

## Faith and Reason

Faith is often assumed to be an irrational act, a “leap” into the unknown over an empty chasm where evidence ought to lie. This assumption is deeply ingrained in Western thinking, and even language. The “Age of Faith” is contrasted with the “Age of Reason,” as if “faith” and “reason” were utterly disparate ways of looking at the world. “I don’t know this, but it’s true anyway” is how one skeptical scientist defined faith to me.

The difference between “science” and “religion” is supposed by many to parallel this alleged disconnect between faith and reason. Biologist Sheldon Gottlieb, in rebuking mathematician David Berlinski for doubting Darwinian theory, claimed (rather irrelevantly, since Berlinski showed little interest in religion), “In the world of the supernatural, anything goes, and the only limitation is the extent of one’s imagination. No evidence is required to substantiate any claims.” (*Commentary*, September 1996) Similarly, in her history of American freethinkers, Susan Jacoby remarked, “The scientific method itself, with its demand to 'Prove it,' discourages the leaps of faith in the unverifiable that are the essence of any religion.” But anyone who pays attention can find dozens of such quotes: that faith conflicts with reason, is the quintessence of conventional wisdom.

In my view, this understanding of the relationship between faith and reason is deeply mistaken. Faith is not some peculiar, mystical path to belief in things probably unreal. In fact, faith is simply one of two faculties (along with its kissing cousin, reason) by which we know all that we know. Without faith, in the Christian sense, it is not only impossible to please God, it is impossible to walk down the street, say “Good morning!” to your wife, fill in a map of the United States with the names of states, or say, “I believe in common descent and the brotherhood of primates.”

The purpose of this paper is primarily to show that the view of faith and reason I argue for is in continuity with the greater Christian tradition. Following a two page definition of faith and explanation of its relationship to reason, and a bit about the context in which this question arose, the bulk of the article will give quotes from about thirty key Christian thinkers, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century philosopher Justin Martyr to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century scientist Steven Barr, on faith and reason. In some cases, I will add comments to clarify remarks, or put them into context.

After writing the initial paper, I e-mailed it to a number of Christian thinkers whom I respect. So far four have kindly responded: Gary Habermas, historian and one of the world’s leading authorities on evidence for the resurrection, Ward Gasque, theologian and New Testament scholar, Ralph Winter, founder of the US Center for World Missions, and Jason Pratt, philosopher and novelist.

I will note and respond to some of their comments, also those of two atheists (a scientist and a historian) who have dialogued with me on this subject, in the course of the discussion.

### **My Definition of “Faith,” and How the Subject Came Up**

Five years ago, I defined Christian faith in my book, *Jesus and the Religions of Man*, showed how it relates to reason, and discussed briefly how people of other religions use or do not use evidence to support faith. I argue that faith and reason are like two chopsticks, with which the human mind feeds itself on the truth. Faith must be tested by reason. But reason relies on four levels of faith for all the facts that it holds dear: faith in the mind, the senses, other people, and (the question at issue between theists and atheists) God.

By faith I mean “believing something to be the case based on rational evidence, and then acting on that belief.”

Reason can only act on data that comes to the mind through one or more of four channels of faith: in the mind, the senses, other people (or sentient biological beings), or God (or other divine beings).

An atheist with an interest in the history of science told me she believed that the sun would rise tomorrow based not on faith, but on “an amassed preponderance of past physical evidence.”

But how does one know what happened in the past? I asked in response. Even to simply say, “The sun rose this morning,” you have to trust your mind (both its rationality and memory), your senses (especially visual and tactual), and perhaps in other people (who affirm that despite the morning fog, the sun shines in the fields of heaven above) to believe something so simple as that the sun came up. I added that to act on that belief, say by taking your camera out in the predawn to take pictures of the sunrise, “is an act of great faith.”

Another atheist and scientist responded: “I think the nuance you put on the term ‘faith’ is incorrect. You are talking about something other than faith; something other than religious faith, at least.” To support his point, he reminded me of “doubting Thomas.” “Thomas is gently rebuked, in fact, for requiring some kind of proof.” “Most of the Christian apologetics that I have read reminds me of my faeries at the bottom of my garden. You will either believe in my faeries by faith, or you won’t, and if you don’t, there is very little point in arguing over whether they are wearing pink or purple sneakers.”

My friend continued:

“If you elect to believe it, you do so on faith alone. And by faith I mean the actual, biblical kind of faith, where you get rebuked if you ask for proof other than circular logic . . . AND you get rewarded for checking your brain at the door (Blessed are those who do not see, and yet believe.)”

Since my take on faith provoked such astonishment among unbelievers, I checked with some favorite Christian thinkers – thirty philosophers, scientists, and historians (and one Church Council) – to see what they had to say about the relationship between faith and reason.

My primary purpose in gathering these quotations was to show that while I think my explanation adds something to the discussion, in general the understanding of faith and reason I describe is not a personal eccentricity. In fact, the Christian tradition assumes more often than not that faith ought to be backed up by evidence. But beyond the general argument, I found the historical ebb and flow of Christian thought on this subject, to the extent I have traced it so far, fascinating reading.

Christian respondents asked why I did not begin with the language and teachings of the New Testament. Dr. Habermas suggested, “You might want to add (perhaps even beginning or ending with) a comprehensive definition from the NT, which would discuss the noun *pistis* & its sense of reliance, surrender, commitment, etc, since this is so different from our English sense of the word, as well as some thoughts on NT apologetic methodology, drawn from a host of references.” Dr. Winter made a similar suggestion: “Since the Greek NT closely associates *pistis* with *pistuo* and *pistos*, 244, 246, 66 times occurring, respectively, it would no doubt be helpful to explore their meaning. Our English translations do not always translate these words faith, believe, and faithful . . . It seems to me more valuable to try to understand the three Greek words and what they meant, whether or not our translated terms mean this or that.”

