**What Is The Value of Faith for Salvation? A Thomistic Response to Kvanvig**

**Abstract:**

Jonathan Kvanvig has proposed a non-cognitive theory of faith. He argues that the model of faith as essentially involving assent to propositions is of no value. In response, I propose a Thomistic cognitive theory of faith both avoids Kvanvig’s criticism and presents a richer and more inclusive account of how faith is intrinsically valuable. I show these accounts of faith diverge in what they take as the goal of the Christian life: personal relationship with God or an external state of affairs. For this reason, more seriously, the non-cognitivist project likely requires rejecting traditional Christianity and its picture of salvation.

It has been a hot item in Catholic theology of the past fifty years to rail against "propositional" theories of faith and revelation, where either essentially involves "conceptual knowledge by means of words (speech)."[[1]](#endnote-1) In response to these theories, Catholic theologians felt the need to explore a tighter connection between belief and action.[[2]](#endnote-2) What has for some time occupied theologians has come around to philosophy: contemporary philosophers of religion have likewise begun recently to voice a concern that classical theories of the virtue of faith are unsatisfactory because they construe faith as constituted essentially (in part or whole) by belief in certain propositions. Jonathan Kvanvig, whom I treat here, argues that the traditional model of faith makes faith of no apparent value in ordinary peoples’ lives. This quandary has led Kvanvig, among others,[[3]](#endnote-3) to defend a distinctly non-cognitivist theory of faith which does not essentially or constitutively involve belief in any set of propositions.

After presenting Kvanvig’s theory of non-cognitive faith and his objections to the cognitive model, I will examine one cognitive theory that proposes a clear internal connection between belief and the value of faith. Thomas Aquinas holds that there needs to be a cognitive virtue (namely, faith), constitutively involving assent to propositions, in order for believers to have a relationship with God. Nevertheless, I argue that Thomistic faith is not susceptible to the objections that Kvanvig proposes which motivate non-cognitivism. Thomistic faith is a species of intellectual humility where the believer trusts God and what He tells human beings. Thomistic faith accommodates the “implicit faith” of those outside explicit Christian confessions, and can positively construe traditional concern for orthodoxy by understanding “heresy” as a sin of intellectual pride that impairs communion with God (but innocent doctrinal error or ignorance as blameless).

Kvanvig argues that we should develop our theory of faith in light of why that virtue is valuable. I will show that the Thomistic account makes faith more intrinsically valuable than affective faith. Nevertheless, there is a deeper problem: affective and Thomistic conceptions of faith involve differing conceptions of the goal of Christian life (i.e., salvation). I will show that accepting that non-cognitive affective faith is ‘saving faith’ (as Kvanvig does) would entail the falsity of the traditional Christian picture of salvation. While I cannot argue that the traditional Christian picture is in fact true, I will present good reasons to reject non-cognitivism.

1. **Jonathan Kvanvig**
   1. **Motivation for Non-Cognitivism**

Cognitive models of faith hold that belief, particularly propositional belief, is essential to faith. In the beginning of *Faith and Humility*, Kvanvig proposes two general objections to these dominant models of a “cognitive” virtue of faith. These objections motivate a commitment to an alternative model of faith – the non-cognitive, affective model of faith Kvanvig proposes – on which propositions or beliefs might be compatible with affective faith, but are not essential to it.[[4]](#endnote-4)

A first objection to cognitivism is that belief in a set of propositions is not obviously virtuous. If a state of belief in some propositions is valuable, it seems only to have whatever value attaches to true belief in general. In turn, the value of mere true belief is (at least mostly) constituted by the value of the propositions believed.[[5]](#endnote-5) True belief that my car’s radiator is faulty might be very valuable because use of my car is valuable to me, whereas true belief that there are 50 mites of dust on my desk is probably useless.

In addition, there is a uniquely religious facet to this first objection. If faith is necessary for salvation, such that nobody can “get to heaven” without it, God would seem fundamentally arbitrary and capricious to demand that people believe in some disjointed set of propositions that bear no apparent connection to their moral character. Cognitivism makes faith a trivial affair: “of all the concerns God might have about human beings and the lives that they live, how could it come down to something like a true/false checklist that you fill out honestly, and the answers determine your destiny?”[[6]](#endnote-6) It would be as if God demanded, as a price of admission, that one get a tattoo on their forearm, or cut off their left toe.[[7]](#endnote-7) But we know too that people come to believe what they believe largely from matters of circumstance outside of their control – children of Jewish parents are often also Jewish, etc. For this reason, Kvanvig concludes “the idea that the difference-maker regarding one’s eternal destiny is simply a matter of being in the right cognitive state is no better than the idea that the difference-maker regarding one’s eternal destiny is a tattoo on the right forearm or a missing little toe on the right foot.”[[8]](#endnote-8)

Second, cognitive accounts would limit faith to those who explicitly profess belief in propositions. This seems to rule out that faith could be a natural virtue, one that would be worth having for human life even outside religious contexts.[[9]](#endnote-9) Instead, Kvanvig proposes, a proper theology of faith can only be grounded upon this prior answer of how faith, generally, plays a beneficial role in human life; “and in particular, what is [faith] for, that could possibly sustain a theology built around it, or uphold the idea that it is a major virtue of a well-lived life?”[[10]](#endnote-10) Further, when Kvanvig develops his account of affective faith, he presents cases where people can have faith that is non-religious, or faith without beliefs at all, as in the case of a Little League pitcher who has faith in his ideal of becoming a better pitcher.[[11]](#endnote-11)

Again, there is a uniquely religious facet to this second objection. Identifying faith with belief in a given set of propositions will rule out that large numbers of people are saved. On such a cognitive theory of faith as belief in some particular list of propositions, if a person failed to believe one proposition in the list, they would fail to have faith. This characteristic is true even of the beliefs traditionally claimed to be so required for salvation, as for example those identified in the Athanasian Creed. Moses, Abraham, and the Apostles cannot be claimed plausibly to have held the propositions identified in the Athanasian Creed as necessary for salvation. And, further, the vast majority of people do not hold any particular beliefs in common which we could jointly identify as required for salvation.[[12]](#endnote-12) Many people would then end up in hell. As a consequence, the cognitivist theory seems to be uncharitable: “It shows smallness of spirit to think that Nestorians, for example, are damned because of their beliefs. The most that could plausibly be claimed is that there will be no Nestorians in heaven – by the time they get there, they will have seen the light.”[[13]](#endnote-13)

* 1. **Non-Cognitive Affective Faith**

Kvanvig argues that, given the failure of cognitive faith to describe something of value, we should begin by describing why faith is valuable, and found our theory of faith on the role that it plays in people’s lives.[[14]](#endnote-14) As Kvanvig sees it, there is a clear reason that people value faith. Faith is a trait of character which plays a role in people’s lives and the way faith functions should “count as good” for the people who have this trait.[[15]](#endnote-15) He defines affective faith as follows: “Faith...[is] an orientation or disposition toward the retaining of the goal or plan or project in the face of difficulties in achieving it, one prompted by affections of various sorts and involving complex mental states that are fundamentally affective even if they involve cognitive dimensions as well.”[[16]](#endnote-16) This faith is obviously not uniquely religious, and Kvanvig sees this as an advantage of the account. Examples of non-religious faith might be a Little League pitcher persevering toward his athletic goals despite adversity.[[17]](#endnote-17)

Faith’s (natural) purpose is, for Kvanvig, giving meaning to one’s life or unifying the projects one pursues because the faithful person acts in pursuit of an ideal. If this is true, Kvanvig argues, mere assent to a set of propositions of any kind can never fill this role. And Kvanvig is quite liberal with what counts as an “ideal.” He criticizes Dewey (who offered a similar view of faith) for proposing limiting criteria supposedly internal to the nature of ideality to criticize some ideals, such as narrow-minded narcissism, as failing to be “ideals” of the right kind. By contrast, Kvanvig’s account of affective faith is descriptive and functional rather than normative, and so he holds there are no conditions internal to ideals to distinguish one from another. A selfish person acting only in their own narcissistic self-interest counts as acting in service of an ideal. And we can admire the character trait of pursuing these ideals, even when those ideals are morally noxious: “pursuing Nazi goals in the face of considerable danger is certainly odious behavior…but the question is whether it can nonetheless involve a display of courage.”[[18]](#endnote-18) Kvanvig thinks it does, as “one should be able to approve the character trait while disapproving the end pursued.”[[19]](#endnote-19)

