discussion so far on Christian faith? From the earliest days Christians saw a kind of comparison or analogy between natural and ordinary faith and the supernatural faith in God. For example, it says in the First Letter of John “If we believe the word of men, how much greater is the word of God” (1John: 9). In other words, if it is a reasonable thing as we have highlighted above for human beings to have faith in the word of merely human witness even when we know that they are fallible and are often mistaken in their judgments or decisions, how much more reasonable is it for us to have faith in the word of God who is infallible and makes no mistake and cannot deceive and be deceived. Similarly, St Paul says in the First Letter to the

---

<sup>21</sup> William James, *The Will to Believe and other Essays* (New York: Longman, Green and Co., 1886), 28.

Thessalonians that: And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe (1Th. 2:13).

The above passages show how conscious Christians were of believing not only human testimony but also divine testimony in the word of God. It also stands to reason that we should believe in the word of God because what we believe by faith is not clearly human testimony but the word of the living God. Apostle Paul echoes this when he said: For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes... for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith (Rom.1:16-17).

There are many signs to confirm that it is the word of God. The signs are accessible to reason, for example, the miracles of Christ which many people witnessed or the enduring reality of the church and the consistency of her teaching, which had perdured for over two millennial in history. Even though, faith mysteries in themselves are hidden from us and our minds are unable to comprehend them, yet it is reasonable to believe them and they are believable and the science of credibility confirms their truths. Beyond this, we know that the truth of faith, for example, the divinity of church and the reality of the Holy Trinity cannot be proven by natural reason; rather, by the force of the supernatural light of faith as the believers embrace them without hesitation, without reservations and affirms that they are true because God bears witness to us about them. Hence, faith is seen as a gift of God born from the spirit of truth that works within our souls and illuminates everything. It is, however, important to note that this `spirit of truth` is not analogous to those of Aristotelian logic, otherwise, they will as James argues above, be an irrational one.

It could be argued that the reasonableness of human faith as expressed above is not in doubt, but the bone of contention is that religious matters lack justifiable evidence and can be misleading and unreliable. While we may agree with this position that the arrow shot by critics hit the body of the bull, it is clear that it missed the heart of the bull because of the historical conflation and mis-interpretation of Hebraic and Hellenistic thoughts. Recall that we have argued that when we ask for justifiable evidence in religious concerns as the logical positivists are wont to argue, we have said that the question as presented is wrongly posed and thus misleading because it is tantamount to assigning to something a quality or action which can only be assigned things of another

category (e.g., treating abstract concepts as though they had a physical location).

At this juncture, let me begin to unearth this category mistake as presented in the bible by looking at Mathew 16: 1-4:

1. And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven.
2. He answered them, “when it is evening, you say, ‘it will be fair weather, for the sky is red’.
3. And in the morning, ‘it will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening’. You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.
4. An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah”. So he left them and departed.

Here, it is important to make a distinction between Hellenistic thought and Hebraic thought. Whereas the former deals with the world around us in a manner similar to Aristotelian logic, which has the syllogism at its foundation as follows:

Premise 1: All bachelors are unmarried men;

Premise 2: Femi is a bachelor;

Therefore: Femi is an unmarried man.

The above deductive proposition is valid because the conclusion is a product of the premises, and the argument is sound because the truthfulness of the premises and the conclusion are not in doubt. The reason for this distinction between Hebraic and Hellenistic thoughts is to show that while the latter seems to be logical in its operations, the former deals with philosophy developed within the Bible. Hence, it is a gross mistake if one uses Aristotelian logic to understand and interpret bible. This is because it does not have its foundation in linear and Aristotelian logic but in relational and experiential knowledge.

Let us see what Jesus is saying to the Pharisees and the Sadducees in verse 2 above? According to Him, “When it is evening, you say, ‘it will be fair weather, for the sky is red.” What is the meaning of this? It means that this Hebraic Pharisees and Sadducees are thinking in Aristotelian syllogisms thus:

Premise 1: Red skies in the evening suggest fair weather;

Premise 2: This evening the skies are red;

Therefore: What follows from premise 1 and 2 is: The weather will be fair. Similarly, in verse 3a: He says “And in the morning, it will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.” This also suggests that they are thinking in an Aristotelian logic as follows:

Premise 1: Red skies in the morning suggest stormy weather;

Premise 2: This morning the skies are red;

Therefore: From premise 1 and 2 The weather will be stormy.

Jesus responded to the application of observation and reasoning in verse 3b: “You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky.” That is, you know how to use your eyes and your minds to draw right conclusions when it comes to the natural world. In other words, he approves of their use of empirical observation and rational deliberation. In fact, it is precisely this approval that makes the following disapproval valid. He says in verse 3c, “But you cannot interpret the signs of the times.” When He says, “You cannot,” He is not saying that they do not have the sensory and rational capacities to do what needs to be done. He just showed them that they do in fact have the sensory and rational capacities to do what needs to be done because they are skilled in observation and deliberation when it comes to worldly matters. Yet, they cannot use such skills to interpret the signs of the times. This is because in verse 4, he said their inability to apply their skills to interpret the “signs of the times” are a function of their evil and adulterous minds. But what does being adulterous and evil have to do with their inability to use their eyes to interpret the signs? Elsewhere, He has metaphorically represented himself as the husband that has come into the world to look for his bride- his chosen people (cf. Matt.9:15; 25:1-13). Yet, they were unwilling to accept him as their husband because their hearts went after other gods and treasures (cf. Luke 16:14; Matt. 6:5). This is the reason they were asking for a sign when the sign was steering at them. They are asking for a sign to give the impression that they do not have sufficient evidence to accept Jesus as the Messiah. This skepticism is not lack of evidence or lack of rational power to decipher “the truth of the times,” as unbelievers, their hardened hearts disorder their rational powers and make them morally incapable of reasoning rightly about the truth. The search for truth, therefore, in religious matters does not lie in deductive propositions as stated above; otherwise, it will amount to the misapplication of categories. Rather, it is by faith - where faith as expressed by John Locke: ... is nothing but a firm Assent of the mind: which if it be regulated, as is our Duty, cannot be afforded to anything but upon good reason; and so cannot be



