


# Doxastic and epistemological justification of religious beliefs in a secular age

**Author:**Aku S. Antombikums<sup>1,2</sup> **Affiliations:**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Systematic and Historical Theology, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities, Faculty of Religion and Theology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

**Corresponding author:**

Aku Antombikums,  
antombikums@gmail.com

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Although most of the world today is religious, there has always been resentment against religious beliefs, given that they are thought not to be empirically verifiable. This article examines the doxastic justification of religious belief. The article focusses on the question of whether faith can be epistemically justified in a secular age where scepticism towards religious claims is prevalent. The article draws insight from contemporary epistemological theories of justification to investigate if religious beliefs are rationally and logically viable today. To do this, the article argues that faith is a belief-forming process which is first internalised before it is practised. Further, it argues that belief has a practical relevance in daily living. Furthermore, the article argues that religious beliefs can be epistemically justified because experience can be considered evidence. In the end, the article concludes that to be epistemologically unjustifiable, the internal witnesses of a religious belief must contradict its praxis.

**Contribution:** This article contributes to the ongoing debate by arguing that rather than placing the burden of proof on the religious worshipper to epistemically justify their beliefs, the evidentialists and contemporary critics of Christianity have the burden of proof for their claims against the Christian religious beliefs.

**Keywords:** doxastic justification; evidence; religious beliefs; epistemology; secular age; doxastic integrity.

## Introduction

At least since the Enlightenment (Duarte 2020)<sup>1</sup> period or as far back as the 7th century AD (Alston 2005), the viability and basis of religious beliefs, including religious experiences, have been questioned.<sup>2</sup> Understandably, given that the subject of belief, especially in the Abrahamic religions, is considered immaterial, one is then faced with the daunting challenge of providing concrete-based evidence for their faith. Gettier (1963), in his famous paper:

'Is Justified Belief Knowledge?' argued that '... for any proposition P, if S is justified in believing P, and P entails Q, and S deduces Q from P and accepts Q as a result of this deduction, then S is justified in believing Q'. (p. 121)

Although Gettier had other propositions to illustrate his argument, if we were to stick to the foregoing schema, we could still deduce what his response would be to such a question as: Are there grounds to hold religious beliefs in a secular age? Gettier's response is not in the affirmative. However, there are certainly going to be desiderata for what counts as a justified belief (Alston 2005).

The call for the justification of religious beliefs has been an essential notion in epistemology. Critics argue that religious claims cannot be empirically verified. What constitutes a justification and who determines what is justified is an interesting side of the debate. Given that critics are sceptical of religious claims, Sartre (2007), a continental philosopher, and Russell (1927), for instance, argue that religion is a product of human figmentation. At the same time, Marx (1844) sees religion merely as the *opium* of the masses. Religion has been regarded merely as an anaesthesia suppressing only the symptoms but offering no real healing for precarious human conditions.

1. Given that there is also what others call *Christian* enlightenment (Kidd 2013), I am using the term from the perspective that it is anti-religion, considering it to be irrational and, therefore, lacking a justifiable basis (Pocock 1999).

2. In 1999, Matthew C. Bagger wrote an important book entitled *Religious Experience, Justification, and History*, which is an excellent book summarising the debate on the justification of religious beliefs with a concrete historical perspective. Bagger broadly divides the responses by apologists into a *doxastic practice approach* and *argument from perception* approaches. Readers interested in the development of these debates will enjoy reading this masterpiece.

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In the end, it is regarded as a tool for the mental enslavement of people of colour.<sup>3</sup> Critics further argued that religion is a political tool for manipulating the masses for the selfish interest of the political elites who are themselves not serious religious practitioners.

Given that questions related to the justification of religious beliefs are mostly propositional and doxastic in nature, I will focus on doxastic justifications of religious beliefs, especially in Christianity. In other words, whether practically speaking, what A believes is rational, not in the sense of propositional rationality or on the availability of empirical evidence for such beliefs, but based on A's current beliefs. In other words, it is not based on God's existence or whether Christ truly got incarnated, died and was resurrected but on whether the entire Christian belief system is rationally justified. That is, whether A can be doxastically justified if A's belief in God fits within A's broader set of beliefs, experiences and perceptions, even if A lacks independent or empirical evidence that would convince others. To do this, the article explores the epistemological dimensions of doxastic justification in religious belief. The article focusses on how faith is justified in an era marked by secularisation and pluralism. The article engages with contemporary debates on evidentialism, reformed epistemology and the role of experience in religious belief to illuminate how faith can maintain epistemic and doxastic integrity in a secular context.