What is the role of belief in affective faith? Although beliefs might accidentally follow from the affective state (e.g., one comes to have certain beliefs after committing to an ideal),[[20]](#endnote-20) Kvanvig denies that belief in propositions has an intrinsic role in constituting that one has affective faith. The value of faith for Kvanvig is that faith gives unified meaning to human life in the face of difficulties, and such faith does not ordinarily require ontological commitment or beliefs in any particular set of propositions.[[21]](#endnote-21) Such an affective state does not rule out that people of faith have cognitive commitments of any kind. Instead, “affective faith and the way of life embodying it will always involve cognitive commitments of one sort or another: how could it not? …the point, however, is that the precise nature of those cognitive commitments is quite indeterminate.”[[22]](#endnote-22) At other times, Kvanvig appears to insist on the “multiple realizability” of what it is to act in service of an ideal such that *no particular* cognitive states are required for acting in that way: “the pattern [of behavior] is multiply realizable by a wide variety of underlying intentional states and attitudes. …What matters is that the responses fall into a pattern of the sort that counts as an instance of that disposition.”[[23]](#endnote-23) He does briefly note that two particular people do not exemplify exactly the same pattern of behavior, given that they do not have exactly the same (inessential) cognitive and affective states that accompany the disposition to produce the pattern of behavior, but Kvanvig is not demanding exactly the same pattern; rather, “what we look for is some high degree of overall similarity.”[[24]](#endnote-24)

But this seems confused. Kvanvig vacillates between saying, as in the first case, that affective faith requires *indeterminate* cognitive content, and, in the second case, that affective faith requires no particular cognitive content. These do not strike me as obviously identical. One could have some basic cognitive disposition, a doxastic state, and yet have no particular proposition in mind – my mental state would be indeterminate. Perhaps I believe somebody is the President of the United States, but I do not have a proposition in mind as to who that is. This seems to me a way someone could have indeterminate cognitive content. Nevertheless, what Kvanvig seems to mean is the second, rather than the first: he insists that the same disposition to produce an external pattern of motions or movements can exist without any other cognitive or affective dispositions being required for or essential for the production of that pattern. It will become important to distinguish that claim from the very different claim that some cognitive or affective attitudes are necessary to support some disposition, but what these attitudes are can differ among instances according to some norm, or involve non-propositional cognitive content, etc., (and so be indeterminate).

Finally, Kvanvig sees religious affective faith as a sub-species of the general case: whereas affective faith is a disposition to act in service of an ideal, religious affective faith is acting in service of a religious ideal. As Kvanvig notes, “In the Christian tradition faith is supposed to be central to salvation.”[[25]](#endnote-25) Yet “the centrality of faith to salvation doesn’t by itself yield the right kind of defense of it. In order to assess the significance of the kind of faith in question, we begin by asking…why would it be that this particular phenomenon is so central to eternal salvation?”[[26]](#endnote-26) Kvanvig then argues that non-cognitivism makes an internal relation of faith to salvation clear: “an account of faith in terms of dispositions to respond in service of an ideal is easily seen as being internally related to a process of reconciliation when the ideal itself is or involves the coming of the Kingdom of God and what it represents….”[[27]](#endnote-27) Despite Kvanvig’s occasional use of the term “saving faith,” there is no further explicit elaboration of what Christian salvation involves. But, as I will present in my objections, there are enough statements of what saving faith is *not* that allows us to (by contrast) reconstruct Kvanvig’s picture. One of those claims is that believers need not have any cognitive beliefs about Christianity, including beliefs that any Christian doctrine is true, in order to count as having affective faith in Christ; “…even if it is in some sense required that one come at some point to believe certain things and to adopt a particular cognitive perspective on all there is and one’s place in it, it would be a strange gospel to impose this requirement in the backtracking fashion that insists that what must be true in the end in order to be saved must be true now in order to be being saved.”[[28]](#endnote-28) Kvanvig is clear (as we will see) in holding that anyone could conceivably commit to acting as a ‘believer’ with affective faith, following Christ or bringing about the Kingdom, even while consciously denying that Christ ever existed.

However, Kvanvig likely holds that there is no need to give an elaborate account of salvation because the model of affective religious faith is functional, like the account of affective faith generally speaking. Then, because there are no constitutive beliefs or attitudes other than a disposition to act for an ideal, we do not need to specify what that Christian ideal actually is. As long as there is some distinctively Christian ideal, such as following Jesus, and someone counts as acting in service of *that*, they thereby count as having saving faith. Naturally, Christians will hold that their ideal is worth pursuing, so affective religious faith that commits one to pursuing Christian ideals is valuable. Thus, nothing further *needs* to be said about salvation.

1. **Thomas Aquinas**
   1. **Salvation as Deification**

Thomas Aquinas constructs the account of faith in the *Summa Theologiae* in the context of an explicit elaboration of the goal of Christian life. He does this for reasons similar to Kvanvig: Aquinas wants to show why faith is valuable. In general, Aquinas holds that the end of human life lies essentially in contemplation of God’s essence (the “Beatific Vision”).[[29]](#endnote-29) For my purposes, I will only focus on the way Aquinas thinks we can attain this goal. Aquinas, I argue, presents a plausible picture of what is unique to Christian lives: relationship with God. Aquinas then shows that this picture of salvation entails that human beings need a cognitive virtue in order to engage in a relationship with God, and he identifies faith as that cognitive virtue.

Aquinas holds we cannot have complete or true virtue without charity.[[30]](#endnote-30) Charity is a virtue of personal love of God, which Aquinas refers to as a kind of “friendship” between a human and God. But Aquinas notes that wishing someone well does not constitute friendship. Instead: “a certain mutual love is requisite, since friendship is between friend and friend: and this well-wishing is founded on some kind of communication.”[[31]](#endnote-31) Friendship requires both mutual love between parties and communication as necessary conditions. The human-God species of friendship involves not only mutual affection, but also some kind of communication. As we will see, Aquinas thinks God takes the initiative in founding this friendship because God shares with human beings knowledge of Himself.

Yet human beings are not capable of being friends with God. Not only are humans born in a state where they are unable to choose to engage in relationship with God, given the obstacle posed by original sin, but humans also lack the right capacities (cognitive, etc.) to be in personal relationship with God.[[32]](#endnote-32) God therefore needs to give “grace” and cause the human being to undergo a kind of ontological change where the human being shares in God’s own mode of existence (“sanctifying grace”).[[33]](#endnote-33) Whatever this state involves, the important point is that God gives the human being certain capacities (infused virtues, theological virtues, Gifts of the Holy Spirit) that enable them to engage in personal relationship with God.[[34]](#endnote-34) In sum, because the human being is made by God to be like God, the human being can know and love God in a similar way to how God knows and loves Himself.

Thomas therefore holds that salvation is a process of ‘divinization/deification,’ coming to be like God, and this process involves a change in cognitive as well as affective dispositions.[[35]](#endnote-35) Human beings not only change what they do, but how they *are*. Aquinas is echoing a traditional Christian vision of salvation, inherited from the early Church. This view of salvation is highly ecumenical and defended extensively by contemporary theologians.[[36]](#endnote-36) For that reason, one does not need to accept the details of the Thomistic theory in order to accept a picture of salvation as deification. That view, at minimum, involves the following two theses: that salvation lies in personal relationship with God, and God’s grace is necessary to permit people to have the capacity to engage in this relationship.

