

SWINBURNE ON AQUINAS' VIEW OF FAITH

This is a prepublication draft. Please, cite only final version published in:

Philosophia 49 (2):617-631 (2021)

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11406-020-00239-w>

Abstract

In recent decades, Richard Swinburne has offered an influential view of the relationship between faith and reason. In doing so, he focused to a considerable extent on Aquinas's view of faith. For Swinburne, Aquinas' view of faith is that to have faith in God is simply to have a belief-that. In contrast, it is another view of faith, which Swinburne calls 'Lutheran,' that involves *both* theoretical beliefs-that *and* a trust in the Living God.

In this article, I argue that Swinburne's view is not faithful to Aquinas's doctrine of faith. In the first section, I will explain Swinburne's view of belief in detail and its application to Aquinas's doctrine of faith. In the second section, I will bolster my argument by showing that Swinburne's reading is inconsistent with Aquinas' statements regarding three relationships, which are essential to Aquinas's faith. I am referring to the relationships between faith and will, between faith and merit and between faith and doubt.

Introduction

In recent decades, Richard Swinburne has offered an influential view of the relationship between faith and reason.¹ Although his goal was to provide an understanding of the kind of faith that 'is required for the practice of any religion,'² he focused mainly on the Christian religion and the related faith. This was a choice that seems to be justified by the significant influence that Christianity has had on the Western society. Another choice that Swinburne made in his reflection on faith was to focus to a considerable extent on Aquinas's view of faith. He justifies this by noting that this has been the view of many Christians, not only

¹ In this article, I will focus on his book entitled *Faith and reason* whose first edition was published in 1981 (Oxford: Clarendon Press). My citations will be from the second enlarged edition, which was released in 2005: R. Swinburne, *Faith and reason*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

² Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, p. 2.

Catholics, before and after Aquinas, and ‘is by far the most widespread and natural view of the nature of religious faith.’³

According to Swinburne, Aquinas’ view of faith ‘is the view that, with one addition and two qualifications, to have faith in God is simply to have a belief-that, to believe that God exists.’⁴ What he says Aquinas adds to this doctrine is that, in order to have faith, one should accept not only the belief that God exists, but also other beliefs that are more central to the Christian revelation. These include beliefs such as that Jesus was raised from the dead. Moving on, there are the two qualifications that Swinburne mentions. First, for Aquinas, faith can be held as firmly as scientific knowledge (*scientia*) although it does not amount to knowledge. Unlike faith, *scientia* involves not only the abovementioned firmness, but also our ability to understand ‘what makes its object true.’⁵ The second qualification is that, as Swinburne says, Aquinas believed that faith, as such, is not meritorious, except for those, presumably only a few, whose faith is ‘formed’ or perfected by charity.

In this article, I argue that Swinburne’s view is not faithful to Aquinas’s doctrine of faith. It is true that there is tension among some of Aquinas’ formulations, which is why they may lend themselves to misunderstanding. However, it is also true that, from Aquinas’s overall treatment of faith, it follows that he did not believe that faith is mere ‘belief-that’ or propositional belief, as Swinburne holds.

In the first section, I will explain Swinburne’s view of belief in detail and its application to Aquinas’s doctrine of faith. In the second section, I will bolster my argument by showing that Swinburne’s reading is inconsistent with Aquinas’ statements regarding three relationships, which are essential to Aquinas’s faith. I am referring to the relationships between faith and will, between faith and merit and between faith and doubt.

³ Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, p. 138. This resembles what John Hick wrote decades earlier, saying that Aquinas’s view could appropriately be seen as ‘the dominant Western tradition of thought on the subject,’ susceptible of being ‘accepted today by many both Catholic and Protestant Christians, as well as by the agnostic and atheist critics of Christianity.’ (John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge. A Modern Introduction to the Problem of Religious Knowledge* (1957) (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 2009), p. 12).

⁴ Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, p. 138.

⁵ Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, p. 139.

1. Is faith in Aquinas' thought mere belief-that?

As I stated above, Swinburne argues that, for Aquinas, faith is 'belief-that' or propositional belief. Its object is the existence of God, which is known that Aquinas says can be held by both faith and demonstration, and other creedal tenets, such as the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus, which Aquinas believed can be held only by faith.

By 'belief-that,' Swinburne means 'an inner attitude towards propositions,'⁶ an attitude of setting these propositions epistemologically above their alternative.⁷ In other words, 'a person believes that p if and only if he believes p over against not- p .' Where there is no alternative, 'a person who expresses belief may not be saying anything very clear.'⁸

However, how does one choose among alternatives? The answer is that a person believes p if 'the total evidence available to him makes p more probable than not- p .'⁹

On this view, one believes that God exists because evidence, as well as background knowledge or prior probability, give grounds for believing. Something similar can be said about other propositions, such as that God is a Trinity, propositions that, according to Swinburne, one believes 'on the ground that God has revealed them.'¹⁰

Let me now consider in depth these two statements regarding God's existence and other revealed truths. (In this paper, 'revealed truths' is used to mean 'Christian beliefs,' as well as 'truths of faith,' namely, all of the statements that the faithful assume are true and revealed by God.) I will begin with Swinburne's view of how one believes propositions, such as that God is a Trinity.

1.1 Believing those truths that for Aquinas can only be held by faith

⁶ Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, p. 27.

⁷ Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, p. 14.

⁸ Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, p. 8.

⁹ Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, p. 25.

¹⁰ Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, p. 138.