## Conceptual clarifications

Doxastic justification relates to the justification of a belief (doxa) in a way that it meets certain epistemic standards, typically involving presenting justifiable evidence or reasons for holding that belief (Nescolarde-Selva et al. 2023). In epistemology, justification can be understood through two primary points of view: internalism, which asserts that a person must be aware of the reasons and have access to the reasons justifying their belief (Feldman & Conee 2001). In contrast, externalism holds that epistemic justification of religious claims depends on factors outside of one's cognition. This includes such factors as the reliability of the belief-forming process (Plantinga 1993).

Doxastic justification has been understood differently by philosophers, especially from the continental and analytic traditions. For instance, Moser (1985) argues that a belief is justified when it is rightly directed to the goal of such a belief:

... epistemic justification is essentially related to the so-called cognitive goal of truth, insofar as an individual belief is epistemically justified only if it is appropriately directed toward the goal of truth. (pp. 4–5)

<sup>3</sup>There seems to be a growing resentment against religious beliefs among young people in the Global South. Many of these young people, especially in Africa, have preferred returning to traditional religions or rejecting the notion of religious beliefs in general. Most of them believe that Christianity, in particular, is a white man's religion, which has been used since the time of colonisation for the mental enslavement of Africans so the West can easily control them. African youths' resentment of religious beliefs based on their claim that Christianity, in particular, was and is still a colonial tool seems to have arisen from post-colonial epistemology, which argues that other traditions outside Western traditions have their distinctive ways of determining what constitutes knowledge (see De Sousa Santos 2021; Gavristova & Khokholkova 2022).

That is, to say a belief is justified, the believer must act in such a way that their actions agree with their set of beliefs in a teleological fashion. This means that my doxastic attitude D towards a religious claim R can only be epistemically justified if only having such a doxastic attitude towards religious beliefs does not negate any evidence I have for such a doxastic attitude consistently (Feldman & Conee 1985):

A justified belief is what a person who is motivated by intellectual virtue, and who has the understanding of his cognitive situation a virtuous person would have, might believe in like circumstances. (Zagzebski 1996:241)

In the modern secular age, doxastic justification of religious beliefs becomes more contested than in the previous traditional context, given that it is believed that religious beliefs cannot be justified in the same way as empirical evidence. This is particularly true, especially from an evidentialist perspective, where every belief must have proportionate shreds of evidence to such a belief. In that case, religious beliefs are considered not epistemically justified given that what constitutes empirical evidence, from the religious perspective, differs significantly from what it is in evidentialism or the natural sciences. However, as far as we are concerned in this article, religious beliefs are epistemically justified but not in the same way a subject is empirically justified in evidentialism.

Alston (2005) argues that in evaluating what constitutes justified knowledge, many issues could be considered, for instance, virtue. In other words, is there a place for epistemic humility in conceptualising what constitutes a justified belief? Who determines what is justified belief, and to what extent can that be determined? Alston (2005) believes that as soon as intellectual virtues such as epistemic humility are introduced in the context of epistemic justification, including taking epistemic subjects, cognitive agents or persons into account, it could result in a robust interaction on what amounts to an epistemic justification of religious beliefs.

Understanding religion as a social construct also and applying a social aspect of epistemology in extrapolating whether it is justified or not is essential. Alston (2005) argues that social epistemology takes both religious and scientific knowledge as social realities that must be understood by deducing how social interactions work in a society. In other words, as religious practices are exemplified in religious communities, an outsider to such religious communities cannot *prima facie* determine whether it is justified or not, just the way we cannot decide that one's culture is inferior or superior to another's without committing a propositional fallacy.