Thomas begins the *Summa Theologiae* with an argument that salvation requires knowledge beyond ‘naturally’ discoverable knowledge of God. First, special knowledge was necessary because "man is ordered to God as to an end which exceeds the comprehension of reasoning.... The end, however, must be first known by men, whose intentions and actions should be ordered to that end."[[37]](#endnote-37) The second reason depends on the first: men would not know securely or with certainty even the naturally knowable truths that are necessary for understanding that goal. Both responses involve some presuppositions Aquinas makes about motivation and human choice. For Aquinas, all human action is involves the intellect perceiving something as a good, which the will is then enabled to desire as its object and to act upon in a variety of ways (e.g., mere wish, decision, etc.). Consequently, nothing can be chosen by our wills without a prior intellectual act where we come to see why we have a reason for action; i.e., we ‘perceive’ some end as good and then can choose means to achieve it. [[38]](#endnote-38) Human action is end-oriented, and any intentional act requires an understanding of an end before a human can intend to act in any way.[[39]](#endnote-39)

Aquinas notes that God has given human beings a special goal in life: personal relationship with Him. But then this end would require knowledge not merely of God acquired from God’s effects (e.g., natural theology) but of God as He is in Himself, as having specific intentions toward humans.[[40]](#endnote-40) But, then, we run into a problem: God is both beyond human comprehension *and* not directly accessible to our cognition. God is an entirely immaterial being, so we can at most reason to Him from His effects in sensible reality, but His immaterial nature is not directly accessible because of our cognitive limitations.[[41]](#endnote-41) Human cognitive powers are oriented toward material, sensible things, and not immaterial ones. For this reason, if we are to act so as to enter into a relationship with God, who is beyond the natural scope of our cognitive abilities, “it was necessary for the salvation of men that something be made known to them by divine revelation which exceeds [the natural power of] human reason.”[[42]](#endnote-42)

Then engaging in friendship with God requires that a human has knowledge necessary to do so, and it is this knowledge that permits affective states in relation to God (e.g., charity, or other consequent virtues or Gifts). Aquinas even responds to an objection here that union involving only our affective faculties – love – would be sufficient for a relationship with God without knowledge of Him. Aquinas responds that our union with God is not union of a faculty or a part of the human person with God, but a complete union of our person to God in a mode appropriately personal. A union of my ‘affective faculties’ or acts with someone else – e.g., you and I both feeling the same emotion, but being unaware of each other on either side of the planet – would not be a friendship. So, Aquinas plausibly suggests, a personal union of the friendship sort requires having right perception of what one loves.

As Aquinas sees it, friendship with God is like any other friendship insofar as not only do both parties need to love each other, but their love needs to be mutually responsive, and this involves cognition of some kind. (It seems plausible to cash out this requirement in contemporary language of “joint attention” and “shared knowledge,” which are plausibly cognitive states to some degree.[[43]](#endnote-43)) Thus, Aquinas concludes: “since communion with God in the good is a prerequisite for friendship with him, unless we believe that such a communion is possible…we will never develop a friendship with him. God might indeed love us, wish us good and do good for us, but unless he makes this known to us, we will not become his friends.”[[44]](#endnote-44) Therefore, Aquinas concludes that we can have a personal relationship with God only if God reveals Himself to human beings as someone who wants to be friends with us, and that it is precisely this cognitive communication of God’s readiness to engage in a relationship that permits each to engage in truly mutual affection. As Aquinas says, we can only tend toward or seek God given that we know something about Him by the articles of faith, and so acceptance of God’s testimony about Himself is then a necessary prerequisite for achieving deification (“salvific deiformity”).[[45]](#endnote-45) As we will see, Aquinas then argues that sustaining the cognitive states involved in this mutual awareness requires that the human have a cognitive virtue: faith.

* 1. **Thomas Aquinas’ Cognitive Account of Faith**

Aquinas is operating from the presupposition that Christian life aims at a personal relationship with God not merely in an afterlife but here below. However, personal knowledge of God is required to enter into relationship with Him. Aquinas proposes that this personal knowledge of God, as required for friendship, is sustained in believers by a cognitive virtue: call this “Thomistic” faith. After presenting the essential features of this virtue and its relationship to propositions, I will address the obvious objections to the cognitive account. The response will show that Thomistic faith is robust and valuable. Thomistic faith will illustrate not only that affective faith misses an important aspect of Christian life, but that affective faith is unmotivated because (at least) one cognitive theory of faith can plausibly avoid the motivating objections.

Thomistic faith is an intellectual virtue by which a believer comes to accept certain propositions from God Himself and acquire testimonial knowledge. The nature of the virtue is cognitive, because the virtue aims at accepting propositions, but the believer is not exclusively motivated by “purely” cognitive reasons to accept these propositions. Aquinas says that faith involves the activity of the will in choosing to accept the testimony of God.[[46]](#endnote-46) In this, I am abstracting from whether and how acceptance of propositions from God comes about – I do not consider how acts of faith are justified. It is noteworthy for our purposes that Aquinas rejects the view that the assent of faith can be compelled by the weight of the evidence.[[47]](#endnote-47) Aquinas has a story that involves God’s grace moving a person to accept what is proposed by revelation.[[48]](#endnote-48) Nevertheless, Aquinas believes that the case of faith is relevantly like accepting testimony from another human being, but that God’s grace is necessary for the hearer to understand or otherwise perceive that God is proposing some propositions to the hearer for belief.[[49]](#endnote-49)

What does God propose for acceptance? God needs to reveal Himself in order to allow human beings to be in a personal relationship with Him. In an ordinary relationship with another person, I need to perceive that person as a person before I can have any relationship at all. Similarly with God, the key propositions that God reveals are those which concern facts about God’s personal nature as, for example, that God is a Trinity of Persons. While Aquinas thinks we can acquire natural knowledge of God as cause of the universe, these revealed statements are not such natural knowledge, but rather expressions of how God understands Himself.[[50]](#endnote-50) Trinitarian propositions are the best examples of properly revealed truths, being things only God can know.[[51]](#endnote-51) Without God revealing them, Aquinas thinks, we could never know God is a Trinity. Therefore, because humans have no cognitive access to God’s essence, we cannot ‘verify’ that God is a Trinity, and can only take it on God’s say-so.

It is these particular kinds of propositions that facilitate coming to understand God personally. Initially, humans do not know fully what these propositions mean.[[52]](#endnote-52) Yet they are true statements about God’s personal nature and they facilitate a growth in mutual awareness and love. Aquinas compares the process of moving from faith to deeper cognitive awareness of God with the case of a student who accepts his teacher’s say-so on some matter he is being taught and then comes to understand the matter more fully later. [[53]](#endnote-53) Aquinas thinks it is on the basis of this propositional awareness of God that a person can acquire non-propositional mystical acquaintance with God, as God will “indwell” the believer as long as they have loving faith.[[54]](#endnote-54)

Aquinas holds that faith ordinarily requires assent to propositions. First, there are good reasons that we might only be able to be aware of God in the right way through propositions. Humans are not cognitively equipped to recognize God’s intentions without His help; also, God has to “lower” Himself to accommodate our ordinary ways of knowing. But why propositions in particular? Here we can be a bit speculative: for Aquinas, knowledge of God in this life is limited to indirect knowledge of God via His effects. Yet the kind of knowledge required to form a relationship must also be personal in allowing us to learn who God is as a *person*. Communication involving propositions seems to be the only way to do this. God is utterly simple and beyond our comprehension, so who and what God is has to be explained using sets of propositions suitable to our way of knowing.[[55]](#endnote-55)

Second, there are good independent reasons for God to use propositions to communicate with us. Aquinas thinks one could also be made aware of God by special revelation. Such revelations are, comparatively, rare.[[56]](#endnote-56) We can speculate that Aquinas thinks God has good reasons for not revealing Himself ordinarily in these ways. One good to be gained by learning the faith from others is the promotion of charity among human beings who form the Church on earth – they are not self-sufficient to engage in relationship with God by themselves, but require apostles, evangelists, teachers, pastors, and so forth.[[57]](#endnote-57) Humans can transmit propositions in verbal or written sentences, but they could not do so with non-propositional knowledge. As we saw, Aquinas believes there is non-propositional knowledge of God through mysticism. Yet mystical acquaintance can occur only because we had faith (involving propositions) *first*.[[58]](#endnote-58) In sum, faith involves propositions both because of our cognitive limitations and because they facilitate (directly or indirectly) forming the right kind of relationship with God.[[59]](#endnote-59)

* 1. **Responding to the Motivating Objections**

Whether or not Aquinas is correct that faith strictly requires propositions, he gives us a picture of how we could reasonably expect that faith ordinarily involves such propositions. I argue, then, Thomas’ account makes it clear how propositions relate internally to the valuable cognitive virtue that is faith. And we will see that faith is nevertheless valuable in addition to the value of the truth of those propositions. If this is true, Thomistic faith avoids the first of Kvanvig’s criticisms.