Swinburne held that, to believe the truths in question, one must first believe God's existence and the fact that God revealed those truths.¹¹ If belief-that *p* presupposes evidence that makes one believe that *p* is more probable than its negation, then believing that Jesus was raised from the dead, for example, requires previous evidence. This evidence emerges from historical investigation, as well as examination of the life and message of Jesus. Both this investigation and examination support the idea that God might have authored the revelation in question.¹²

However, the idea that one needs previous evidence in order to believe the revealed truths of incarnation or the Trinity can be ascribed only in part to Aquinas. Swinburne refers to the fact that, for the medieval thinker, 'man becomes aware of them [the revealed truths] only because God reveals them,'¹³ or, to use Swinburne's words, 'on the ground that God has revealed them.'¹⁴ The grounds in question, for Swinburne, are *evidence* and *prior probability* in support of the belief that God authored the revelation.¹⁵ However, this is only part of Aquinas's reflection on the causes of faith. While focusing on the assent to the things of faith, Aquinas argues that two causes must be considered:

one of external inducement, such as seeing a miracle, or being persuaded by someone to embrace the faith: neither of which is sufficient cause, since of those who see the

¹¹ See above, note 10.

¹² See R. Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1982), chapters 5 and 6.

¹³ This is the translation that Swinburne offers of a passage from *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 6 a. 1, where Aquinas focuses on the causes of faith (see Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, p. 138). In this connection, let me point out that I will normally use the translation of *Summa theologiae* by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, second and revised edition (London: Oates and Washbourne, 1920), hereafter: *Summa theologiae*. (The Latin text of Aquinas's works will always be that of the Leonine Edition [Rome 1888-1948]). In some cases, however, this translation is not satisfactory. Here, for example, Swinburne adheres more to Aquinas's text. Unlike the Dominican Fathers, Swinburne renders into English the expression 'cadunt in contemplatione hominis' with 'becoming aware' instead of 'coming to man's knowledge.' Swinburne's choice is more appropriate, because 'knowledge' is also used to translate Aquinas's *scientia*, that is, knowledge by demonstration, which in the case in question, would be inappropriate.

¹⁴ See above, note 10.

¹⁵ See Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, p. 241.

same miracle, or who hear the same sermon, some believe, and some do not. Hence we must assert another internal cause, which moves man inwardly to assent to matters of faith ... Since man, by assenting to matters of faith, is raised above his nature, this must needs accrue to him from some supernatural principle moving him inwardly; and this is God. Therefore faith, as regards the assent which is the chief act of faith, is from God moving man inwardly by grace.¹⁶

Like Swinburne, Aquinas acknowledges that evidence, which for him can be provided by arguments and miracles, has a role in the process of believing. Unlike Swinburne, he makes it clear that one would not believe in God, if God did not intervene by moving one *inwardly by grace*. (Let me point out that for Swinburne the specific argument that Aquinas employed in the above-mentioned passage to support his thesis is wrong. I agree with Swinburne. Nonetheless I think that the specific argument in question, even if wrong, does not spoil the overall discussion of Aquinas on the subject. I will comment further on this in the next section when I discuss the relationship between faith and will.¹⁷) Therefore, what this passage shows is that faith cannot be a mere belief-that, for Aquinas.

This emerges equally clearly from Aquinas's definition of faith. For Aquinas, faith is 'an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine Truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God.'¹⁸ Contrary to Swinburne's reading, Aquinas says that faith is not only due to the work of the intellect and will, but also to the gracious intervention of God. This reminds us of the tripartition that Aquinas draws on Augustine. On the basis of such partition, faith means 'believing in a God' (*credere Deum*), 'believing God' (*credere Deo*) and 'believing in God' (*credere in Deum*).¹⁹ Only the first of these three dimensions of faith (*believing in a God*) considers God as an object of knowledge, thus defining the intellectual character of faith. That is to say that faith is an act of the intellect with its noetic contents, *fides quae*, (rather than *fides qua*, the act of faith that the two other aspects denote). The second aspect (*believing God*) allows us to see that the act of faith depends on God, in the sense that there is no faith without divine revelation. The third aspect (*believing in God*) allows us to see that the object in question is also the ultimate goal, as it is the greatest possible good, to look for,

¹⁶ *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 6 a. 1.

¹⁷ See below, note 46.

¹⁸ *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 9.

¹⁹ *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 2.

and not a mere truth or a person like any other. To express it differently, the first two aspects concern the content of faith (the material object: *believing in a God*) and the way in which it is proposed to the believer (the formal object: *believing God*). The third aspect determines the proper task of the will. Because it seeks the highest good, the will leads the intellect to assent to the revealed truth.

For Aquinas, therefore, faith is not mere belief-that. Although he insists that faith is *formally* an act of the intellect, he ‘does recognize the large part which the will plays in the act of faith.’²⁰ Moreover, faith is not limited to human activity. As I have said above in regard to the two causes of faith, he points out that the faithful tend to God because of what he has revealed (*exterius*), and love him thanks to the work he does in their interiority (*interius*) to move them to assent. Of course, the believer can also provide effective arguments in support of faith, but what pushes him or her to assent to the revelation is principally ‘the inward instinct of the divine invitation.’²¹ Aquinas is convinced that God is ‘the chief and proper cause of faith.’²² God is love. He guides human beings to partake of him by generating in them the desire to love him more and more and to believe what he has revealed. According to Thomas, love for God, which is granted by God himself, is the very center of the Christian faith. Charity is the source of faith’s perfection: ‘Charity is called the form of faith insofar as the act of faith is perfected and formed by charity.’²³

One may say that the faith that is perfected and formed by charity regards only *some*, presumably a few, believers. As a consequence, one may say that Aquinas believed that the faith of the majority of believers may coincide, as Swinburne believes, with mere belief-that, which depends on prior probability and evidence. For Swinburne, there is another view of faith, which he calls ‘Lutheran,’ that

involves *both* theoretical beliefs-that (Thomist faith) *and* a trust in the Living God. The person of faith, in this view does not merely believe that there is a God (and

²⁰ P. J. Riga, ‘The act of faith in Augustine and Aquinas,’ *The Thomist* 35 (1971), p. 168.