To offer a complete or authoritative explanation of the Christian meaning of “faith,” and its relationship with reason, no doubt that is the course I should take. I certainly agree that Christianity cannot be understood or defined apart from the Christian Scriptures.

Nevertheless, I confine myself to later tradition in this paper for four reasons: (1) The paper was originally written to show that my own take on faith and reason is not out of line with the Christian tradition in general. For that purpose, my ideas seemed best compared with the understanding other non-canonical Christian writers had come to. (2) The paper was initially written as a response to

skeptics, and I preferred not to argue with them about the meaning of Scripture. (3) Sometimes it is interesting to look at an interesting object (such as a waterfall or volcano) through other peoples' eyes. (4) I was curious how this teaching would be developed by Christian thinkers of various spiritual traditions, professional disciplines, and ethnicities, through the ages.

### **Key Christian thinkers on Faith and Reason**

The following is a list of quotes by about thirty Christian thinkers on the relationship between faith and reason, beginning with Justin Martyr, and ending with Stephen Barr. While this list is admittedly spotty, these quotes represent a variety of traditions – Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant, philosophers, theologians, scientists, reformers, and perhaps the greatest Christian missionary after St. Paul.

I have put the most telling portions of the quotes that agree that faith requires evidential support in red (bold for explicit, light for implicit); those that disagree in light or dark green, quotes that develop a definition of faith in ways that suggest my four-level explanation of faith in orange, and important quotes that are either neutral, indirectly attributed, or part of a challenge by non-Christian thinkers, in bold black.

**Justin Martyr: “Reason directs those who are truly pious and philosophical to honour and love only what is true, declining to follow traditional opinions.”** (*The First Apology*)

Justin goes on to give evidence to support his faith, implicitly asserting that faith should be backed by evidence.

**Clement of Alexandria:** Philosophy is “a kind of preparatory training to those who attain to **faith through demonstration.**” (*The Stromata*)

“Some, who think themselves naturally gifted, do not wish to touch either philosophy or logic; nay more, they do not wish to learn natural science. They demand bare faith alone, as if they wished, without bestowing any care on the vine, straightway to gather clusters from the first . . . “

“We must lop, dig, bind, and perform the other operations. The pruning-knife, I should think, and the pick-axe, and the other agricultural implements, are necessary for the culture of the vine, so that it may produce eatable fruit. And as in husbandry, so also in medicine . . . So also here, **I call him truly learned who brings everything to bear on the truth;** so that, from **geometry, and music, and grammar,**

and philosophy itself, culling what is useful, he guards the faith against assault.”

“Since, therefore, truth is one (for falsehood has ten thousand by-paths); just as the Bacchantes tore asunder the limbs of Pentheus, so the sects both of barbarian and Hellenic philosophy have done with truth, and each vaults as the whole truth the portion which has fallen to its lot. **But all, in my opinion, are illuminated by the dawn of Light.**”

(Clement then inventories the moral and scientific discoveries made by various civilizations and philosophers.)

**Origin**, arguing *Contra Celsus*: “He next proceeds to recommend, that in adopting opinions **we should follow reason and a rational guide**, since he who assents to opinions without following this course is very liable to be deceived. And he compares inconsiderate believers to Metragytae, and soothsayers, and Mithrae, and Sabbadians, and to anything else that one may fall in with, and to the phantoms of Hecate, or any other demon or demons. For as amongst such persons are frequently to be found wicked men, who, taking advantage of the ignorance of those who are easily deceived, lead them away whither they will, so also, he says, is the case among Christians. And he asserts that certain persons who do not wish either to give or receive a reason for their belief, keep repeating, **‘Do not examine, but believe!’ and ‘Your faith will save you!’**”

Origin replies that most people cannot (or will not) devote themselves so exclusively to the pursuit of truth as to prove faith by philosophy. (In those days, of course, most ordinary people were day-laborers, and illiterate.) Should ordinary people enjoy none of the benefits of truth, especially “amelioration of conduct” and the cure of souls, just because they are unable to establish it rationally?

“We admit that we teach those men to believe without reasons, who are unable to abandon all other employments, and give themselves to an examination of arguments; and our opponents, although they do not acknowledge it, yet practically do the same.

But implicitly, **Origin seems to admit that for those who have the time, reason (and evidence) must be employed in proving Christian faith.** And of course he does employ both; that is the whole point of the book. He admits that historical proof is intrinsically difficult: “the endeavor to show, with regard to almost any history, however true, that it actually occurred, and to produce an intelligent conception regarding it, is one of the most difficult undertakings that can be attempted, and is in some instances an impossibility.” (Giving the Trojan war as an example: “How should we

prove that such was the case, especially under the weight of the fiction attached, I know not . . . .”

However, **Origin finds several lines of evidence and argument** (including archeology, miracles, history both secular and Christian, and especially prophecy) **do support the historical truths of the Gospel.**

**Irenaeus of Lyon: “Creation itself reveals him that created it;** and the work made is suggestive of him that made it; and the world manifests him that arranged it.” (Barr, 13)

**Basil of Caesarea: “We . . . must first,** if the glory of the good is to abide with us indelible for all time, **be instructed by these outside means (i.e., reasoning), and then we shall understand the sacred and mystical teachings.”** (Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 27)

**Gregory of Nazianzus: “Faith is what gives fullness to our reasoning.”** Pelikan: “Both ‘faith in search of understanding’ and ‘understanding in search of faith’ had a part in such a method. For even the case of a doctrine that was ‘true already at first sight, as well as credible on the basis of Scripture,’ it was not desirable ‘to leave this part of the subject without philosophical examination,’ because ‘the weakness of the human understanding’ could be ‘strengthened still more by any intelligible rational arguments.” (Pelikan, 27-8)