Aquinas holds faith can be defined as "a habit of mind making the intellect to assent to that which is not apparent, by which eternal life is begun in us." It is the latter part of that definition that highlights the internal connection of salvation to belief as a cognitive virtue. The knowledge of God constitutive of our happiness in heaven is contained virtually in the propositions to which faith assents – in other words, they refer to God and enable us to come to know Him more fully.[[60]](#endnote-60) By adhering to the truths of the faith, we can stand outside of merely human knowledge and be ‘deified’ through participating in God's self-knowing.[[61]](#endnote-61) Aquinas uses this point to claim that all believers share "the mind of Christ.”[[62]](#endnote-62) The value of faith as a cognitive virtue is that it enables a human being to know God as God knows Himself.

We can see why the virtue is distinct from the propositions, because Aquinas holds that one needs to accept the relevant propositions *because* they were proposed for belief by God. Aquinas uses the case of the “faith” of demons (mentioned in the Epistle of St. James) as an illustration. The demons acquire cognitive certainty that some propositions are being proposed by God for belief because of their special cognitive capacities; demons can recognize a true prophet, miracles, etc. They know God always tells the truth, so they come to acquire knowledge and belief in those propositions.[[63]](#endnote-63) Nevertheless, Aquinas holds, the demons lack the virtue of faith, even though they believe all the same propositions that a Christian believes. Demonic faith is not a cognitive virtue because the demons did not accept these propositions for the right reasons. A believer has a cognitive virtue not just because they accept some propositions, but because they accept the propositions in a cognitively virtuous manner: the believer accepts the propositions *because* they trust God and accept His testimony. The demons do not accept the propositions because they trust God (they don’t); demons came independently to see some propositions were true.

Aquinas therefore proposes that the “object” of faith is really God Himself as testifier, trust in whom is the reason one assents to whatever propositions He proposes for belief. Aquinas uses the language of “formal object” to refer to the fact that God is the object of the believer’s trust, and “material object” to refer to the propositions that are accepted in virtue of that trust.[[64]](#endnote-64) The demons go wrong because, although they accept the material objects of faith (the propositions), they do not have the right formal object: trust in God. Kvanvig objects: “the idea that one must believe a certain set of doctrines, independent of coming to see them as true from a love of truth, is baffling.”[[65]](#endnote-65) Yet, for Aquinas, God is Truth itself (“First Truth”), and you have saving faith only when you assent to what God reveals because you love God, who is Truth.[[66]](#endnote-66) Thus, ironically, it is precisely love for Truth that is supposed to motivate the believer to accept propositions God proposes. Further, it is *only* when the believer assents out of respect for the Truth that they have Thomistic faith. Aquinas would only disagree with Kvanvig that believers do not themselves “see” the doctrines are true. Rather, they see the doctrines as proposed for belief by God and, for this reason, worthy of acceptance.

What I have hoped to show in presenting Aquinas’ account of faith so far is that Thomistic faith is not merely assent to propositions, but a valuable doxastic attitude of epistemic trust in God. The second of Kvanvig’s criticisms, however, presented a different challenge. The second criticism was that a cognitive model of faith limited faith to those who profess explicit acceptance of some set of propositions, but that many people who had religious faith (Moses, Abraham, and the apostles) did not believe the same propositions. To respond to the second challenge, we should note that Aquinas holds there are strong cognitive limits on our knowledge of God.[[67]](#endnote-67) The propositions believed only need to be of the appropriate character for human beings to engage in relationship with God, and, as we will see, Aquinas’ construal of the requirement is relatively liberal. Aquinas proposes two conditions on the propositions involve in faith. The first is a negative condition: there will be a minimum necessary set of propositions to accept in order to count as having faith. The second is a positive condition: people can be obligated to have beliefs that follow from that minimum set of propositions (depending on circumstances), and failure to do so can be culpable.

The negative restriction is easier to grasp. We might characterize the virtue of Thomistic faith as a form of intellectual humility. On one side, this virtue involves being deferential not only to God Himself, but also to instruments of God’s revelation, such as Scripture, other people, or the Church’s pastors. This is why Aquinas holds that adherence to the doctrines passed down in Scripture and the hierarchical tradition of the Church is the *only* way to trust correctly in God’s testimony, as an "infallible rule of the faith."[[68]](#endnote-68) And, as intellectual humility, faith not only involves assent, but withholding assent when appropriate. Duties of withholding assent are apparent in Thomas' Trinitarian theology, where he thinks we have to avoid trying to say too much and to restrain ourselves to what we know about the Trinity by revelation, sticking closely to the words of Scripture.[[69]](#endnote-69)

We will therefore expect that, because faith is valuable in light of a personal relationship with God, the minimum propositions required to have faith will be beliefs that God exists as a personal being and that He is interested in engaging in relationship with human beings. Unsurprisingly, Aquinas identifies the minimum necessary set of propositions required to count as having faith as precisely these two beliefs: “all the articles are contained implicitly in certain primary matters of faith, such as God's existence, and His providence over the salvation of man, according to Hebrews 11: ‘He that cometh to God, must believe that He is, and is a rewarder to them that seek Him.’”[[70]](#endnote-70)

Aquinas does not mean that all the articles of faith (e.g., Incarnation) are logical entailments of the belief that God exists and that He rewards those who seek Him. Rather, it seems instead that there are minimum beliefs required to have the right understanding of God, and then all other propositions God reveals can be considered as (*a posteriori*) specifications of those beliefs. These additional specifications, Aquinas thinks, are also cognitively valuable. Explicit knowledge of the Passion or Trinity give us moral guidance and help us know God better; while theological elaboration is not sufficient for growth in charity, it is intrinsically suited to promote it.[[71]](#endnote-71)

Aquinas thinks every saved person holds these two basic beliefs at least implicitly. Kvanvig actually concedes this point to Aquinas. While Abraham did not profess the Athanasian Creed, nor did Abraham explicitly endorse claims “that God is redemptive or that God is for us,” still Kvanvig thinks “it is obvious that, among his cognitive commitments can be found claims that entail that God is redemptive or that God is for us.”[[72]](#endnote-72) Similarly, while Abraham, Moses, or the Apostles did not profess the Athanasian or Nicene Creeds, it is plausible that they were committed to claims like those two Aquinas lays out as the minimal necessary for faith.

The positive condition on what needs to be believed is harder to enunciate, as it depends on many factors, not least of which is what period of time and place a believer lives! Faith is a properly intellectual virtue, and so it ordinarily involves assent to propositions. Nevertheless, as an attitude toward a person, the doxastic attitude of faith can involve distinct propositions in different situations, depending on how God has proposed a belief *to you*. Aquinas holds that God revealed Himself gradually to humanity over the course of history, and there are varying obligations for different people. Moses, Abraham, and the Apostles therefore had different epistemic obligations, even if they all held the minimal necessary propositions required for faith. Aquinas rejects the view, e.g., that everyone is required explicitly to believe the propositions of the Athanasian Creed. Rather, whether you have the relevant virtue depends on your cognitive capacity, station, place, time, and many other factors. The key is that one is responsive *to God* from one’s situation.