Deducing from the foregoing, what constitutes a justified belief is not that which can be logically or rationally justified in the estimation of the scientist seeking empirical veracity for such a belief:

The rational belief is the belief which does not violate our noetic obligations. The rational belief is the belief which, by reference to our noetic obligations, is permitted...To be rational in one's believings amounts to doing as well in the firmness and

reality-possession dimensions of one's believing as can rightly be demanded of one. (Wolterstorff 1983:144)

## Measuring the adequacy of the grounds of belief

Alston (2005:81) argues that for one to have adequate grounds for holding a certain belief, such grounds should include the following:

1. The subject (S) has adequate evidence (reasons, grounds ...) for the belief (B).
2. B is based on adequate evidence (reasons, grounds ...).
3. B was formed by a sufficiently reliable belief-forming process.
4. B was formed by the proper functioning of S's cognitive faculties.
5. B was formed by the exercise of an intellectual virtue.

In my estimation and drawing from Alston (2005), further desiderata for doxastic justification of religious beliefs may include the following: (1) Is the belief consistent? (2) Is it coherent? No religious practitioners will believe that their claims are faulty. Every believer thinks they hold the truth. What is truth is also a subject of debate in the secular world. However, what constitutes truth in Christianity is Christ, whom the Scriptures testify about. On several occasions during his earthly ministry, Christ insisted that he is the truth. This affirmation contradicts the secular notion of the truth as relativised today.

The burden of proof for doxastic justification does not lie with the believer, who has now suspended all attempts for further investigation concerning the truth and has come to a conclusion based on their evidence that they have the truth. Therefore, if anyone has the truth or can disprove the veracity of their claims, then yes, their belief is not only unjustifiable, but the sacred text is also not epistemologically justified.

Although Plantinga (1981) disagrees with the term 'justification' as applied to the veracity of religious beliefs, given that the term is understood differently, especially in Christianity and prefers to use the term 'warrant', I will not make such a distinction in this article. Plantinga (1993) argues that beliefs are continuing conscious mental states that only the one possessing them has infallible access to them. In some cases, the one holding such mental states is unaware of their existence. Such mental states shape and define how the one holding them behaves. In other words, such mental states determine one's reaction or attitude towards a thing or a person. The holder of such mental states is thus justified in holding such beliefs even if they are unwarranted or unjustifiable to an external observer. He argues that, to some extent, belief is passive and involuntary.

Christian philosophers have continually argued that although it is the case that the believer may not be able to provide such concrete evidence for their belief as demanded in the sciences, doxastic justification of religious beliefs insists

that it is not obligatory for the believer to provide such concrete evidence for her belief to be justified because the object of belief transcends empirical verification which must be accepted by faith. For instance, Tucker (2024) argues that:

In the absence of further considerations, if you have paradigmatic evidence for P, then it is reasonable for you to believe P and unreasonable for you to disbelieve or withhold judgment about it. (p. 27)

Reisner (2017) argues that there are pragmatic reasons for belief, which could be considered truth-convergent reasons for belief, as well as truth-non-convergent pragmatic reasons for belief. The former has an alethic basis, while the latter does not. In a secular age, as characterised by Taylor (2007), belief in God is not only challenged by the rising dominance of scientific rationalism but is also seen as one option among many.

## Religious claims under fire: Apologetic responses

### The challenges of pluralism

Taylor (2007) outlines how religious belief in the modern era is not only characterised by plurality but also seems contestable. In other words, given the nature of the modern world and the plurality of religious beliefs, religious claims are becoming more contested than before. As far as Taylor is concerned, one's religious view is no longer absolute but one among many religious worldviews. Pluralism, as a result, introduces the condition of beliefs in which religious beliefs are contested and challenged by other religious worldviews, offering alternative responses to both secular and spiritual existential questions. The notion of a transcendent being seems to have been lost amid modern secular understanding (Taylor 1995, 2007).

The major challenge to belief in the modern secular context is the fact that the plurality of religious beliefs presents a paradox to the worshipper, given that the exclusivity of one's faith is at a crossroads. In this case, the epistemic status of one's faith may be highly contested and challenged. Additionally, it seems that when the epistemic status of one's faith is contested, its epistemic worth may diminish. Furthermore, a clear mark of secularism is the exclusion of religious beliefs from the public domain: it is now a private matter. Contrary to this conclusion, Taylor (2007, cf. Smith 2014) believes that although secularisation challenges the traditional notions of faith, it nevertheless nuances the notion of cross-pressures in which faith or belief and doubt could conveniently coexist. Also, another element that seems to be at the heart of secularism is what Taylor (1991a, 1991b) regards as the 'primacy of instrumental reasoning'. Furthermore, the secular context claims to provide empirical responses to the questions of life. As a result, is there any justification for religious belief when the modern secular context could provide not only alethic alternate responses to life questions but also empirical ones? Ultimately, the epistemological ambivalence presented by the modern secular age invites

religious philosophers and theologians to a reevaluation of how religious beliefs are justified.