**Gregory of Nyssa:** “Gregory of Nyssa agreed with that sequence when he said, in reaction to Macrina’s method of theologizing, that it was proper first to propound a doctrine ‘for those trained only in the technical methods of proof’ by means of a **‘mere demonstration, sufficient to convince’ within the limits of reason alone,** and only then, because ‘the teachings of the Holy Scripture’ were ‘more trustworthy than any of these artificial conclusions,’ to inquire whether everything that had been proved by reason could also be harmonized with scriptural teachings.” (Pelikan, 27)

**Tertullian: “Faith must trample underfoot all reason, sense and understanding . . . to know nothing but the Word of God.”**

**“Reason is a thing of God, inasmuch as there is nothing which God the Maker of all has not provided, disposed, ordained by reason – nothing which He has not willed should be handled and understood by reason.”** (Stark, *For the Glory of God*, 148, from *On Repentance* 1)

(Habermas suggested tentatively that in the larger context of his views, Tertullian may not have been a fideist. Pratt said that another Tertullian quote like the first had been thrown at him by a Christian

as an excuse for not following the evidence, and noted that Tertullian had become a heretic, in any case. I leave this case for further study.)

**Augustine:** “Heaven forbid that God should hate in us that by which he made us superior to the animals! **Heaven forbid that we should believe in such a way as not to accept or seek reasons, since we could not even believe if we did not possess rational souls.**”

“In certain matters pertaining to the doctrine of salvation that **we cannot yet grasp by reason** – though one day we shall be able to do so – **faith must precede reason and purify the heart and make it fit to receive and endure the great light of reason** . . . for faith to precede reason in certain matters of great moment that cannot yet be grasped, surely **the very small portion of reason that persuades us of this must precede faith.**” (Stark, 148)

In *Concerning Faith in Things Not Seen*, Augustine points out that much of our knowledge is in fact based on realities that are not visible to the senses, but are well attested by evidence. He adds, **“But they are much deceived, who think that we believe in Christ without any proofs concerning Christ,”** and gives a number of pieces of evidence for Christian faith.

(Note: The testimony of St. Augustine is particularly important, since he was probably the most influential Christian thinker outside of the Bible. Here Augustine assumes that faith and reason are complementary, rather than opposed to one another. He also assumes that in most matters, ordinary human reasoning must be used to learn the truth of things. In some matters “relating to salvation” reason is too weak or uninformed to “grasp” the truth, and therefore we rely on faith in revelation. But this step itself is founded on reason. And, of course, Augustine himself wrote thousands of pages apologetics that argued from common knowledge to the truth of Christianity.)

Habermas commented: “On both Augustine & Anselm, you might want to add/treat their famous statements, **‘I believe in order to understand.’** This has relevance both to their views on faith & reason, but also on their methodology, if belief in some sense precedes reason/understanding.”

It does seem that “I believe in order to understand” is a key phrase for understanding Augustine’s views, both from my reading of Augustine himself, and from Augustinian scholars. Perhaps this should be interpreted in terms of experimental knowledge: “Bite the apple to learn its taste.” In any case, this view does seem to support the mutually affirming relationship between faith and reason that I argue for.

Kenneth Samples summarizes Augustine's thoughts on faith and reason, and his use of this phrase, as follows:

“In his *Sermon* (43.7, 9) Augustine asserted: *Crede, ut intelligas* (**‘Believe in order that you may understand’**).<sup>12</sup> For Augustine, faith (‘trust in a reliable source’) is an indispensable element in knowledge. One must believe in something in order to know anything. Knowledge begins with faith and faith provides a foundation for knowledge. Faith is itself indirect knowledge (like testimony or authority). While faith comes first in time, knowledge comes first in importance. Faith and reason do not conflict, but instead complement one another. Augustine believed that while reason does not cause faith, reason everywhere supports faith. Augustine also argued that Christians should seek to use their reason to understand doctrines (the Trinity, Incarnation, etc.) that are given via divine revelation (thus ‘faith seeking understanding’). Augustine’s writings about the role of faith influenced *Crede, ut intelligam* (‘I believe in order that I might understand’) by St. Anselm (a.d. 1033-1109).

In any case, the phrase seems to imply a kind of feedback loop between faith and reason like that I am defending. Reason depends on faith, and then faith also depends on reason. In the abstract, this may sound like circular reasoning. (Of which Pratt seemed to wryly accuse me at this point, in fact, and others have accused Augustine.)

But life can be like that. You know your mind works, because it works. If it didn't work, you would never know. Because it does work, to some extent, you can learn more about the mind, logic, and reality, reinforcing and enriching the faith you began with.

When it comes to knowledge, we have to start somewhere. Augustine's point may be that if we start with faith in God, or reason to it and then start, we will continue to experience a feedback loop of further evidences and richer faith that both depends on that evidence, and discovers more evidence. “Taste and see that the Lord is good.”