Thomistic faith also accommodates innocent epistemic errors. Even if a believer disbelieves in some revealed propositions, they can still have faith if they retain the right attitude toward more basic propositions of the faith (e.g., “everything in Scripture is God’s word”).[[73]](#endnote-73) Failure to believe what it is, in fact, the material object of faith does not automatically entail that one does not believe in the right formal object. E.g., someone might be misinformed as to what is in Scripture on the question of, say, whether Abraham was the father of Melchizedek. Being misinformed does not automatically mean that a person no longer believes inScripture as God’s revelation. An easy way Aquinas proposes to tell whether an apparently misinformed person has the virtue of faith is to correct the misunderstanding and observe their reaction. Citing St. Augustine, Aquinas proposes, “’By no means should we accuse of [heresy](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07256b.htm) those who, however [false](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05781a.htm) and perverse their opinion may be, defend it without obstinate fervor, and seek the [truth](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) with careful anxiety, ready to mend their opinion, when they have found the truth,’ because, to wit, they do not make a choice in contradiction to the doctrine of the Church. Accordingly, certain doctors seem to have differed either in matters the holding of which in this or that way is of no consequence, so far as [faith](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05752c.htm) is concerned, or even in matters of faith, which were not as yet defined by the Church….”[[74]](#endnote-74)

But, as Aquinas immediately notes, someone who persists obstinately in their own opinion even when corrected, or is not sensitive to the teaching of the Church or Scripture, is someone who lacks faith.[[75]](#endnote-75) Thus, the reverse is equally possible: someone who denies one article of the faith, even if assenting to everything else in Scripture, can lack the formal motivation to believe of someone having faith.[[76]](#endnote-76) “Heresy” involves belief in some of the same propositions as believers, but not for the right reasons. Heresy is thus relevantly like what we saw in demonic faith: believing in the articles of faith, e.g., because I think they are likely true, is to lack trust in *God’s knowledge* and instead to trust in my own*.* In this case, one is not expressing the right attitude toward God’s testimony by sifting through what one agrees or disagrees with.

Given that faith is an epistemically virtuous way we defer our judgment to God, a species of intellectual humility, it is clear why Aquinas thinks not deferring our judgment to God in matters proper to faith is an epistemic vice. The religious vice of disbelief is analogous to what might be wrong in willfully distrusting known epistemic experts: teachers, scientists, etc. The vices of unbelief and of heresy are evil as these vices do not consist in merely not believing some propositions (just as faith is not merely belief in propositions). Heresy is a form of intellectual pride, and such pride is clearly a vice.[[77]](#endnote-77) The fact that such sins are possible (*pace* Kvanvig) does not seem more problematic than holding that sins can be committed with our intellects as well as with our bodies. A person can sin with desire for knowledge, as the Nazi doctors misused a desire for scientific knowledge to justify atrocities, as much as a glutton sins with his desires for food. Therefore, it seems perfectly possible that not believing in certain revealed propositions in some cases could be culpable and lead to damnation. As faith is a prerequisite to love of God, so, in virtue of being someone who does not believe for the right reasons, a true heretic does not love God.

Whether heresy can be, in some cases, a moral evil does not entail approval of any rhetoric surrounding heresy, state or ecclesial sanctions of heretics, particular ways of speaking about or to heretics (e.g., anathemas), and so forth. Kvanvig himself acknowledges that there might be reasonable and acceptable ways to sanction those who break communion of faith with other Christians.[[78]](#endnote-78) I am inclined to see documents like the Athanasian Creed as primarily a teaching document rather than an instance of moral denunciation. Nevertheless, I see no reason to engage in a defense of similar documents. I merely note that there are two distinct questions here: “Whether faith constitutively involves cognitive states,” and “Whether we can punish people for deviant cognitive states.” I do not see any way that one implies the other and, as I only defend the first, I see no way the theory of Thomistic faith entails the second.

Thomistic faith is premised on the view that salvation constitutively involves personal friendship with God. As friendship requires mutual attention and awareness, friendship requires some cognitive states in the friends. Aquinas argues that the relevant cognitive states that human beings could have toward God, in order to be aware of Him, have to come through revelation and ordinarily involve propositions. Consequently, the virtue of Thomistic faith is an epistemic virtue of reliance on God’s testimony about Himself – it is, simply, a form of epistemic humility. Not only does faith lead to assent to propositions, but restraint from affirming too much and from overstepping epistemic boundaries. Finally, it becomes clear why people might possess the same virtue of faith even though they have varying moral obligations to believe different sets of propositions, depending on their circumstances. Thomistic faith is valuable because it is partially constitutive of a human being’s loving relationship with God.

1. **Three Issues with Non-Cognitivism**
   1. **First: Cognitive Faith is More Valuable**

If we compare the two views, a first reason to prefer Thomistic faith is that affective faith is either not intrinsically valuable or only valuable in some cases. The value of affective faith is dependent both on the nature of the ideal to which one commits and how one commits to that ideal. This is illustrated in the fact that affective faith can commit one to evil ideals. Kvanvig only proposes a partial solution, arguing that affective faith alone is not virtuous unless affective faith coexists in a more complete state that involves a counter-balancing virtue – humility – or an even more complete state where affective faith and humility operate under an executive virtue (e.g., wisdom).[[79]](#endnote-79) Even when Kvanvig utilizes other virtues to counter-balance these shortcomings of affective faith, affective faith will be still instrumentally, rather than intrinsically, valuable. By contrast, Thomistic faith is valuable intrinsically as constitutive of a relationship with God.

Kvanvig’s affective faith can take various ideals, and there seem to be no limits on what ideals one can commit to by affective faith. Kvanvig utilizes this feature very often to argue that non-cognitivism is more pluralist or inclusive than cognitivism, because commitment to an ideal can involve any number of kinds of ideals and we cannot *a priori* rule out any ideal as valuable for someone. Nevertheless, there are serious consequences to this pluralism, the most serious being that ideals can go from morally praiseworthy to morally disgusting. Insofar as “ideals” go, the ideal of acting to bring about God’s Kingdom is as much an ideal as the ideal of acting to implement the Third Reich’s Final Solution. While Kvanvig proposes that we should tolerate all but the most extreme deviations from the good life as possible ideals, I see no reason offered by Kvanvig why there are any criteria internal to affective faith to differentiate these ideals, or even to rule out those most extreme deviations like the Nazi ideal. Kvanvig only offers criteria *external* to affective faith that would rule out these cases (which I will discuss below).

My intuition, however, is that when an ideal is morally odious affective faith in that ideal is not valuable – in fact, affective faith in an odious ideal is a vice, a moral sickness. What this illustrates is that affective faith (of any kind) is only instrumentally valuable. The *ideal* to which one commits is that which has intrinsic value or disvalue, and it is from the ideal that the virtue derives its value.[[80]](#endnote-80) Thus, it is not as if we could disdain the Final Solution as an ideal and yet admire affective faith in that ideal; nor could we disdain the ideal of bringing about God’s Kingdom and yet disdain affective Christian faith. My inclination is, consequently, to reject that commitment to an ideal of any kind, or commitment generally taken, is a virtue at all.[[81]](#endnote-81) This is problematic because the noncognitivist was supposed to give us an account of the *virtue* of faith such that affective faith is valuable and worth having (as opposed to cognitive faith).[[82]](#endnote-82) Kvanvig has instead given us a general account of what it is to be committed to anything at all, valuable or not. Yet a general state in virtue of which either I could be committed to Nazi genocide or to God’s Kingdom does not seem worth having.[[83]](#endnote-83)

Is there any way Kvanvig could respond to this challenge? As noted earlier, Kvanvig gives a partial account of how affective faith needs to be counter-balanced by humility, and perhaps another executive virtue, and it is only the state of having affective faith + humility (+wisdom?) that is valuable.[[84]](#endnote-84) Kvanvig could respond that a Nazi ideal is perhaps something towards which we can form an affective faith, but an ideal toward which we cannot have an affective faith co-existing with humility or wisdom or both. Traditionally, practical wisdom (i.e., prudence) is a virtue that is a quasi-intellectual virtue, by which an agent perceives *in truth* when and how to act rightly. Thus, it is essential to practical wisdom that one have correct cognitive perception of moral reality (whatever that is). Kvanvig introduces a similar requirement into humility. According to Kvanvig, humility involves “directing of attention *for the right reasons”[[85]](#endnote-85)* But then humility essentially involves cognitive states that conform to reality, just like wisdom. For this reason, ideals worth having are those that constitutively involve the right reasons for action. Nevertheless, notice that Kvanvig’s account makes affective faith only instrumentally valuable toward achieving these other states or the ideal that affective faith aims at. For this reason, affective faith is of dubious character as a virtue in its own right apart from these other states.