## The new atheism

Hahn and Wiker (2008) regard new atheism as:

A cadre of militant unbelievers calling themselves The Four Horsemen – Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and Daniel Dennett – have assumed the leadership of a growing Anglo-American movement, releasing volley after volley of bestsellers and DVDs into the Christian culture. (p. 1; Peels 2023)

The aim is the secularisation of an entire globe without God. Will they succeed? I doubt. However, it indicates that the task of apologetics is increasingly becoming very complicated and challenging. No doubt, there are many reasons to question the validity of religious beliefs today, and at the same time, there are many reasons to think positively about them. In what might be regarded as a ground-breaking book from the atheistic perspective (unfortunately, most of the arguments have been shattered by many eminent philosophers and theologians)<sup>4</sup> against religious beliefs, Richard Dawkins, in his book *God delusion* (2006), puts up several defences against theism. He argues that ‘...one of the truly bad effects of religion is that it teaches us that it is a virtue to be satisfied with not understanding’ (Dawkins 2006:126). *Prima facie*, this statement implies that religious beliefs are not only irrational but lack elements of intellectuality. To buttress this point further, Dawkins argues that ‘faith is an evil precisely because it requires no justification and brooks no argument’ (Dawkins 2006:308). When it comes to the God of the Bible, especially as we see in the Old Testament, Dawkins argued that he is the *most unpleasant character in all fiction* because God, as seen in the Old Testament, is petty, a bloody ethnic cleanser, homophobic, a racist, proud, jealous, capriciously malevolent bully, unforgiving control freak and the like (Dawkins 2006).

However, whether it is accurate that faith lacks elements of intellectuality and rationality needs not to be a difficult subject. As hinted already and as I will be establishing in this article, the Christian faith, in particular, operates based on faith-seeking understanding. Additionally, Dawkins’ description of the God of the Old Testament is no new news and, indeed, gives grounds for doubting the existence of God, especially from the problem of evil. However, most religious people know that their suffering and the presence of a plethora of evil in the world do not necessarily disprove the existence of God. Further, Dawkins’ criticism of religious beliefs as static, brooking no further evidence, could be regarded as counter-productive against Dawkins himself, given his ardent belief in fate or chance (Hahn & Wiker 2008).

4. See Hahn and Wiker (2008), for an excellent rejoinder which dismantles the new atheism, including McGrath (2004). Readers who are interested in the new atheism may explore the writings of The Four Horsemen – Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens and Daniel Dennett (2007).

## Evidentialism and epistemic justification of religious beliefs

Clifford (1877:70) champions an evidential philosophy arguing that ‘it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence’. Van Inwagen, like Clifford, argues ‘It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to ignore evidence that is relevant to his beliefs, or to dismiss relevant evidence in a facile way’ (Van Inwagen 1996:145). Based on these two propositions, among others, evidentialism argues that religious beliefs do not have sufficient evidence to be justified. For instance, evidentialism argues that there is no empirical or verifiable evidence for such theistic claims as the existence of God, miracles or the afterlife. A theist may argue that there are a plethora of miracles today which are scientifically proven. However, given that religious claims require faith, one without faith may not experience miracles as a believer will do today. In that case, the doubter does not meet the requirements for receiving a miracle. In the end, it seems there are no reasons to present evidential arguments to counter evidentialism (Peels 2023). However, as I am arguing in this article, what I find as the strongest defence against evidentialism is the internal witness of religious beliefs.

## Reformed epistemology and properly basic beliefs

Religious philosophers of the Reformed tradition developed what they call Reformed epistemology. Reformed epistemology offers an externalist account of doxastic justification that challenges evidentialist norms. For instance, Plantinga (1981) argues that the belief in God can be properly basic. This is because the Christian religious belief does not require inferential authentication from other belief systems. On the contrary, religious beliefs are justified given that they arise from cognitive faculties that are functioning properly in an appropriate religious context (Plantinga 1993).