**Thomas Aquinas:** “It was necessary for man's salvation that there should be a knowledge revealed by God, besides the philosophical sciences investigated by human reason. First, because man is directed to God as to an end that surpasses the grasp of his reason . . . But the end must first be known by men who are to direct their thoughts and actions to the end. **Hence it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation.**” (*Summa Theologica*) (At first glance this may seem to support the “faith is not based on evidence” camp. But note: there is no suggestion here that evidence does not support faith in God, or should not support faith, or that these “certain truths” are illogical or against reason . . .



only that they are beyond the discovery of unaided “human” reason. This suggests a supplemental source of knowledge, which I call the fourth level of faith, and show how it is continuous with lower levels. Aquinas goes on, it seems to me, to suggest something like that in the next passage:)

“We must bear in mind that there are two kinds of science. There are some which proceed from principles known by the natural light of the intellect, such as arithmetic and geometry and the like. There are some which proceed from principles known by the light of a higher science: thus the science of optics proceeds from principles established by geometry, and music from principles established by arithmetic. So it is that **sacred doctrine is a science because it proceeds from principles made known by the light of a higher science, namely, the science of God and the blessed.**”

And how does one establish the authority of the “higher science” in this case? Aquinas quickly explains:

“The principles of any science are either in themselves self-evident, or reducible to the knowledge of a higher science; and such, as we have said, are the principles of sacred doctrine . . . **Individual facts** are not treated in sacred doctrine because it is concerned with them principally; they are rather introduced as examples to be followed in our lives (as in the moral sciences), as well as to **establish the authority of those men through whom the divine revelation**, on which this sacred scripture or doctrine is based, **has come down to us.**”

So Aquinas assumes that the authority of the authors of Scripture (which he seems to be referring to) should be established, and established by facts.

A page or two later, Aquinas affirms my interpretation of the first passage:

“It may well happen that what is in itself the more certain may seem to us the less certain because of the weakness of our intellect, which is dazzled by the clearest objects of nature; as the owl is dazzled by the light of the sun. **Hence the fact that some happen to doubt about the articles of faith is not due to the uncertain nature of the truths, but to the weakness of the human intellect . . .**”

Again, bear the hierarchical explanation of faith I gave in mind in reading the passage that follows:

“**This science can draw upon the philosophical sciences, not as though it stood in need of them, but only in order to make its teaching clearer.** For it accepts its principles, not from the other sciences, but immediately from God, by revelation. Therefore it does not draw upon the other sciences as upon

its superiors, but uses them as its inferiors and handmaidens: even so the master sciences make use of subordinate sciences, as political sciences of military science. **That it thus uses them is not due to its own defect or insufficiency, but to the defect of our intellect, which is more easily led by what is known through natural reason (from which proceed the other sciences), to that which is above reason, such as are the teachings of this science.**”

Aquinas essentially agrees with my skeptical friends that large swaths of Christian doctrine must be accepted on “faith.” (Though I can also interpret that view to some extent in my own terms.):

But he does not include the existence of God in that category:

**“The existence of God and other like truths about God, which can be known by natural reason, are not articles of faith, but are preambles to the articles; for faith presupposes natural knowledge, even as grace presupposes nature and perfection the perfectible.”**

“From effects not proportioned to the cause no perfect knowledge of that cause can be obtained. Yet from every effect the existence of the cause can be clearly demonstrated, and so **we can demonstrate the existence of God from His effects**; though from them we cannot know God perfectly as He is in His essence.”

Following that, **Aquinas gives his famous five “proofs” for the existence God**, about which philosophers continue to argue.

Historian **Donald Treadgold** comments: “Aquinas’ great achievement was to expound the relation between faith and reason in such a way that those who regarded Aristotle as authoritative in philosophy could wholeheartedly remain Christian . . . to build strong intellectual foundations for Christianity and to **vindicate the use of reason** . . . “ (*A History of Christianity*, 110)

Treadgold goes on to say, however, that **John Scotus** and **William of Occam stretch Aquinas’ bifurcation between faith and reason to the point of “divorce.”**

Pratt added:

“That’s true enough. Not coincidentally, Occam became a deist, abandoning orthodoxy – I’m not sure whether this happened before or after accepting a faith/reason disparity, but I’m sure it was connected with it. (And I still see it happening today.)”

**John Calvin: reason distinguished man from “true brutes,” and was that “by which man judges between good and evil.”**

Chapter in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: **“Rational proofs to establish the belief of the Scripture.”**

**Matteo Ricci:** “Of all things which mark off all men as being different from animals, none is greater than the intellect. The intellect can distinguish between right and wrong and between that which is true and that which is false, and it is difficult to deceive it with anything which lacks rationality. The stupidity of animals is such that although they possess perception and are capable of motion in much the same way as men, they are incapable of understanding the principles of causality. For this reason their minds are merely concerned with drinking and eating, with mating at appropriate times, and with begetting their own kind.

“Man, then transcends all other creatures since he is endowed with a spiritual soul within, and the ability to observe the principles of things without. **By examining the outcome of things he is able to know their origins, and by observing their existence he can know that by which they exist. Thus, without leaving this world of toil, he can devote himself to the cultivation of the Way and prepare himself for an eternity of peace and joy following his death.**

“That which is brought to light by the intellect cannot forcibly be made to comply with that which is untrue. Everything which reason shows to be true I must acknowledge as true, and everything which reason shows to be false I must acknowledge as false. Reason stands in relation to a man as the sun to the world, shedding its light everywhere. To abandon principles affirmed by the intellect and to comply with the opinions of others is like shutting out the light of the sun and searching for an object with a lantern.

“Now you, Sir, desire to learn the principles of the teachings of the Lord of Heaven. I shall therefore state them plainly for you, and **my explanations will be based solely on reason.** Should you find **any proposition unacceptable I hope you will dispute it** and not deceive me in any way. Because we are discussing the universal principles of the Lord of Heaven I cannot permit personal modesty to stand in the way of truth.” (Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*)

**Rene Descartes**, writing to “the Dean and Doctors” of the University of Paris: “I have always thought that **two questions – that of God and that of the soul – are chief among those that ought**

**to be demonstrated by the aid of philosophy rather than of theology.** For although it suffices for believers like ourselves to believe by faith that the soul does not die with the body and that God exists, certainly no unbeliever seems capable of being persuaded of any religion or even any moral virtue, unless **these two are first proven to him by natural reason.**” (Notes that to believe in God because of Scripture, and in Scriptures because of God, would seem like arguing in a circle.)