²¹ The believer is moved to believe for many reasons, such as miracles and arguments. However, s/he is moved mainly ‘by the inward instinct of the Divine invitation (*interiori instinctu Dei invitantis*)’ (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 9 ad 3).

²² *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 6, a. 1, ad 1.

²³ *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 3.

believe certain propositions about him), but also trusts Him and commits himself to Him.²⁴

Swinburne also says that the two views in question, the Thomist and the Lutheran, can be reconciled with each other. Supporters of either one could agree ‘that love is needed on top of Thomist faith, while admitting that Lutheran faith (since it included love) was sufficient for salvation.’²⁵

As a matter of fact, there are passages of Aquinas’s works that lend themselves to the reading that charity plays a role in faith only in some case. It follows from this that faith can sometimes be a mere intellectual act. Is this correct? Let us consider the passage in which Aquinas says that faith is the first of the virtues.²⁶ (The order that is considered is ‘the order of generation.’²⁷) It goes without saying that, if faith is the first of the virtues, charity included, it can exist and operate without charity. Another passage that may be mentioned is one in which Aquinas argues that devils have faith.²⁸ Swinburne refers to this passage, because it clearly supports his thesis that faith can be had without charity.

In reply to Aquinas’s idea that faith is the first of the virtues, it should be said that, even if he thinks that one can obtain faith without charity, Aquinas states firmly that no act of faith is possible without an act of the will that is prompted by divine grace. As he says, ‘some act of the will is required before faith,’ no matter whether or not it is initiated by charity.²⁹ Thus, even if for Aquinas charity is not involved in every act of faith, it remains true that no act of faith is possible without an act of will. This is sufficient to reject Swinburne’s view that for Aquinas faith is just belief-that.

In regard to Aquinas’s idea that devils have faith, I will argue later in this essay that their faith simply has nothing to do with the faith of human believers.³⁰

1.2 Believing that God exists

²⁴ Swinburne, *Faith and reason*, p. 140.

²⁵ Swinburne, *Faith and reason*, p. 146.

²⁶ See *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 7.

²⁷ See *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 62 a. 4.

²⁸ See *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 5 a. 2. For more on this, see below, notes 60ff.

²⁹ *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 7 ad 5.

³⁰ See below, notes 60ff.

After having focused on the revealed truths that Aquinas says cannot be demonstrated, I need to consider such truths as the ‘preambles of faith.’ When it comes to truths, such as God exists, may Swinburne be correct in saying that to Aquinas faith is simply ‘belief-that’?

An affirmative response may be given if we limit ourselves to considering that, as is known, Aquinas believed that demonstrations can be brought to support the existence of God. Of course, this differs from Swinburne’s view, which is that theistic arguments are only probable. At any rate, if God’s existence can be demonstrated, believing that God exists depends on evidence, which is precisely Swinburne’s thesis.

However, this is a limited view of Aquinas’s thinking about God’s existence. In fact, it considers only those few people, who are able to demonstrate that God exists, which, as Aquinas is aware, is a difficult task:

Even as regards those truths about God which human reason could have discovered, it was necessary that man should be taught by a divine revelation; because the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors ... It was therefore necessary that besides philosophical science built up by reason, there should be a sacred science learned through revelation.³¹

For Aquinas, the vast majority of those who hold beliefs, such as that God exists, need divine revelation and believe mainly by grace. As I have stated previously, the main reason why they believe is that God himself prompted them to do so.

One may dispute that, in Aquinas’s thinking, believers are also expected to argue in support of their faith. The revealed truths that can be held only by faith can also be supported by probable arguments.³² Therefore, making use of arguments should especially regard truths

³¹ *Summa theologiae* I q. 1 a. 1. That is what Aquinas teaches throughout his works, as Ralph McInerny emphasized: ‘Early, middle and late in his writings, St. Thomas speaks of a twofold knowledge of God, one that was achieved by pagan philosophers and which is based on knowledge of material things, another that results from God’s revealing Himself to men’ (Ralph McInerny, ‘On Behalf of Natural Theology,’ *Proceedings of The American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 54 [1980], p. 64).

³² See *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 1 a. 4 ad 2.

such as the preambles of faith, which, for Aquinas, were demonstrable. As a consequence, Swinburne's view that to Aquinas faith was a belief-that may turn out to be acceptable.

In response, let me point out that Aquinas stated that those who argue in support of faith should *first* be faithful. This means that their faith *cannot depend on evidence*. This is shown by the passage in which Aquinas wondered whether or not arguments in support of the Christian faith diminish the merit of believers. For him, there are two kinds of arguments:

Human reason in support of what we believe, may stand in a twofold relation to the will of the believer. First, as preceding the act of the will; as, for instance, when a man either has not the will, or not a prompt will, to believe, unless he be moved by human reasons; and in this way human reason diminishes the merit of faith. ...