The argument is that religious beliefs are not considered justified because they do not meet certain criteria from non-religious practitioners like meeting several stringent standards of evidentialism arising from empirical sciences. On the contrary, religious beliefs are justified because they arise from a reliable belief-forming process over time. For instance, someone might come to believe in God through a religious experience or an innate sense of the divine, which Plantinga (1983) considers reliable sources of belief.

No doubt, despite its impact in shifting the conversation arising from religious epistemology because of challenges from evidentialism and offering a robust defence of religious beliefs in a secular age, Reformed epistemology is not without critics. Critics argue that the notion of ‘proper basicity’ seems to nuance various conflicting belief systems that cannot all be true, thus undermining its epistemic credibility (Fales 2003).

## The epistemic values of religious beliefs

Given the nature of the object of religious worship, namely immateriality, it becomes necessary for the divine being to



undergo some form of condensation (Antombikums 2025) for the purpose of the divine-human relationship. In other words, because religious beliefs cannot be empirically experienced and, therefore, not justified as understood in evidentialism, there must be a way in which a religious belief is experienced and, therefore, authenticated. As a result, the notion of revelation (Antombikums 2024a), a form of religious experience is upheld in Christianity. Based on religious experiences, religious beliefs may, to some extent, be justified in that the believer has evidence for what they believe. Tucker (2024) and Kelly (2014) argue that:

Evidence, whatever else it is, is the kind of thing which can make a difference to what one is *justified* in believing or ... what it is *reasonable* for one to believe. (p. 1)

In this case, religious experiences can be considered knowledge and therefore, evidence for religious beliefs.

From this, many religious adherents justify their beliefs through religious experience. James (1902), in his *The varieties of religious experience*, argues that religious experiences are a source of knowledge about God. James' (1902) pragmatic approach posits that the effect of religious experiences on the believer's life provides a form of epistemic justification.

More recent scholars have gone further than James' work, arguing that religious experiences give us unique epistemic access to realities that cannot be empirically investigated. For example, Swinburne's (2004) principle of credulity argues that if it appears to someone that they are experiencing God, such a person is justified in believing it unless there is strong evidence to the contrary.

Notwithstanding the overwhelming support of religious experiences today, critics argue that they are subjective and culturally conditioned and, therefore, not a reliable source of knowledge. The psychological and sociocultural factors that influence religious experiences, as explored by Freud (1927) and Durkheim (1912), suggest that such experiences may not provide a reliable epistemic basis for belief.

## Faith and reason

A major issue in the epistemology of religious belief is the relationship between faith and reason. Some theologians and philosophers argue that faith and reason are complementary, while others say they operate in separate domains. However, I have always believed that the two are not antagonists. Philosophy is both a faithful and troublesome maid that Christian thought cannot be alienated from because Christian thought is also a form of philosophy and allows for the cross-fertilisation of thoughts between the two. Nevertheless, philosophy does not dictate what is epistemically justified from the religious point of view. It is the Scriptures that determine that.<sup>5</sup> Thomas Aquinas, for example, argues that while some religious truths can be demonstrated or explicated through reason (e.g. the existence of God), others (e.g. the

Trinity) are beyond reason (Aquinas 1947). Faith-seeking understanding has been the traditional motto of medieval philosophers and theologians.<sup>6</sup>

Fideistic thinkers such as Kierkegaard believe that faith involves a 'leap' beyond reason. According to Kierkegaard (1985), faith in God is not the result of rational reasoning but rather an existential choice made in the face of uncertainty. In other words, what constitutes faith as against reason is the fact that faith seems to suspend further search for evidence and is contended with what is presented before the religious practitioner. In that case, what constitutes a justification of religious beliefs is not empirical evidence but the individual's commitment to belief. This commitment, in most cases, results from religious experience.

Other contemporary researchers of religious epistemology focus on bridging the gap between faith and reason, particularly through the lens of virtue epistemology. Zagzebski (1996), for example, argues that faith can be seen as a kind of intellectual virtue, one that aims at truth while recognising the limitations of human reason. This approach provides a way to reconcile faith with the demands of epistemic justification by highlighting the role of intellectual humility and trust in belief formation.