Descartes points out (to members of one of the most influential Christian organizations in history, the faculty of the University of Paris) that this is the normal Christian position:

“And truly I have noticed that **you, along with all other theologians, affirm not only that the existence of God can be proven by natural reason,** but also that one may infer from the Holy Scriptures that the knowledge of him is much easier than the manifold knowledge that we have of created things.” (Refers to Romans 1.)

Descartes proceeds to begin with utter skepticism, and try to prove his own existence, then that of God, from reason alone.

**John Locke:** “We are capable of knowing certainly that there is a God. – Though God has given us no innate ideas of himself; though he has stamped no original characters on our minds, wherein we may read his being; **yet having furnished us with those faculties our minds are endowed with, he hath not left himself without witness: since we have sense, perception, and reason, and cannot want a clear proof of him, as long as we carry ourselves about us.** Nor can we justly complain of our ignorance in this great point; since he has so plentifully provided us with the means to discover and know him; so far as is necessary to the end of our being, and the great concernment of our happiness. But, though **this be the most obvious truth that reason discovers,** and though its evidence be (if I mistake not) equal to mathematical certainty: yet **it requires thought and attention; and the mind must apply itself to a regular deduction of it from some part of our intuitive knowledge,** or else we shall be as uncertain and ignorant of this as of other propositions, which are in themselves capable of clear demonstration. To show, therefore, that we are capable of knowing, i.e., being certain that there is a God, and how we may come by this certainty, I think we need go no further than ourselves, and that undoubted knowledge we have of our own existence.”

As for other Christian teachings, Locke, the great peace-maker, proposes to solve the problem of how faith and reason should get along:

“I think we may come to lay down the measures and boundaries between faith and reason: the want

thereof may possibly have been the cause, if not of great disorders, yet at least of great disputes, and perhaps mistakes in the world”

“ . . . I find every sect, as far as reason will help them, make use of it gladly: and where it fails them, they cry out, It is matter of faith, and above reason. And I do not see how they can argue with any one, or ever convince a gainsayer who makes use of the same plea, without setting down strict boundaries between faith and reason . . .

“*Reason*, therefore . . . I take to be the discovery of the certainty or probability of such propositions or truths, which the mind arrives at by deduction made from such ideas, which it has got by the use of its natural faculties; viz, by sensation or reflection.

“*Faith*, on the other side, is the assent to any proposition, **not thus made out by the deductions of reason**, but upon the credit of the proposer, as coming from God, in some extraordinary way of communication. This way of discovering truths to men we call revelation.”

“First, then, I say, that no man inspired by God can by any revelation communicate to others any new simple ideas which they had not before from sensation or reflection . . .

“In all things of this kind there is little need or use of revelation, **God having furnished us with natural and surer means to arrive at the knowledge of them. For whatsoever truth we come to the clear discovery of, from the knowledge and contemplation of our own ideas, will always be certainer to us that those which are conveyed to us by traditional revelation . . .**“

“**Even original Revelation cannot be admitted against the clear Evidence of Reason . . . But yet nothing, I think, can, under that title, shake or overrule plain knowledge, or rationally prevail with any man to admit it for true, in a direct contradiction to the clear evidence of his own understanding.** For, since no evidence of our faculties, by which we receive such revelations, can exceed, if equal, the certainty of our intuitive knowledge, we can never receive for a truth anything that is directly contrary to our clear and distinct knowledge . . . therefore no proposition can be received for divine revelation, or obtain the assent due to all such, if it be contradictory to our clear intuitive knowledge. Because this would be to subvert the principles and foundations of all knowledge . . . In propositions therefore contrary to the clear perception of the agreement or disagreement of any of our ideas, it will be vain to urge them as matters of faith. They cannot move our assent under that or any other title whatsoever. **For faith can never convince us of anything that contradicts our knowledge . . .**”

(There is here some implied agreement with the idea that higher levels of faith (such as in human testimony) is necessarily weaker than lower levels (in the senses, “physical testimony.” I take this to be an over-generalization, for reasons I have given. But other than that, I think Locke’s ideas are fairly accurate.)

“In all things, therefore, where we have clear evidence from our ideas, and those principles of knowledge I have mentioned, reason is the proper judge; and revelation, though it may, in consenting with it, confirm its dictates, yet cannot in such cases invalidate its decrees . . . faith . . . can have no authority against the plain and clear dictates of reason.

“Things above Reason are, when revealed, the proper matter of faith. But, Thirdly, there being many things wherein we have very imperfect notions, or none at all; and other things, of whose past, present, or future existence, by the natural use of our faculties, we can have no knowledge at all; these, as being beyond the discovery of our natural faculties, and above reason, are, when revealed, the proper matter of faith. Thus, that part of the angels rebelled against God, and thereby lost their first happy state: and that the dead shall live again: **these and the like, being beyond the discovery of reason, are purely matters of faith, with which reason has directly nothing to do . . .**”

“Because the mind not being certain of the truth that it does not evidently know, but only yielding to the probability that appears in it, is bound to give up its assent to such a testimony which, it is satisfied, comes from one who cannot err, and will not deceive. **But yet, it still belongs to reason to judge of the truth of its being a revelation, and of the significance of the words wherein it is delivered.** Indeed, if anything shall be thought revelation which is contrary to the plain principles of reason, and the evident knowledge the mind has of its own clear and distinct ideas; there reason must be hearkened to, as to a matter within its province.”

(In sum, while Locke’s definitions of faith and reason are in my opinion incomplete, and I have argued against his assumption that what I call lower levels of faith will always be more reliable than what I call the fourth level of faith, Locke agrees that faith in God is established by reason and evidence, our central question. He argues that faith should never be given against reason. And positively, he claims that the sources and meaning of a revelation must be established by what he calls reason.)