By contrast, Aquinas’ account of the theological virtue of faith has an entirely different object. Thomistic faith is about a person, not an ideal or pattern of behavior – God is First Truth and Love itself. As God is First Truth, He is uniquely trustworthy, and so the believer gains a kind of infallibility in what they believe.[[86]](#endnote-86) Kvanvig also proposes that humility is a virtue of attention to *persons*.[[87]](#endnote-87) Thomistic faith involves attention to propositions, but it is primarily attention to the person who proposes those propositions and to whom they refer (God). At least, if humility is valuable, Thomistic faith is too. The Thomistic virtue of faith is therefore like a species of intellectual humility whereby the believer practices appropriate cognitive deference to God.

The virtue of Thomistic faith is thus valuable independently of the value of the knowledge gained thereby. Faith is the beginning of a personal relationship with God, which is immensely valuable. Having faith permits the believer to participate in shared attention with God, both in loving God and in developing that attention so that the believer comes to participate in God’s own cognitive and affective states. Faith, a constitutive part of that relationship, is therefore intrinsically valuable.[[88]](#endnote-88) If we are looking for an account of faith that makes faith intrinsically valuable, or even merely worth having, we thus have very good reasons to opt for the Thomistic account rather than affective faith.

* 1. **Second: Affective Salvation is Impersonal**

The second problem is that affective faith does not seem to be able to have personal relationship with God as a constitutive element. Kvanvig never directly says what salvation is, and, methodologically, he aims to discuss faith as distinct from salvation.[[89]](#endnote-89) Yet Kvanvig’s claim seems to be that affective faith would be sufficient to be “salvific faith,” i.e., sufficient for salvation.[[90]](#endnote-90) We can reconstruct his view in broad strokes. Non-cognitive salvation is conformity to an ideal of some sort. Kvanvig identifies the ideal at the core of religious (Christian) faith a commitment to bring about the “Kingdom of God.” What this means is exemplified by Jesus Christ’s pattern of behavior on earth. However, the believer only needs “pro-attitudes” toward Jesus rather than any definite beliefs about him.[[91]](#endnote-91) That is to say anyone can commit to acting as Jesus Christ did, without ever even believing *that* Jesus Christ existed at some point in history, just as I can act like Superman without believing that Superman is a historical figure. While there are cognitive beliefs that the believer ordinarily holds, e.g., “Jesus acted in such-and-such a manner,” these are incidental to the commitment. I have affective faith if my behavior aims consistently (committedly) at the ideal: bringing about the Kingdom.

One gets the impression that the pattern of behavior is detachable from the attitudes that sustain it, and so the attitudes are instrumental to the true purpose of faith: the pattern of conduct. If affective attitudes merely sustain external conduct, all affective faith aims for is a purely external pattern of limb motions. As Kvanvig says that people with religious faith, “might include various kinds of skeptics and agnostics regarding the existence of God and any or all of the central claims of the major world religions. That is, one can commit to a certain ideal, even to being an unconditional follows of Jesus or Mohammed or whatever, without any of the standard cognitive attitudes of ordinary folk on such paths….”[[92]](#endnote-92) The inclusion of skeptics among “believers” makes it unclear whether *any* internal affective and conative attitudes are essential to commitment to a religious ideal. It is very difficult to imagine that a series of limb motions alone counts as acting in “service of an ideal.” An ideal seems a rational goal of some sort, so that you have to have *some* reasons to count as acting for an ideal.

Consider a charitable reading that affective faith includes internal attitudes but no beliefs. We here imagine the believer imitates Christ’s affective and conative attitudes, not merely bodily movements. Plausibly, Christ loves God as His Father. The believer should then come to love God as Father in the course of imitating Christ’s affections. Yet it is very hard to see how such an attitude of personal love and relationship could be sustained without belief in propositions “that God exists,” or similar claims. By contrast, I cannot have a personal relationship with Superman because Superman does not exist. Kvanvig responds to such criticism by noting that one can act in regard to persons by way of *hoping* they exist, as someone could commit to seeking advice from a hermit without knowing that this hermit exists.[[93]](#endnote-93) The affective believer is committing to draw closer to God by their actions and affections. Is this not love of God?

Certainly, the love you have for someone you hope exists is a kind of love. But it is not the love that produces or is constitutive of a friendship; the relevant attitude constituting friendship does not seem possible if you are not sure if the beloved exists. This does not require that I am explicitly conscious of the beloved, or that I can describe the beloved propositionally, but only that there is cognitive content on my part in virtue of which I am responsive to that beloved and the truth of which *matters* to whether I am in a friendship or not. Obviously, a person can be unsure, e.g., if a friend of theirs is still alive or reading their letters. But if I *never* have beliefs that you exist, I can only be in a pretended relationship.

It gets worse. This view might not be non-cognitivism if certain act-types are constituted by beliefs. While I can act in promoting democracy without believing in the existence of democrats, I cannot promote democracy without beliefs about democracy. The concept “democracy” is internal to that action-type. I cannot love someone without knowing anything about the beloved or being acquainted with him or her, and I cannot be their friend if they do not exist. On the other hand, my actions could certainly count as, e.g., moving ambient air. I need no concept of air currents in order to do something that counts as moving the air. We can preserve the non-cognitivism of the account by holding that what counts as “service of an ideal,” is purely the “aimed at” external state of affairs. Perhaps this makes sense for other cases, but this seems an odd way to think of the Christian life, unless the Kingdom was purely a matter of external affairs. I do not know how to prove this, but it seems very plausible that such a move would rule out the central case: having a relationship is not merely to bring about an external state of affairs.[[94]](#endnote-94)

1. **Third: Differing Paradigms**

The final point is a more profound and serious disagreement that I cannot here resolve, but which I will try to present. If Kvanvig’s objections against cognitive faith are accurate, or if affective religious faith is faith sufficient for salvation (“saving faith”), it would follow that traditional Christianity’s whole theological paradigm is fundamentally flawed. I concede that traditional Christianity could be grossly mistaken about the nature of its own claims, and I will not attempt to rebut a skeptical position that is a normative rather than descriptive account of Christian faith. I will end by proposing that affective faith nevertheless cannot explain central features of a religious attitude that many of us could see as valuable.

Kvanvig acknowledges cognitivism about religious faith as the ‘received’ view of Christianity; e.g., Church authorities have delimited doctrinal beliefs as necessary for salvation. But Kvanvig thinks this is all the worse for dogma; the Church authorities are wrong.[[95]](#endnote-95) Kvanvig has a story about how this emphasis on doctrine arose and became dominant, despite being alien to the essence of Christianity. The story, in short, is that political forces (and specifically the Emperor Constantine) transformed Christianity from a purely affective religion of love, which held no appreciable or essential doctrinal beliefs about God or Jesus, to one of anathema and condemnation that utilized doctrine in enforcing conformity for political ends.[[96]](#endnote-96) As the story about affective faith seems to be normative rather than descriptive, if historical Christianity had *never* valued affective faith, I wonder whether this would be a problem with historical Christianity or with affective faith. It is not clear to me whether Kvanvig’s story is supposed to be falsifiable by appeal to ecclesiastical history.[[97]](#endnote-97)

As I am not a historian, I propose three theological questions about the aforementioned narrative. First, if Kvanvig’s narrative was correct, *all* dominantChristiantheological claims should be guilty until proven innocent; this includes not only views on faith and salvation, but also all theological beliefs. For example, if Christians have been operating under delusion about the nature of “faith” for so long, why think they got “love” right? Second, the motivation for non-cognitivism involved a deep-seated suspicion of traditional claims to special access to God’s revelation (in Scripture/Tradition) or activity (grace). If these claims are jettisoned, it is hard to see why the result is more than a “religion of pure reason” or secular humanism. Finally, non-cognitivism requires a paraphrase or reinterpretation of the way many Christians understand their theological claims, so that doctrinal claims should be read as having primarily practical rather than theoretical significance.[[98]](#endnote-98) As with emotivism, I will not rule out *a priori* that Kvanvig can offer these paraphrases, but it seems difficult and I suspect results will not closely match traditional Christian claims. Describing what it is to love and know another person is not easily paraphrased into language about commitment to an ideal of action.

Notice that I am arguing not that non-cognitivism is wrong. Rather, I am pointing out that the non-cognitivist account of faith has a cost. My point is therefore a *caveat emptor* more than a *reductio ad absurdum*. Kvanvig’s notion of faith differs from traditional Christian notions of faith and he recognizes this. The price of admission to non-cognitivism requires the traditional Christian to paraphrase their apparently cognitive beliefs about grace, God, Jesus, and so forth into quasi-emotivist semantics, or at least to relativize them significantly in terms of practical commitments. The cost, it seems to me, is quite high.[[99]](#endnote-99) I do not know how to argue against this apparently normative set of claims about Christianity.

