

# The Nature of Faith

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## 1 Faith vs. Belief-that

### 1.1 From the Oxford English Dictionary (OED)

**belief (noun)**

1. an affirmation that something is true
2. (belief in) trust, faith, or confidence in someone or something

**believe (verb)**

1. accept (something) as true
2. hold (something) as an opinion

**faith (noun)**

1. complete trust or confidence in someone or something
2. strong belief in God or in the doctrines of a religion

**faith (v)** MISSING (faith is not an English verb)

### 1.2 Faith and Belief in Philosophy

**Belief-that** a propositional attitude aimed at truth  
corresponds to OED's *belief* (n) definition 1

**Faith (belief-in)** trust or confidence in someone or something  
corresponds to OED's *belief* (n) definition 2

Some Quotes Representing Different View of Faith:

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

– Hebrews 11:1, NIV

There are those who scoff at the schoolboy, calling him frivolous and shallow. Yet it was the schoolboy who said, "Faith is believing what you know ain't so."

– Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar*

A casual stroll through the lunatic asylum shows that faith does not prove anything.

– Paraphrase of Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*

### 1.3

Faith ... is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted in spite of your changing moods.

## 2 Swinburne's Analysis of Faith in the Christian Tradition

### 2.1 Thomistic View of Faith: Two Kinds of Faith

- Non-Meritorious
- Meritorious

### 2.2 Thomistic View of Faith: Non-Meritorious Faith

- to have faith is to believe certain revealed propositions (the articles of faith)
- this belief-that cannot amount to scientific knowledge (*scientia*)
- Aquinas quotes Hugh of St Victor: “faith (*fides*) is a form of mental certitude about absent realities that is greater than opinion (*opinio*) and less than scientific knowledge (*scientia*)”
- demons and scoundrels can have this kind of faith

### 2.3 Thomistic View of Faith: Meritorious Faith

- voluntary
- formed by love

### 2.4 Lutheran View of Faith

Three parts

1. Understanding (*notitia*): involves knowing the content of faith (i.e., what propositions are to be believed)
2. Assent (*assensus*): intellectual assent or belief-that (i.e., actually believing those propositions)
3. Trust (*fiducia*): trust / belief in

### 2.5 Lutheran View of Faith: Fiducia

- to act on the assumption that person *S* will do for you what *S* knows that you want or need, even when the evidence gives some reason for supposing that *S* may not and where there will be bad consequences if the assumption is false.
- Problem: Even a “perfect scoundrel” can act on the assumption that God will do for her what she wants or needs.
- Solution: Add that faith includes agreement with the purposes of the person being trusted

### 2.6 Pragmatic View

- Faith is a matter of acting-as-if some proposition/set of propositions/hypothesis were true
- Similar to the Lutheran view: Understanding (*notitia*) and trust (*fiducia*) without assent (*assensus*)

## 3 Aspects of Faith (in the Christian Tradition)

### 3.1 The Cognitive Aspect of Faith

- Faith is belief-entailing
- For example:
  - The Thomistic and Lutheran views require belief in specific articles of faith.

- The Pragmatist view requires a belief that one’s purposes in life are best fulfilled by acting-as-if those articles of faith are true.

### 3.2 The Evaluative-Affective Aspect of Faith

- Consider James 2:19 “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder” (NRSV).
- What if we translated the verse “You have faith that God is one; you do well. Even the demons have faith—and shudder.”
- Faith requires a positive attitude toward the person or object of faith

### 3.3 The Practical Aspect of Faith

- Faith influences action
- “Complete readiness to do good works” (Swinburne 2005, 141)

### 3.4 The Interpersonal Aspect of Faith

- Faith between persons requires a personal relationship
- Christian faith requires a personal relationship with God
- Friendship with God

## 4 Explicit, Pragmatic, and Implicit Faith focusing the Christian Tradition

### 4.1 Explicit Faith

- *Notitia*: knowing or understanding the content of faith
- *Assensus*: assent / belief that . . .
- *Fiducia*: trust / belief in . . .

### 4.2 Pragmatic Faith

- Understanding (*notitia*) and trust (*fiducia*) without assent (*assensus*)
- Incorporates articles of faith into practical reasoning.
- Example of Pragmatic faith in God: Living As-If
  - I do not know whether God exists, but I make decisions and live my life as if God does exist.
  - There is no better way of achieving my purposes in life than by accepting God’s authority.
  - Furthermore, I am *for* (favorably disposed to) the existence of God. If God exists, I consider God’s existence and claims on my life a good thing.

### 4.3 Implicit Faith

- Trust (*fiducia*) without Understanding (*notitia*) or Assent (*assensus*)
- “Anonymous Christian” is term used by Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner that refers a person with implicit faith
- An unwitting, but positive response to divine communication.

Through the “exercise of implicit faith one becomes the kind of person who would exercise explicit Christian faith . . . if only one came to see that certain messages (most importantly, the message that reconciliation with God is possible by pleading Christ’s passion) do in fact come from God”

– Kevin Kinghorn (2005, 178)

#### 4.4 Relationship to Christian Views on the Afterlife

**Exclusivism** Only those who have explicit (or possibly pragmatic) faith in Jesus during this life will enter heaven.

**Inclusivism** Those with explicit, pragmatic, or implicit faith will enter heaven.

#### References

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