**Blaise Pascal:** “**Thought constitutes the greatness of man.** Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed . . . All our dignity consists, then, in thought. . . . Let us endeavor, then, to think well.”

394 “All the principles of skeptics, stoics, atheists, etc. are true. But their conclusions are false, because the opposite principles are also true.”

Section 12 **Proofs of Jesus Christ** (emphasizes miracles and prophecies)

**William Law:** “Unreasonable and absurd ways of life . . . are truly an offense to God.” (J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with all your Mind*, 41)

**Cotton Mather:** “Ignorance is the Mother not of Devotion but of Heresy.” (J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with all your Mind*, 22)

**John Wesley:** “A rational assent to the truth of the Bible is one ingredient in the Christian faith.” (*Reason for the Hope Within*, 136)

**Johannes Kepler:** “God is supremely rational, and the human being is also rational, being created in the image and likeness of God. Hence religion, which is the expression of the deep relationship between God and humankind, cannot be but rational.” (*What if the Bible had never been Written*, 105)

**First Vatican Council** (1870): Condemned the idea that inner experience was enough, **affirmed that the existence of God could be known with certainty without faith or divine revelation “by the light of human reason.” “In order that our submission of faith be nevertheless in harmony with reason, God willed that exterior proofs of his revelation . . . should be joined to the interior helps of the Holy Spirit.”** (Barr, 12)

**Francis Schaeffer** (evangelical theologian, philosopher, enormously influential founder of L’abri community in Switzerland), famously blamed the idea that faith need not be rationally supported on Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard:

“When he put forth the concept of a leap of faith, he became in a real way the father of all existential thought, both secular and theological.” (*The God Who is There*, 22)

Schaeffer insisted, on the contrary, that Christians should make it clear that “we would be the first ones to step out of the queue” if it should be shown that God is, in fact, NOT there.

**C. S. Lewis** The most influential modern Christian thinker certainly agreed that faith is based on evidence. He said so explicitly in various books (*Mere Christianity* and *Screwtape Letters*), in essays, and implicitly by writing several books and articles giving evidences for the Christian faith.

“Have we now got to a position from which we can talk about Faith without being misunderstood? For in general we are shy of speaking plain about Faith as a virtue. It looks so like praising an intention to believe what you want to believe in the face of evidence to the contrary: the American in the old story defined Faith as ‘the power of believing what we know to be untrue.’ **Now I define Faith as the power of continuing to believe what we once honestly thought to be true until cogent reasons for honestly changing our minds are brought before us.**” (Lewis goes on to point out that most loss of faith is due to non-rational causes, such as a change of environment.) (*Religion: Reality or Substitute*, from *The Seeing Eye*, p. 56)

“Belief, in (the Christian) sense, seems to me to be assent to a proposition which we think so overwhelmingly probable that there is a psychological exclusion of doubt, though not a logical exclusion of dispute.” (*Obstinacy of Belief*)

Lewis went on to describe the kind of continuity between this “fourth level of faith” (as I call it) and the lower three levels:

“The scientist himself . . . has beliefs about his wife and friends which he holds, not indeed without evidence, but with more certitude than the evidence, if weighed in the laboratory manner, would justify. Most of my generation had a belief in the reality of the external world and of other people – if you prefer it, a disbelief in solipsism – far in excess of our strongest arguments. It may be true, as they now say, that the whole thing arose from category mistakes and was a pseudo-problem; but then we didn’t know that in the twenties. Yet we managed to disbelieve in solipsism all the same.”

Pratt rightly saw a subsequent paragraph as also pertinent:

**"There is, of course, no question so far of belief without evidence.** We must beware of confusion between the way in which a Christian first assents to certain propositions, and the way in which he afterwards adheres to them. These must be carefully distinguished. Of the second it is true, in a sense, to say that Christians do recommend a certain discounting of apparent contrary evidence, and I will later attempt to explain why. But so far as I know it is not expected that a man should assent to those propositions in the first place without evidence or in the teeth of the evidence. **At any rate, if anyone expects that, I certainly do not. And in fact, the man who accepts Christianity always**



thinks he had good evidence; whether, like Dante, [physical and metaphysical argumentation], or historical evidence, or the evidence of religious experience, or authority, or all these together. For of course authority, however we may value it in this or that particular instance, is a kind of evidence."

Pratt also pointed out this passage in *Mere Christianity*:

"I am not asking anyone to accept Christianity if his best reasoning tells him that the weight of the evidence is against it. That is not the point at which Faith comes in. But supposing a man's reason once decides that the weight of the evidence is for it. I can tell that man what is going to happen to him in the next few weeks. There will come a moment when... all at once his emotions will rise up and carry out a sort of blitz on his belief. [...] I am not talking of moments at which any real new reasons against Christianity turn up. Those have to be faced and that is a different matter. I am talking about moments where a mere mood rises up against it.

"Now Faith, in the sense in which I am here using the word, is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods. For moods will change, whatever view your reason takes."

**James Sire** (editor and author, IV Press): In campus seminar, *Why Should Anyone Believe Anything at all*, asks, "Why do people believe what they believe?" Sorts reasons into sociological, psychological, religious (authority), and philosophical. Leads students to conclude (according to Geisler and Turek, 53) that **the only legitimate form of proof is "philosophical," by which is meant "finding truth through logic, evidence, and science."**

**Geisler and Turek**: "Sire's Socratic approach helps students realize at least three things. First, **any teaching – religious or otherwise – is worth trusting only if it points to the truth.** Apathy about truth can be dangerous. In fact, believing error can have deadly consequences, both temporally, and – if any one of a number of religious teachings are true – eternally as well."