opposite to it. He that believes, without having any reason for believing, may be in love with his own fancies; but neither seeks Truth as he ought, nor pays the Obedience due his Maker, who would have him use those discerning faculties he has given him, to keep him out of mistake and error.<sup>22</sup>

What the preceding discussion shows is that faith should not be seen as a fragile structure without foundation. As Mooreland and Craig point out, “in scripture, faith involves placing trust in what you have reason to believe is true. It is not a blind, irrational leap into the dark. So, faith and reason cooperate on a biblical view of faith. They are not intrinsically hostile;”<sup>23</sup> and such we can conveniently say they are complementary and harmoniously related.

### *Conclusion*

Thus far, I have argued that in spite of the seemingly differences of faith and reason as diverse sources of epistemic claims, they are complementary and harmoniously related. In doing this, I have argued that faith is not irrational or unreasonable and that it is also not oppose to reason as some skeptics are wont to believe. Rather, to have faith in something or someone is to trust or believe in that thing or person. It is true at times that we may not have sufficient evidence to believe in something but that does not obliterate the fact of believing because not doing so in any society will destroy social capital, risk-taking, activate distrust and the promotion and expression of creativity and innovation will be in flight. Hence, it is argued that faith does not only promote self-confidence, it is central to human existence. To lack self-confidence, therefore, is for someone to feel that he cannot achieve his goals, and tends to have a negative perspective about himself and what he hopes to gain in life. And because of this, it is argued that it is reasonable to believe - an act of faith - failing which will make society dysfunctional and chaotic. This is so, following William James that; ... “a rule that prevents me from acknowledging certain kinds of truths, if those kinds of truths were really there, would be an irrational one.”<sup>24</sup> The quest for truth, therefore, in religious matters does not lie in deductive propositions as we have stated

---

<sup>22</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* IV 17, 24.

<sup>23</sup> James Porter Moreland, and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundation for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2017), 20.

<sup>24</sup> James, “The Sentiment of Rationality,” *Mind* 4, no. 15 (July, 1879): 330.

above, otherwise, it will amount to what we have called mis-application of categories.

*References:*

Aquinas, St Thomas. "Summa Theologiae." In *Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas* 2, edited by Anton C. Pegis, 5. New York: Random House, 1945.

Baham, Mark. "Faith and Reason." *ResearchGate*, June, 2020. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342275819\\_Faith\\_and\\_Reason](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342275819_Faith_and_Reason).

Clifford, K. William. "The Ethics of Belief." In *Contemporary Review*, edited by Leslie Stephen, and Fredrick Pollock, 1-5. London: Macmillan and Co., 1886.

Craig, William. "What is Faith." Filmed 2012. Veritas org, 4:00. <https://www.veritas.org/talks>.

Ebijuwa, T. "Confluence of Ideas: Philosophy, Tradition and the Challenges of universal Values." *36<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Lecture Series*, Ogbomoso, Nigeria, 2021, 1-68. Nigeria: Ladoke Akintola University of Technology.

Holy Bible. *New Living Translation (NLT)*. Cambridge: Tyndale House Publishers, 2020.

Hornby, Albert Sydney. *Advanced Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

James, William. "The Sentiment of Rationality." *Mind* 4, no. 15 (July, 1879): 317-46.

James, William. *The Will to Believe and other Essays*. New York: Longman, Green and Co., 1886.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. "Kierkegaard Soren." Accessed November 10, 2017. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kierkegaard/>.

Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 2, edited by Alexander C. Fraser. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959.

Moreland, James Porter, and William Lane Craig. *Philosophical Foundation for a Christian Worldview*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2017.

Pascal, Blaise. *Penses (Thoughts)*. Translated by W.F. Trotter. New York: Collier, 1910.

Paul II, John. *On the Relationship between Faith and Reason: Fides et Ratio*. Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1999.

Possenti, Vittorio. “Faith and Reason: What Relationship”? *Zeszyty Naukowe KUL* 59, no. 1 (2016): 4.

Scriven, Michael. *Primary Philosophy*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966.

Tavani, Herman. “The Classic Debate on the Relationship between Faith and Reason: Some Challenges from the Perspective of Relativism and Postmodernism.” *Insight: Rivier Academic Journal* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 1-20.

Throdahl, T.Peter. “Faith and Reason are not Mutually-Exclusive; we need both.” *Tampa Bay Times*, August 4, 2005.

Zacharias, Ravi. *Beyond Opinion: Living the Faith we Defend*. New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2010.

*Professor Temisan Ebijuwa*  
*Professor of Philosophy and Dean,*  
*Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,*  
*Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso,*  
*Nigeria*  
<tebijuwa@lautech.edu.ng>