Secondly, human reasons may be consequent to the will of the believer. For when a man's will is ready to believe, he loves the truth he believes, he thinks out and takes to heart whatever reasons he can find in support thereof; and in this way human reason does not exclude the merit of faith but is a sign of greater merit.³³

Aquinas added that the readiness to believe and the love for the truth that was believed also operate when the subject at stake becomes *fully evident*. This is the case of the preambles of faith, which, for him, can also be attained by demonstration:

Demonstrative reasons in support of the preambles of faith, but not of the articles of faith, diminish the measure of faith, since they make the thing believed to be seen, yet they do not diminish the measure of charity, which makes the will ready to believe them, even if they were unseen.³⁴

These passages emphasize the fact that Aquinas praised those who are ready to assent to the revealed truths—including the preambles of faith—before arguing in their support. Aquinas did not praise the attitude of those who search for evidence before deciding whether or not to believe. It is true that Aquinas concentrated on the merit of faith. That is why someone may object that, if merit was not involved, Aquinas would be able to also praise those who search for evidence before deciding whether or not to believe. However, this objection implies that believing is meritorious only for some believers, namely those whose faith is perfected by

³³ *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 10.

³⁴ *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 10 ad 2.

charity. This is untrue. Aquinas claimed that charity is the principle of merit.³⁵ However, he also defined faith as an act of the will whose end is the good. As a consequence, faith - not only perfect faith - is meritorious, regardless of how limited the merit may be. This disproved Swinburne's idea that faith for Aquinas is mere 'belief-that.'

It may still be argued that, if believers typically believe that God exists because God led them to believe, a circularity problem may emerge. As J. Bishop notices,

believers are to accept theological truths on divine authority, yet the truth that *there is such an authority* (historically mediated as the relevant tradition maintains) is amongst those very truths that are to be accepted on divine authority.³⁶

C. Rosental has made an attempt to respond to the problem of circularity that is under consideration here.³⁷ He refers to a passage from *On Truth* and notes that Aquinas holds the view that, in order to believe in God, 'one can accept that God exists *with some hesitation* ... such a person does not yet have faith, because "God exists" is accepted only hesitantly'.³⁸ As a consequence, we may say that

(H) To have faith, one has to believe that God exists, no matter how hesitantly.

For Rosental, Aquinas seems to offer in this way a solution to the previously mentioned problem of circularity. As Aquinas sometimes claims, God's existence can be believed 'in a general and confused way,' –to mean that the belief that God exists requires no demonstration or faith.³⁹ Almost everyone may be provided with this belief. As a

³⁵ See below, note 59.

³⁶ John Bishop, 'Faith.' In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=faith> (accessed on 15 July 2019).

³⁷ See Creighton Rosental, *Lessons from Aquinas: A Resolution of the Problem of Faith and Reason* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2011).

³⁸ Rosental, p. 229, my emphasis. The passage he cites from *On Truth* is the following one: 'Someone can begin to believe what he did not believe before but which he held with some hesitation (*existimatio debilis*).' (*On Truth*, tr. by J. V. McGlynn [Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953], q. 14, a. 9, ad 9).

³⁹ 'To know that God exists in a general and confused way is implanted in us by nature, inasmuch as God is man's beatitude. ... This, however, is not to know absolutely that God exists; just as to know that someone is approaching is not the same as to know that Peter is approaching, even

consequence, (H) may adequately replace both (D) the claim that we can believe preambles only by demonstration and (F) the claim that we can believe preambles only by means of faith. Unlike (D), (H) does not contradict Aquinas's doctrine that demonstration is neither necessary nor sufficient for one to have faith; unlike (F), (H) does not create a circular argument. If faith is both an intellectual assent to revelation and an act of will that is moved by divine grace, it is plausible to conclude the followings. Before getting in touch with divine revelation, one needs to believe the preambles, since this enables one to get a sense of the revealed truths, no matter how hesitantly one may believe them; however, one can *firmly* believe the preambles only by divine grace.

Once we have been offered this plausible solution to the problem of circularity, can we claim that this solution supports Swinburne's view that for Aquinas faith is belief-that? A positive response may be given if the hesitant belief corresponded to Swinburne's belief. However, it does not. Unlike Swinburne's belief, Aquinas's awareness of God's existence does not coincide with religious belief. For Aquinas, this awareness results from a natural knowledge of God that does not incorporate the idea of God as creator of all things to be thanked and praised.⁴⁰

2. Is Swinburne's claim consistent with three decisive persuasions that Aquinas held?

I have so far questioned Swinburne's claim that, according to Aquinas, faith is mere 'belief-that.' Swinburne's claim appears to be inconsistent with Aquinas's doctrine of faith, regardless of the fact that this doctrine concerns the preambles of faith or those revealed truths that Aquinas believes can only be held by grace.

I now argue that my thesis can be confirmed if we look at three relationships that have significant roles in Aquinas's thought. I refer to the relationships between faith and will, faith and merit, faith and doubt.

though it is Peter who is approaching,' (*Summa theologiae* I q. 2 a. 1 ad1). As noted above (see note 13), the authors of this translation mistakenly render with 'knowledge' various terms that for Aquinas have different meanings. In this case, Aquinas employs '*cognitio*.'

⁴⁰ A. Plantinga refers to atheists like Daniel Dennett and Richard Dawkins and affirms that 'Aquinas would apparently include them among those who have a natural knowledge of God' (A. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* [New York: Oxford University Press 2000], p. 177)

2.1 The relationship between faith and will

If Swinburne believes that to Aquinas faith is mere propositional belief, then he must reject Aquinas's view that faith is an act of the intellect that can occur only under the command of the will. Propositional belief, as Swinburne arguably shows, is incompatible with will, insofar as 'one's beliefs about whether the evidence favours a proposition determine one's beliefs about that proposition.'⁴¹ As a consequence, no one can begin to believe or change one's belief at will at an instant.⁴²

This view of the relationship between belief and will is reasonable. Obviously, there is a gap between this view and Aquinas' view of faith. Swinburne is well aware of this and advances a proposal to bridge the gap.