Finally, **in order to find truth, one must be ready to give up those subjective preferences in favor of objective facts. And facts are best discovered through logic, evidence, and science.**"  
(54)

**J. P. Moreland** (popular evangelical philosopher) "Biblically, **faith is** a power or skill to act in

accordance with the nature of the kingdom of God, **a trust in what we have reason to believe is true. Understood in this way, we see that faith is built on reason. We should have good reasons for thinking that Christianity is true before we dedicate ourselves completely to it.**”

Moreland adds this amusing story, by which he makes the point that evidence had best not be construed in a positivist fashion, as limited only to what is called “physical evidence” tested in the “scientific manner:”

“I arrived at the party on time and was at the hors d’oeuvres table when Tom’s boss arrived. Tom brought him over and introduced us to each other. When I extended my hand . . . he started attacking my Christian beliefs without a moment’s hesitation.’

“‘I used to think that religion and philosophy were important, but I now recognize that they are just superstition,’ he asserted. ‘Science is the only area where we have knowledge. If you can quantify something or test it in the lab, then you can know it. Otherwise, it’s just one person’s opinion against another’s. To me, the sole value of religion is that believing it helps some people who need that sort of thing, but religious beliefs are neither true nor rational because they are not scientifically testable.’”

“I let him go on for what seemed like the longest ten minutes of my life. In the most gracious way I could muster, I finally got a chance to respond. ‘I have a few questions for you, Mr. Smith. I am puzzled as to how I should understand what you have asserted for the last ten minutes. You have not said one single sentence from science and nothing you have asserted is the least bit scientifically testable or quantifiable. In fact, you have spent all of your time making philosophical assertions about science and religion. **Now, I get the distinct impression that you want me to take your ten-minute monologue as something that is both true and rational. But how can this be, given your scientism, because you do not believe that philosophical assertions are either true or rational? On the other hand, if you don’t think your own assertions are either true or rational, why have you been boring us with emotive expressions of autobiography for the last ten minutes?** After all, some of the finger foods are getting cold.’” (149)

**John Eccles:** “**Science and religion are very much alike . . . Both are imaginative and creative aspects of the human mind. The appearance of conflict is a result of ignorance.**” (*Christianity on Trial*, 84)

**Pope John Paul II**

“It would be useful to quote and analyze the entire (Declaration on Human Freedom). Instead, perhaps quoting a few phrases will do: ‘**And all human beings, we read, are bound to seek for the truth, especially in regard to God and his church, and as they know it they are bound to adhere to it and pay homage to it . . .**’”

“The text continues: ‘Motivated by their dignity, all human beings, inasmuch as they are individuals **endowed with reason** and free will . . . **are bound by both their nature and by moral duty to search for the truth, above all religious truth.** And once they come to know it they are bound to adhere to it and to arrange their entire lives according to the demands of such truth. . . **The way in which the truth is sought, however, must be in keeping with man’s dignity and his social nature** – that is, by seeking freely, with the help of instruction or education, through communication and dialogue . . . ’”

“Man cannot be forced to accept the truth. **He can only be drawn to the truth by his own nature . . .**”

**“This has always been the teaching of the Church. But even before that, it was the teaching that Christ himself exemplified by His actions . . .**

“The Council merely reconfirms what has always been the Church’s conviction. The position of Saint Thomas (Aquinas) is, in fact, well known: he is so consistent in his respect for conscience that he maintains that **it is wrong for one to make an act of faith in Christ if in one’s conscience one is convinced, however absurdly, that it is wrong to carry out such an act.**” Cf *Summa Theologiae* 1-2, 19.5)” (Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Faith*)

**Richard Swinburne** (Oxford U, one of leading Christian philosophers in the world today):

“‘Ordinary language’ philosophy however had no sympathy for anything that went beyond ordinary language. But it taught one clarity of statement and thoroughness of argument. I valued Oxford philosophy greatly for its cultivation of those virtues. But there seemed to me no good reason for believing the dogmas that lay behind the practice. In particular there seemed no good reason for believing the verification principle, but even if one did assume it, so long as you do not interpret **‘verified’** as ‘conclusively verified’ but as **‘confirmed or supported by evidence or argument,’ then why shouldn’t great metaphysical theories, including Christian theism, be verifiable and so meaningful?**”

“So I disliked Oxford philosophy for its dogmas, but I liked it for its tools of clarity and rigor; **and it**

seemed to me that someone could use its tools to make Christian theology again intellectually respectable.”

“But once I had seen what makes scientific theories meaningful and justified, I saw that any metaphysical theory, such as the Christian theological system, is just a superscientific theory. Scientific theories each seek to explain a certain limited class of data: Kepler’s laws sought to explain the motion of the planets; natural selection seeks to explain the fossil record and various present features of animals and plants. But some scientific theories are on a higher level than others and seek to explain the operation of the lower-level theories and the existence in the first place of the objects with which they deal. Newton’s laws explained why Kepler’s laws operated; chemistry has sought to explain why primitive animals and plants existed in the first place. **A metaphysical theory is a highest-level-of-all theory. It seeks to explain why there is a universe at all . . .**”

“Such a theory is meaningful if it can be stated in ordinary words, stretched a bit in meaning perhaps. **And it is justified if it is a simple theory and leads you to expect the observable phenomena when you would not otherwise expect them. Once I had seen this, my program was there – to use the criteria of modern natural science, analyzed with the careful rigor of modern philosophy, to show the meaningfulness and justification of Christian theology.**”

(Points out that Aquinas did the same thing.) “**The *Summa* doesn’t start from faith or religious experience or the Bible; it starts from the observable world . . . While I realized that the details were not always satisfactory, it seemed to me that the approach of the *Summa* was 100 percent right. I came to see that the irrationalist spirit of modern theology was a modern phenomena, a head-in-the-sand defensive mechanism. In general, I believe, it is the spirit of St. Thomas rather than the spirit of Kierkegaard that has been the more prevalent over two millennia of Christian theology.**” (*Philosophers Who Believe*)