In conclusion, though, I might illustrate that traditional Christianity does have apparently admirable, valuable states not explained or captured by Kvanvig’s account of faith. Affective faith seems to miss something important about the religious outlook of Christianity. Christian claims that we can have a personal relationship with God (let alone claims that Christ rose from the dead) are not obviously intended as metaphor. If we were not beholden to a narrative about the history of Christianity as the incursion of illegitimate cognitive beliefs, I would think that attempts to illuminate what Christians have historically found valuable about faith would not see Christian theological claims like the Resurrection as mere moral/practical metaphor.

Let me end with a short story. At the end of his life, several weeks after September 29th, 1273, Thomas Aquinas was saying Mass in a chapel dedicated to St. Nicholas. After he was finished with the Mass, he came out and the brothers of the Dominican convent noticed a remarkable transformation in him. Thomas stopped his writing entirely and threw away his writing materials, even though he was mid-way through the incomplete final treatise of the *Summa Theologiae*. When questioned by his secretary, Reginald, as to the reason for the change, Thomas answered, “I cannot do any more. Everything I have written seems to me as straw in comparison with what I have seen.”[[100]](#endnote-100)

The behavior Thomas exemplifies seems to me admirable and praiseworthy because Thomas understood that the knowledge of God he had acquired through study was inferior to direct personal interaction with God Himself. Thus, Thomas stopped his study once he had attained that goal. Thomas accepted using propositions to learn about and love God, but was willing to put them aside in favor of “face-to-face” relationship with their referent. The attitude appears to be intellectual humility before God. Affective faith does not seem able to explain why this attitude is valuable. Nevertheless, it is.[[101]](#endnote-101)

1. Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1983),42. The work generally is useful as an overview of positions in Catholic theology of revelation at that time. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This was particularly associated with “liberation” theology, such as Gustavo Gutierrez or Leonardo Boff. Nevertheless, liberation theologians generally take a non-cognitive view of faith as an assumption rather than defend it. I speculate that Edward Schillebeeckx is chiefly to be credited with popularizing something like a non-cognitive view of faith among theologians of that generation, and it was from him that the liberation theologians appear to have derived their view. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Daniel Howard-Snyder proposes ‘nondoxasticism’ about faith, which is similar in many respects to Kvanvig’s ‘non-cognitivism.’ I believe similar criticisms as those presented against Kvanvig’s position would likely apply to Howard-Snyder’s view. Nevertheless, Howard-Snyder’s nondoxasticism (in his account of Markan ‘propositional faith’) involves essential, positive *cognitive* attitudes toward propositions which are not however identical with belief in those propositions; instead of belief, faith can take various other distinct doxastic states of some kind. The idea is that a specially-defined state of belief is not essential to faith. This makes the arguments as presented here against Kvanvig not directly applicable to the nondoxastic view. Howard-Snyder has a number of articles on this topic, the more recent being: “Markan Faith,” in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 81, 1-2 (2016):1-30; “Three Arguments to Think that Faith Does Not Entail Belief,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*. (2018): online, DOI: 10.1111/papq.12237; “Can fictionalists have faith? It all depends,” in *Religious Studies* (2018): online, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000161. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Jonathan Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility* [FH] (Oxford: Oxford University Press,2018), 19. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. FH, 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. FH, 107-108. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. FH, 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. FH, 107. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. FH, 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. FH, 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. FH, 19-20. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. FH, 13-14. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. FH, 136. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. FH, 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid., 19. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. FH, 65. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Jonathan Kvanvig, “Affective Theism and People of Faith,” in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* XXXVII (2013): 125. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. FH, 112-113. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. FH, 135. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. FH, 128. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. FH, 129. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. FH, 105. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. FH, 105. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Kvanvig, “Affective Theism,” 107. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. FH, 136. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [hereafter ST]. When the Latin text is cited, the translation is my own. Otherwise, translation by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, *Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 2nd and revised ed. (New York, NY: Benzinger Bros., 1920). [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. See especially ST II-II, q. 23, a. 6-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. ST II-II, q. 23, a. 2, resp. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. ST I-II, q. 109; esp. a. 2, resp. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. ST, q. 110, a. 2, resp. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. See ST I-II, q.110, a.4, ad 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. C.f., ST I-II, q. 112, a. 1. See also Andrew Hofer, “Aquinas, Divinization, and the People in the Pews,” in *Divinization* (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 2015), 54-72. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. There is an extensive literature on the topic. For example, Michael Christensen and Jeffery Wittung, ediotrs, *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Baker Academic, 2008); David Meconi and Carl Olson, editors, *Called to be the Children of God: The Catholic Theology of Human Deification* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2016); Anna N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. ST I, q. 1, a. 1, resp. [...quia homo ordinatur ad Deum sicut ad quendam finem qui comprehensionem rationis excedit.... Finem autem oportet esse praecognitum hominibus, qui suas intentiones et actiones debent ordinare in finem.] [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. The argumentative strategy in the *Summa Theologiae* is practically identical with that used elsewhere in the corpus for this same point; c.f., *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.5.2: “nobody tends toward something studiously and with zeal unless they first perceive it [Nullus enim desiderio et studio in aliquid tendit nisi sit ei praecognitum].” [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Michael Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2005),22. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. ST II-II, q. 3, a. 8, resp. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. ST I, q. 12, a. 12, resp. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. ST I, q. 1, a. 1, resp. […necessarium fuit homini ad salutem, quod ei nota fierent quaedam per revelationem divinam, quae rationem humanam excedunt.] [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. While the literature is voluminous on this topic, see for example M. Carpenter & K. Liebal, “Joint attention, communication, and knowing together in infancy,” in *Joint attention*, ed. A. Seeman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 159-181. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Sherwin, 151. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. ST II-II, q. 4, a. 7, ad. 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. ST II-II, q. 4, a. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. A very clear account of Thomistic faith that construes faith as testimonial knowledge can be found in John Lamont, *Divine Faith* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016); for a discussion of justification and motivation of accepting God’s testimony, see esp. 187-206. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. C.f., ST II-II, q. 6, a. 1, resp. but also ST II-II, q. 2, a. 9, ad. 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. ST II-II, q. 6, a. 1, resp. […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.] [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Gregory Rocca describes this as the switch between thinking of truth in concepts as "meaning-dependent" and instead switching to seeing the meaning of divine names as "truth-dependent." While limited in being phrased in human concepts, the *referent* of what is predicated is modified; *Speaking the Incomprehensible God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2004), 195. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Jacques Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995),298. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Timothy Smith, *Thomas* *Aquinas' Trinitarian Theology* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2003), 191. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Thomas Aquinas, *In librum B. Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio,* I-1, nn. 61-82. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. The three intellectual Gifts are understanding (ST II-II, q. 8), knowledge (ibid., q. 9), and wisdom (ibid., q. 45). The one most resembling non-propositional acquaintance is wisdom. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Although it refers to the complexity of propositions in general, ST II-II, q. 1, a. 2, resp. C.f., ibid., a. 6, ad. 2. Consider why Aquinas rules out prophetic visions as a suitable means for union with God: ST II-II, q. 171, a. 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Aquinas proposes, however, that revelations of Christ might have occurred either explicitly or privately before Christ by the ministry of the angels (ST II-II, q. 2, a. 5, ad 3.). [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. This is the point of the gratuitous graces (like the grace of words, ST II-II, q. 177, a. 1, resp.) and of duties in the Church (ST II-II, q. 183, a. 2, resp.). [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. ST II-II, q. 3, a. 8, resp. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Although it is important to note that one could follow the main of Aquinas’ account that we require the right kind of personal knowledge of God, but nevertheless deny this knowledge is even ordinarily propositional. Nevertheless, such a view would be opposed to non-cognitivism about faith because of the constitutive role of knowledge. The view could lead to a variant non-cognitivism, however, if it were true not only that we have non-propositional awareness of God but also that this awareness cannot be communicated in propositions of any sort. Such a view would require a different response than the one I offer of Kvanvig’s version of non-cognitivism. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. ST II-II, q. 4, a. 1, resp. […habitus mentis, qua inchoatur vita aeterna in nobis, faciens intellectum assentire non apparentibus.] [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Aquinas, *De* *Divinis Nominibus*, VII-1, nn. 50-57. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Thomas Aquinas, *Super I Epistolam B. Pauli ad Corinthios lectura,* caput 2, lec. 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. ST II-II, q. 5, a. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. ST II-II, q. 1, a. 1, resp. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. FH, 136. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. The role of faith is a necessary condition for justification, ST I-II, q. 113, a. 4, resp. & ad. 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. We cannot know *what* God is in this life, even by revelation; ST I, q. 12, a. 13, ad. 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. Aquinas, *De Divinis Nominibus,* I-1, nn. 29-40. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. Smith, 154-156. cf., Robert Sokolowski, "God's word and human speech," in *Nova et Vetera,* English Edition, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2013): 203. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. ST II-II, q. 1, a. 7, resp. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. Ibid., ad. 2, ad. 3, ad. 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. FH, 80. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. ST II-II, q. 2, a. 3, resp. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. ST II-II, q. 11, a. 2, ad. 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. ST II-II, q. 5, a. 3, ad. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. Although the proximate end of heresy is a kind of intellectual pride, Aquinas also thinks one could be a heretic for covetousness as well as for more general pride; ST II-II, q. 11, a. 1, ad. 2. [“the proximate end of heresy is adherence to one's own false opinion, and from this it derives its species, while its remote end reveals its cause, viz. that it arises from pride or covetousness.”] [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. FH, 75-76 gives a comparatively positive account of excommunication (Kvanvig calls this all “anathema”, but he seems to mean a practical sanction like excommunication) in the life of the early Church. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. FH, 145. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. This worry does not presume a “unity of the virtues” thesis (that one cannot have any of the virtues unless one has them all) which is an assumption Kvanvig explicitly denies (FH, 143). Rather, the worry is that, whether by itself or in combination with any other virtuous states, affective faith only appears valuable instrumental to attain some other intrinsically virtuous state or state of affairs. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. In small cases of theft or other mildly evil actions, we are perhaps willing sometimes to call thieves “courageous” or having “faith” in what they’re doing. However, use of terms like these becomes grotesque in cases of serious evil. In fact, using these terms is precisely part of a justificatory strategy for serious evil. If we encountered a gravestone that proclaimed a Nazi war criminal a “courageous martyr to his faith in the Final Solution,” it seems to me we should, among other things, recognize that the language is being used to commend the goals and ideals of this person’s life, and that our utilizing this same language to describe Nazi war criminals as having “faith” or “courage” would make us participants in their moral evil. That language would be supremely inappropriate because their ideals are morally disgusting. [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
82. Kvanvig’s non-cognitive faith is comparable to Aquinas’ account of the virtue of fortitude. Aquinas characterizes fortitude in this way: “Fortitude denotes a certain firmness of mind…and this firmness of mind is required both in doing good and in enduring evil, especially with regard to goods or evils that are difficult,…so as not to forsake the good on account of difficulties, whether in accomplishing an arduous work, or in enduring grievous evil” (ST II-II, q. 139, a. 1, resp. ). However, Aquinas’ account would be preferable to Kvanvig at least insofar as Thomas rejects that one can be courageous or have fortitude in regard to an evil end - fortitude is only a virtue in regard to good ends. Much of Kvanvig’s analysis of affective faith, otherwise, seems to me quite complementary to Aquinas’ notion of fortitude and might even enhance it in various respects. I would suggest that Aquinas’ account of fortitude might, at least at some points, be more perspicuous and inclusive of different species of the virtue of fortitude than Kvanvig’s account. Aquinas can account for how grace is required for some kinds of fortitude, but that fortitude generally speaking can be practiced without specifically religious ends. Thus, there are various species for Aquinas, from natural fortitude, to infused fortitude, to the Gift of the Holy Spirit which is fortitude.To give a rough and quick overview, these states differ based on the end (the ideal) to which a human is oriented: the natural virtue is pursuit of human goods, whereas infused virtue and the Gift are in pursuit of supernatural goods. Then the Gift differs from the infused virtue because the human relies on God moving them ‘directly’ in the Gift rather than a habit intrinsic to themselves, as in the case of the infused virtue. C.f., ST II-II, q. 123-140. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
83. A similar point even about language of “virtues” bears mentioning. In cases some kinds, we are willing sometimes to call thieves “courageous” or having “faith” in what they’re doing. However, use of terms like these becomes grotesque in cases of serious evil. In fact, using these terms can be recognized as part of a justificatory strategy for that evil. If we encountered a gravestone that proclaimed a Nazi war criminal a “courageous martyr to his faith in the Final Solution,” it seems to me we should, among other things, recognize that the language is being used to commend the goals and ideals of this person’s life. Our utilizing this same language to describe Nazi war criminals as having “faith” or “courage” would make us participants in their moral evil. So I am very disinclined to consider the commitments that motivate such persons even nominally “virtues.” [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
84. Kvanvig makes this point in the context of religious faith, *Faith and* Humility, 131. In order, for example, to correct the way some virtues can go wrong, Kvanvig seems to balance one virtue against another, as in the example that humility would be needed to correct ‘unbalanced’ affective faith; 152-153. [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
85. FH,198. [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
86. ST II-II, q. 1, a. 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
87. FH, 193-198. [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
88. This is true even if faith ceases to be operative in the afterlife. Faith is a valuable attitude toward God, whether it is replaced by another attitude or not. E.g., if I trust my parents as a child in their decision to have me learn a musical instrument, and then as an adult see good reasons to play an instrument, the attitude of trust is no less valuable even if it was no longer necessary to motivate my playing the instrument as an adult. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
89. FH, 105. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
90. FH, 93, 77, 166-118, 128, 136. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
91. FH, 116. [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
92. Kvanvig, “Affective Theism,” 140. [↑](#endnote-ref-92)
93. FH, 114. [↑](#endnote-ref-93)
94. A final striking fact is that “grace” has no explicit place in Kvanig’s account and is not (as far as I can see) mentioned at all in the context of religious faith presented in *Faith and Humility*. Rather, Kvanvig sees faith as a natural, human virtue which can take religious ideals as its object. Grace seems necessary, then, only to provide us with information about a uniquely Christian ideal – committing to an ideal seems an ordinary human activity otherwise. Specifically too, it seems a problem that Christ plays no important role in salvation beyond being an example of conduct; people with no experience of Christ can commit to a similar pattern of behavior as Christ’s. If such help from God is needed, the need for such help seems to be for reasons external to faith itself. But this seems very close to classical Pelagianism, which held that, apart from Christ’s example, we need no other special help from God in living a good life. C.f., Joseph Pohle,"Pelagius and Pelagianism," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 11 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911): http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11604a.htm (accessed 7 Feb. 2019). [↑](#endnote-ref-94)
95. Jonathan Kvanvig, “Affective Theism and People of Faith,” in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* XXXVII (2013): 126. [↑](#endnote-ref-95)
96. The story can be gleaned both from the more direct narration in FH, 82-88, but also 75, 136, and 199-201. [↑](#endnote-ref-96)
97. Modern historical scholarship might call into question aspects of Kvanvig’s history. For example, see the overview of recent historical research about earliest devotion to Jesus in Larry W. Hurtdao, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 2005). Or, Henry Chadwick also has a celebrated history of the early Church, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1968). [↑](#endnote-ref-97)
98. Kvanvig gives some of these paraphrases in FH, 75-76. [↑](#endnote-ref-98)
99. The non-cognitivist programme resembles, in important ways, the programmes outlined by Kant or Schleiermacher in regard to religion, and anyone is perfectly free to embrace such a programme, but we should have no illusions that their programmes are very different from traditional Christianity. [↑](#endnote-ref-99)
100. Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Volume 1, revised edition, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC : CUA Press, 2005), 289. [↑](#endnote-ref-100)
101. I want to thank, in particular, three anonymous referees, whose comments were immensely helpful in improving the paper. [↑](#endnote-ref-101)