Swinburne argues that the only way to find an agreement is to maintain 'that the voluntariness of it [the Thomist faith] is a matter of its resulting from adequate investigation.'⁴³ In other words, since I cannot change my belief at will at an instant,

what I can do is to set myself to change them over a period. I can set myself to look for more evidence, or investigate the correctness of my inductive criteria, knowing that that *may* lead to a change in my beliefs.⁴⁴

However, this procedure would imply, as H. McCabe has noted without referring to Swinburne, that faith 'is nothing *but* a matter of reasons and argument,' which necessarily 'makes the notion of faith inapplicable.'⁴⁵

Swinburne could reply that Aquinas was wrong when he explained why the main cause of faith needs to be God's intervention, which causes the will to command the intellectual assent to divine revelation.⁴⁶ As a matter of fact, Swinburne is right in showing that, when Aquinas argues that some people believe and some do not although they have seen the same external evidence (miracles and preaching),

⁴¹ Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, p. 135.

⁴² See Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, p. 26.

⁴³ Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, p. 142.

⁴⁴ Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, p. 27.

⁴⁵ H. McCabe, *Faith within reason*, ed. by B. Davies (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 5.

⁴⁶ See above, note 17.

he is not sensitive to the fact that different people may have different background evidence... and also that as a result of our genes and upbringing or even our own bad past choices (to try to inculcate in ourselves certain criteria), we may have different inductive criteria from each other.

Swinburne can plausibly conclude that ‘one does not need a hypothesis of miraculous grace to explain why “some believe and some do not.”’⁴⁷

However, only a supernatural intervention that causes the will to move the intellect to assent to revelation appears to justify the certainty that Aquinas attributes to faith, a certainty that Swinburne does not appear to consider. It is true that the English philosopher has great respect for the role that this certainty plays in Aquinas’s thought. The certainty is one of the ‘two qualifications’ of Aquinas’s theory that Swinburne proposed.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Swinburne did not accept such a certainty as caused by divine grace. ~~Swinburne believed that we can attain the truth only probabilistically. This is why he employed the concept of belief. In contrast, not only did Aquinas claim that it is because of God’s intervention that faith, at least the paradigmatic faith, involves certitude, but he also claimed that faith is more certain than any other kind of intellectual assent.~~⁴⁹

This high level of certitude is caused by the

~~Once we have considered the fundamental role of certainty in Aquinas’s doctrine of faith, it is difficult to see how a perspective such as Swinburne’s can apply to Aquinas’s view. Swinburne could claim that explaining why some believe and some do not does not require the intervention of the will, which, in turn, is caused by a miraculous intervention of God to move the intellect to assent. However, this intervention, This is required to explain how one~~

⁴⁷ Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, p. 111.

⁴⁸ See above, notes 4f.

⁴⁹ See *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 8. See also Aquinas’s *Disputed Questions on Truth*, where he claims that ‘faith is more certain than any understanding [of principles] and scientific knowledge (*omni intellectu et scientia*)’ (*On Truth*, q. 14, a. 1, ad 7). J. Jenkins, while commenting on this passage, suggests that according to Thomas ‘the faithful hold the articles of faith with greater conviction than the principle of non-contradiction’ (Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], pp. 167f.)

can be so certain of a statement for which there is no overwhelming evidence of support. Christians, as H. McCabe notes,

do not say, 'These things are highly probable.' They say that they are quite certain about them. This certainty about them Christians call faith. This certainty cannot be justified by the evidence.⁵⁰

Some may object that McCabe's statement appears to lead to a form of fideism and consequent religious fanaticism. If the certainty of faith cannot be justified by evidence, then reason seems to have no role at all. In response, it must be said that it is only the aforementioned high level of certainty that Aquinas attributes to the paradigmatic believer that is not supported by evidence. Apart from this level of certitude, faith is to be corroborated by the intellectual investigation that Aquinas practiced in its support and considered to be meritorious.⁵¹ Furthermore, the previously mentioned high level of certainty does not prevent believers from arguing for faith. It only makes them feel certain that any objection to their faith will be answered.⁵² Aquinas explained this position when he stated that, if natural reason attains conclusions that contradict the truths of faith, the arguments developed to attain those conclusions are certainly wrong:

If ... anything is found in the teachings of the philosophers contrary to faith, this error does not properly belong to philosophy, but is due to an abuse of philosophy owing to the insufficiency of reason. Therefore also it is possible from the principles of philosophy to refute an error of this kind, either by showing it to be altogether impossible, or not to be necessary.⁵³

On one hand, Aquinas maintained that any argument that conflicted with the truth of the Christian revelation, even if it appears to be rationally convincing, must be rejected as wrong. On the other hand, he emphasized the importance of the role that reason is expected to play. In fact, Aquinas's thesis was that once certain arguments had been rejected because they contradicted faith, reason must commence anew from the beginning - 'from its own

⁵⁰ McCabe, *Faith within reason*, p. 10.

⁵¹ See above, note 33.

⁵² See McCabe, *Faith within reason*, p. 9.

⁵³ Aquinas, *Super Boethium De Trinitate*, q. 2, tr. by R. E. Brennan (New York: Herder and Herder, 1946), q. 2, a. 3.

principles.’ In so arguing, Aquinas promoted the idea that *scientia* needed to be grounded in arguments and also that the search for arguments must be promoted by the will or, more precisely, the readiness to believe.