**Mortimer Adler** (Jewish philosopher who became a Christian after many decades of prominent work publishing classic books of thought, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, etc.): Describes the argument he ultimately found the most persuasive for God’s existence. But then adds: “I therefore concluded by saying that **the soundest rational argument for God’s existence** could carry us only to the edge of the chasm that separated the philosophical affirmation of God’s existence from the religious belief in God. **What is usually called a ‘leap of faith’ is needed to carry anyone across the chasm. But the leap of faith is usually misunderstood as being a progress from having insufficient reasons for affirming God’s existence to a state of greater certitude in that affirmation. That is not the case. The leap of faith consists in going from the conclusion of a merely philosophical theology to a**

**religious belief in a God that has revealed himself as a loving, just and merciful Creator of the cosmos, a God to be loved, worshiped and prayed to.”**

(In other words, consciously following Pascal, Adler affirmed that reason supports Christian faith. Faith, however, transcends reason in the sense that it requires a step into relationship with God that carries other meaning, risks, and rewards than the purely cognitive recognition that the evidence suggests that God is.)

**John Polkinghorne** (physicist, Anglican theologian, winner of Templeton Prize), argues that the cognitive processes involved in Christian faith and scientific discovery are similar: **“The ability of understanding to outrun explanation is intimately connected with the religious concept of faith. This is not a polite expression for unsubstantiated assertion, but it points to an ability to grasp things in totality, the occurrence of an insight which is satisfying to the point of being self-authenticating, without dependence of detailed analysis.** Involved is a leap of the mind – not into the dark, but into the light. **The attainment of understanding in this way does not remove the obligation to seek subsequent explanation,** to the degree that it is attainable, but the insight brings with it a tacit assurance that such explanation should be there for the eventual finding. Such experiences are quite common among scientists. Paul Dirac tell us how one of his foundational ideas about quantum theory came to him ‘in a flash’ when he was out for a Sunday walk. He was too cautious to be sure immediately that it was right, and the fact that the libraries were closed prevented his checking it right away. Nevertheless, ‘confidence gradually grew in the course of the night,’ and Monday morning showed that his idea was indeed sound. The mathematician Henri Poincare was more certain of his insight. An important idea came to him ‘At the moment I put my foot on the step (of a bus) . . . I did not verify the idea . . . but I felt a perfect certainty . . . “

**“Recognition of the limitations of ratiocination is not indulgence in anti-intellectualism, but rather the avowal that knowledge has a broader base than that afforded by atomized argument alone.”** (*The Faith of a Physicist*, 38)

In other words, sensible people leave room for a variety of forms of reason. (As in my four-stage analysis.)

**“In common with many others, I have wished to revalue the classical ‘proofs’ of God’s existence as suggestive insights rather than logically coercive demonstrations. They are part of those consilient ‘converging lines of probable reasoning’ which constitute a case for theism.”** (41)

“Expressivist views of religion are very popular today, but **I cannot renege on the commitment to the cognitive quest with which I began this chapter, for the way things are is the only reliable basis for the way we should respond to them.**” (41)

“I think science and theology can make common cause in opposing decline into a merely intellectual utilitarianism and in **insisting on the pursuit of the difficult but essential task of seeking to understand what is.**” (50)

Polkinghorne then reprises Lewis’ (and my) argument about differing modes of argument:

“Lewis Wolpert asks the question, ‘Why should religious experience be treated as different from any other experience and not subject to scientific inquiry in the normal way?’ The answer is that all experience is to be subject to rational inquiry, and part of that necessary rationality is to **conform one’s investigation to the nature of the entity being investigated. I very much doubt whether Professor Wolpert subjects his enjoyment of music or his encounter with persons ‘to scientific inquiry in the normal way,’ if that phrase is to be interpreted in some flat, universal catch-all, reductionist way.**”

“Religion does not demand that all answers are agreed before the discussion begins. **All that it asks for is a respect for its particular modes of experience and an openness to the insights they bestow.**” (193)

**Stephen Barr** (physicist): **“To a religious person, however, a dogma is not something that is embraced from mere hidebound habit or feeling or wishful thinking, rather it is understood to be a true proposition for which there is the best of all possible evidence, namely that its truth has been revealed by God.”**

“The believer in religious dogmas accepts that there are two ways that a thing may be known to be true: either empirically, through observation, experience, and the ‘natural light of reason,’ or through **divine revelation.** Accepting the one does not mean rejecting the other. In fact, **in our everyday life we recognize that our knowledge does have a double source: there is what we have learned for ourselves and what we have learned from the information of others, whether teachers, friends, books, or common knowledge. Indeed, a little reflection shows that what we have actually derived from our own direct observation of the world without relying upon the word of others is but a very tiny part of everything that we do know. For a person to accept as knowledge only what he had discovered and proved for himself from direct personal experience would put his**

**knowledge at the level of the Stone Age.”**

“Taking something on authority, then, is not in itself irrational. On the contrary, it would be irrational never to do so. **The question is when we should take something on authority, and on what kind of authority, and how far we should trust it.** In the case of religious dogma, the authority is said to be from God, who, it is claimed, has revealed certain truths – primarily truths about himself—to human beings. Such a claim is not in itself contrary to reason, for it is certainly hypothetically possible that there is a God and that he has revealed himself to man.”

**“On the other hand, reason would require that before accepting religious dogmas we must have some sufficient rational grounds for believing that there is in fact a God, and that he has indeed revealed himself to man, and that this revelation truly is to be found where it is claimed to be found. And, indeed, these requirements of reason have always been admitted by the monotheistic creeds of Judaism and Christianity.”** (*Modern Physics and Ancient Faith*, 11-12)