It may be claimed that this intervention of the will is equivalent to *wishful thinking*. In response, let me say that wishful thinking can be taken in both a bad sense and a good sense. McCabe describes ‘wishful thinking in a bad sense’ in terms that have nothing to do with faith as held by Aquinas. Wishful thinking in the bad sense leads people to allow ‘their desires to trespass in a field that belongs exclusively to reason.’⁵⁴ In other words, those in question may be led by these desires to reason dishonestly and to use poor arguments. In contrast, what I have shown in regard to Aquinas’s view coincides with what McCabe calls wishful thinking in the good sense. It is true that in this case, also, one hopes to show that no objections to one’s belief can be found. This, however, does not lead one to spoil a rational investigation. Aquinas’s thesis was that if believers have rejected arguments against their faith, reason must commence anew from the beginning - ‘from its own principles.’ Aquinas showed a noteworthy trust in the potentialities of reason. This is why, despite any mistakes it might have involved, reason should recommence its work.

In conclusion, the high level of certainty that Aquinas attributed to faith was able to significantly promote rational investigation. This level of certainty could have been due only to the intervention of the will in the act of faith, an intervention that, in turn, is due to divine grace. If so, Swinburne’s interpretation of Aquinas’ thought, an interpretation that rejects the role of will and justifies probability, but not certainty, cannot apply to Aquinas’s view of faith.

2.2 The relationship between faith and merit

As I stated in the Introduction, Swinburne mentions ‘two qualifications’ of the Thomist view of faith as belief. One of these is that ‘for Aquinas faith is not, as such, meritorious.’⁵⁵ For Swinburne, it is the effort of investigation to find proof in support of a certain belief that is meritorious;⁵⁶ belief in itself cannot be meritorious because it depends on evidence. Since Swinburne maintains that Aquinas has interpreted faith as belief, the former ascribes this no-

⁵⁴ McCabe, *Faith within reason*, p. 10.

⁵⁵ Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, p. 140.

⁵⁶ See above, note 44.

merit-of-belief-view of faith to the medieval thinker. However, Aquinas would accept only in part Swinburne's view of merit. Full agreement between them can only be found in regard to the investigation in support of belief, which Aquinas, also, considers to be meritorious.⁵⁷ The same cannot be said of the assent to divine revelation. Unlike Swinburne, Aquinas considered divine revelation also to be meritorious. Not surprisingly, the medieval thinker offered his definition of faith ('an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine Truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God') precisely where he focussed on faith and merit. Since 'our actions are meritorious in so far as they proceed from the free-will moved with grace by God,'⁵⁸ it follows that faith, given its abovementioned definition, is meritorious.

At any rate, consider how Swinburne supports his view that for Aquinas faith as such was not meritorious. He claims that only those whose faith is formed by charity ('formed faith') have merit.⁵⁹ Those whose faith is 'unformed' do not have merit. In support of this view, he notes that Aquinas believed that the devils, who plainly lack charity, have faith.

Swinburne rightly says that Aquinas believed that both the faithful and the devils have *unformed faith*, faith that is not perfected by charity. However, he does not consider that the faith of devils does not appear to have anything to do with the faith of the Christian believers. Let's consider this further.

While focusing on the *Epistle of James*, Aquinas argues that the faith of devils is merely intellectual:

They see many evident signs, whereby they recognize that the teaching of the Church is from God, although they do not see the things themselves that the Church teaches, for instance that there are three Persons in God, and so forth.⁶⁰

Because of 'their natural intellectual acumen,' which must be significantly superior to that with which human beings are gifted, the devils notice many evident signs. Aquinas goes so far as to say that the demons are somehow compelled to believe.⁶¹

⁵⁷ See above, note 33.

⁵⁸ *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 9. See also above, note 18.

⁵⁹ For Aquinas, charity 'is the principle of merit' (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 9 ad 1).

⁶⁰ *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 5 a. 2.

Does this mean that they *know* and don't *have faith* that divine revelation is true? A number of scholars have offered various and even mutually incompatible responses to this question.⁶² Focusing on them is of no immediate interest to me. Instead, I wish to show that devils and humans don't share the same type of unformed faith. To this end, however, it is useful to make it clear whether or not devils have faith. It is sufficient to note that the particularly effective acumen of the devils enables them to far better understand the relationship between revealed truths and their signs than can human beings. (For Aquinas, there are instances in which the truths of faith can be *seen*. What can be seen, however, is not the object of faith, which the faithful are expected to believe, but a host of *signs* that point to the object.⁶³) If the demons were compelled, then the object of faith would be simply *seen* and Thomas would have no reason to say that they have faith. Instead, the demons *have* faith, namely, they do not *know* the divine reality and don't have the Beatific Vision. They know the *signs* of the divine revelation. They know many arguments in support of the revealed truths and in a way that is significantly more effective than human beings.

⁶¹ Their faith, so he says, is 'quodammodo coacta ex signorum evidentia' (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 5 a. 2 ad 1).

⁶² According to W. Mann, Aquinas seems to 'suggest that the evidence is so clear for the demons as to make their assent involuntary.' Obviously, 'if Aquinas accepts this position, then he is forced to concede that the demons do not *believe*; they *know*' (W. Mann, 'Theological virtues.' In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by E. Craig, (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), vol. 9, p. 328). The same view is held by P. O'Grady (*Aquinas's Philosophy of Religion* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), p. 78), S. Bonino (*Angels and Demons. A Catholic Introduction*, trans. by M. J. Miller (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), p. 295), and C. Rosental (*Lessons from Aquinas: A Resolution of the Problem of Faith and Reason* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2011), p. 128). However, if the signs are so compelling, it should be said, as J. Hick does, that the faith of demons contradicts Aquinas's doctrine of faith (see J. Hick, *Faith and Knowledge: A Modern Introduction to the Problem of Religious Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 21). A possible solution is provided by E. Stump. That author argues that the evidence that the demons have at their disposal motivates, rather than compels, them. This also can be said of humans (see E. Stump, 'Aquinas on Being and Goodness.' In *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. by S. MacDonald (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press), pp. 190f.).

⁶³ See *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 1 a. 4 ad2.

Now that I have made clear in what sense Aquinas attributes faith to demons, I can move on to the previously mentioned difference between the unformed faith of devils and that of believers. Aquinas points out that ‘the very fact that . . . the demons are compelled to believe, is displeasing to them.’⁶⁴ The faithful are moved by the readiness to believe, whereas this is not true for demons. The faithful *want* to believe the divine revelation out of love for God,⁶⁵ whereas the devils hate God, and ‘their malice is by no means diminished by their belief’.⁶⁶ It follows from this that the devils neither assent to divine revelation at the command of the will nor are moved by divine grace. The human faithful are expected to be ready to believe, whereas the devils are somehow forced to believe. This makes them feel very sad. Obviously, such faith is essentially *unformed*. Not only is charity not involved; but it is replaced by hatred for God.

When all is said and done, what can we learn from this as to the unformed faith of human beings? Is it possible for them to have such a faith? While comparing the unformed faith of demons with that of human beings, Aquinas states that, unlike the former, the faith of human beings is always accompanied by a sort of ‘affection for the good (*secundum aliquem affectum boni*).’⁶⁷ Aquinas believes that ‘faith, which is a gift of grace, inclines man to believe, by giving him *a certain affection to the good, even when that faith is lifeless*.’⁶⁸

Therefore, even in the case of unformed faith, the faith of humans is always characterized by *the will to do good*, however exiguous it may be. This is consistent with Aquinas’s claim that an act of will is always involved in faith; it is also confirmed by his definition of faith, according to which no assent to divine revelation is possible without the intervention of the will, which is moved by divine grace.⁶⁹

In conclusion, to Aquinas, the faith of devils, which lacks any love for God and any will to do good, could rightly be taken as ‘belief-that.’ However, devils cannot be considered to be

⁶⁴ *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 5 a. 2 ad 3.

⁶⁵ See above, note 29.

⁶⁶ *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 5 a. 2 ad 3.

⁶⁷ *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 5 a. 2 ad 2.

⁶⁸ *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 5 a. 2 ad 2.

⁶⁹ If someone objects that Aquinas is using the word *affectus*, and not *will*, it may be mentioned that he employs *affectus*, as well as related words or phrases such as *affective* or *per affectum*, to refer not only to passions, but also to *all* appetitive acts, whether sensitive or rational.

Christian.⁷⁰ Their faith coincides with what Aquinas named ‘faith commonly so called.’⁷¹ In contrast, the faith of human believers is not merely ‘belief-that.’ It appears always to be caused by the love and the will that was mentioned above. Furthermore, since Aquinas pointed out that our actions are meritorious if they proceed ‘from the free-will moved with grace by God,’ it becomes clear that, in his thinking, the faith of humans always needs to be meritorious, however limited its merit may be.

2.3 The relationship between faith and doubt

Swinburne considers Aquinas’ thought on doubt. For him,

despite his more usual insistence that the belief of faith has to be as strong as the belief involved in scientific knowledge, Aquinas does, at times, also allow that faith can be a matter of degree, so that for some who have faith there is still doubt. And he allows that there can be greater faith in one person than in another.⁷²

For those who have perfect or formed faith, no doubt is expected to be experienced, whereas those who do not have such a faith—presumably the majority of believers—have doubt and probably in inverse proportion to the probability that supports their faith.

Swinburne interprets Aquinas plausibly on this point. The *reason why* he advances such interpretation, however, is not equally plausible. The reason is that, as Swinburne states, Aquinas accepted faith as mere ‘belief-that.’ In fact, faith is mere belief if no conclusive evidence in support of faith is available. This is why doubt emerges. Nevertheless, Aquinas offered a more comprehensive view. For him, doubt emerges because the faithful do not love God as they should. Love for God causes one to search for evidence to sustain one’s faith.

⁷⁰ According to G. Dawes, ‘the faith of demons is not, it seems, unformed faith, since even unformed faith is shaped by ‘a certain affection for the good’ and is in this sense a gift of God’ (G. Dawes, ‘The Act of Faith: Aquinas and the Moderns.’ In Kvanvig, J. (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 6 [New York: Oxford University Press, 2015], p. 70, note 21). While commenting on James 2:19 (‘even the demons believe [*pisteuousin*] that, and shudder’), W. C. Smith says that in the passage in question ‘*pisteuo*’ simply does not refer to the Christian faith (W. C. Smith, *Belief and History* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1977), p. 74).

⁷¹ ‘We distinguish the virtue of faith from faith commonly so called (*communiter sumpta*), which has no reference to the beatitude we hope for’ (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 1).

⁷² Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, p. 140.

Consequently, when Aquinas said that it is insufficient love for God that causes doubt, this includes Swinburne's view. The reason is that the insufficient evidence, which for Swinburne is the only cause of doubt, becomes, in view of Aquinas's thought, an immediate cause that, ultimately, is insufficient love for God.

Let us now examine Aquinas's view of the different levels of intensity at which believers hold faith. This is the view that Swinburne mentions to reconcile faith and doubt. This view dates back to the Gospel. Aquinas finds it to be fully consistent with his doctrine of faith when he wonders 'whether faith can be greater in one man than in another':

The quantity of a habit may be considered from two points of view: first, on the part of the object; secondly, on the part of its participation by the subject. Now the object of faith may be considered in two ways: first, in respect of its formal aspect; secondly, in respect of the material object which is proposed to be believed. Now the formal object of faith is one and simple, namely the First Truth, as stated above. Hence in this respect there is no diversity of faith among believers, but it is specifically one in all, as stated above. But the things which are proposed as the matter of our belief are many and can be received more or less explicitly; and in this respect one man can believe explicitly more things than another, so that faith can be greater in one man on account of its being more explicit. If, on the other hand, we consider faith from the point of view of its participation by the subject, this happens in two ways, since the act of faith proceeds both from the intellect and from the will, as stated above. Consequently a man's faith may be described as being greater, in one way, on the part of his intellect, on account of its greater certitude and firmness, and, in another way, on the part of his will, on account of his greater promptitude, devotion, or confidence.⁷³

Citing the entire *respondeo* was necessary, because Aquinas summarizes in it an impressively effective way of viewing the different levels of faith. He makes use of the tripartition that I mentioned in the first section ('believing in a God,' 'believing God' and 'believing in God').

If we accept faith as 'believing God,' there is no diversity of faith among Christians. They all assent to that which God has revealed, without which there would be nothing to believe.

⁷³ *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 5 a. 4.

If we accept faith as ‘believing in a God,’ something similar may be said. All Christians are required to believe the same revealed truths. Some of the faithful, however, may believe more aspects than others.

To explain this, Aquinas refers to reasons that regard both the intellect (‘on account of its greater certitude and firmness’) and the will (‘on account of his greater promptitude, devotion, or confidence’). He argues that the faithful believe with more or less certitude, firmness, promptitude, devotion, and confidence. At the heart of this diversity, there is the readiness to believe.

This emerges from Aquinas’s reply to the first objection in the article that is being discussed. According to the objector, all people of faith believe the same thing. Consequently, ‘it seems that faith cannot be greater in one than in another.’⁷⁴ Aquinas replies focusing on the readiness to believe, which coincides with the habit of faith. Aquinas believes that ‘a man who obstinately disbelieves a thing that is of faith, has not the habit of faith, and yet he who does not explicitly believe all, while he is prepared (*paratus est*) to believe all, has that habit.’⁷⁵

Note that Aquinas introduces a viewpoint that differs from the one that the objector has adopted. In fact, the objector focuses on the material object of faith (‘believing in a God’) and claims that, if one fails to believe even one truth, he loses his faith altogether. Aquinas shifts the attention from the material object of faith to the virtue of faith, namely to the readiness to believe, which he calls ‘the participation of faith by the subject.’ Those who ‘obstinately’ do not believe one thing are not worthy of the habit of faith, whereas those who are ‘prepared to believe all’ have such a habit.⁷⁶

Swinburne considers only the material object of faith, because he thinks that Aquinas believed that faith is ‘belief-that.’ Instead, for Aquinas, the will to believe, which believers do not possess in equal degree, is at the heart of the different levels of faith. This will to believe causes them to be ready to believe. Also, it causes them ready to search for evidence in

⁷⁴ *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 5 a. 4 obj. 1.

⁷⁵ *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 5 a. 4 ad 1.

⁷⁶ While responding to another objection, Aquinas adds that ‘some submit to it [the first truth] with greater certitude and devotion than others; and in this way faith is greater in one than in another’ (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 5 a. 4 ad 2).

support of their belief, as revealed in the passage in which Aquinas stated that ‘when a man’s will is ready to believe, he loves the truth he believes, he thinks out and takes to heart whatever reasons he can find in support thereof.’⁷⁷

In conclusion, unlike the belief Swinburne attributes to him, Aquinas believed that there was no faith without the intervention of will, which in turn is caused by divine grace to command the intellect. Only this intervention could explain what was essential to Aquinas’s doctrine of faith, namely that believers are expected to adhere to divine revelation *with a high level of certainty*, despite a lack of supporting evidence. There is simply no explanation for this if faith, as occurs in Swinburne’s view of Aquinas, is interpreted to be mere belief-that, which depends on probabilistic evidence.

I thank the Reviewer for his or her corrections, which I inserted into the new version. They can be easily found, as I have marked them in yellow.

I thank the Reviewer for suggesting that I refer to other books by Swinburne, if I want to compare Aquinas’s thoughts on faith and reason to those of Swinburne. The reviewer’s advice enabled me to see that there were some expressions in my text that could cause the reader to think that I didn’t want to limit myself to Swinburne’s view of Aquinas’s thought. Therefore, I made a few changes to prevent such an interpretation. Now, the reader should be able to understand that I intended only to compare Swinburne’s interpretation of Aquinas to the texts of Aquinas.

In reply to the Reviewer’s comments regarding p. 5, lines 10-20, I can state that my argument, which I have modified on the basis of his or her suggestions, can be found on p. 12.

I thank the Reviewer for his or her comments on p. 9, lines 35-41. I have now written that, for Aquinas, believers are expected to be ‘READY to assent to the revealed truths before arguing in their support.’ I use ‘Ready to assent’ to emphasize the role played by their *trust* in God, as the Reviewer said.

⁷⁷ See above, note 33.

Thanks to the Reviewer for the comments regarding p. 14 lines 5-7. I found it necessary to make it clear that it is only the high level of certainty, which Aquinas attributes to paradigmatic faithful, that is not supported by evidence. Apart from this level of certitude, faith must be corroborated by intellectual investigation.