## Doxastic voluntarism and the ethics of belief

Following from the fact that the nature of the evidence for religious beliefs seems subjective, one wonders if religious experience which, when understood psychologically, has led to the conclusion that religious beliefs are irrational, is voluntary. In other words, the subjectivity of religious experiences and the lack of empirical evidence for religious beliefs seem to suggest that religious practitioners are not intellectually sound for believing against all odds. A compelling question that arises is whether religious beliefs are voluntarily upheld, and if so, do we have a moral obligation to ensure that our beliefs are justified? Doxastic voluntarism, which is the idea that we can choose our religious beliefs, has now been widely rejected (Boespflug & Jackson 2024). Many philosophers argue that belief is not under direct voluntary control; we find ourselves believing certain things because of the evidence or reasons that present themselves to us (Alston 1989). Also, the notions of *sensus divinitatis* and *semenus religionis* come in to here (Calvin 1960). If it is the case that every human has a sense of divinity and a seed of a religion, then one may be said not to believe voluntarily. However, I believe that one, to some extent, can choose what they believe because every religion has evidence and this evidence may be tested by the believers and believed to be justified in some sense. Further, given that there abounds a plethora of religious cross-carpeting among many strong religious adherents, one can argue that religious beliefs, although they have divine connections, require human assents.

5. See my article on analytical philosophy and scriptural interpretations for further discussion on this subject.

6. In his proslodium, Anselm argues that 'The believer does not seek to understand, that he may believe, but he believes that he may understand: for unless he believed he would not understand' (Anselm 1923: Proslodium, l:4).

Whether religious beliefs are upheld voluntarily or not, Clifford (1877), in his ethics of beliefs, argues that every religious adherent has to ensure their beliefs are epistemically justified. In religious contexts, this raises the question of whether faith can be held responsibly in light of contrary evidence. Feldman (2000) argues that responsible belief requires proportioning belief to the evidence. That is, the nature of one's religious beliefs depends, to some extent, on the nature of the available evidence for such a belief. Contrarily, the likes of Plantinga argue that religious belief can be held responsibly even without evidential support as long as it comes from reliable belief-forming mechanisms.

## Religious beliefs and cognitive science

Recent work in cognitive science seems to provide new insights into how religious beliefs are formed and maintained. Scholars such as Barrett (2004) argue that belief in God is a natural byproduct of cognitive processes designed to detect agency in the world. The 'hyperactive agency detection' theory argues that humans are predisposed to believe in supernatural agents because they conferred evolutionary advantages.

While this naturalistic explanation of religious belief might seem to undermine its epistemic justification, proponents of reformed epistemology argue that cognitive science does not negate the truth of religious belief but rather explains how humans are designed to be receptive to the divine (Plantinga 2011). Although this seems to be the case, critics argue to the contrary. Critics believe that cognitive science, instead of authenticating religious beliefs, has rather provided compelling reasons that challenge the reliability of religious belief (McKay & Dennett 2009).

Whatever one's view is, the fact that everyone holds a form of belief, be it religious or non-religious, one has a basis to argue that belief is not only rationally justified but practically relevant for humans (Buchak 2017), especially for nourishing their souls and the flourishing of their minds and bodies.

There is an almost universal fallacy today that takes it for granted that for a certain truth to be considered rational and therefore justified, that is epistemologically viable, it must lack elements of mythology or any connection to an immaterial divine being. From the perspective of this fallacy, religious claims are considered as lacking warrant. However, many people seem to be unaware that Greek philosophers, for instance, did not always claim to philosophise devoid of transcendent beings. Such was the case with Parmenides and even Boethius, a Roman philosopher. In his only known work, *On Nature*, Parmenides claims that a divine chariot led him to the presence of the goddess of truth and wisdom, who revealed the way of *aletheia* [truth] to him contrary to opinions, that is self-acclaimed knowledge. In this encounter, Parmenides felt that from this time onward, he was illuminated with a pearl of unusual wisdom beyond human reasoning (Antombikums

2024b; Coxon 1986). Therefore, knowledge proceeding from religious beliefs can be considered justified truth.

Because belief involves faith (Cohen 2024), it seems one would not be able to arrive at empirical evidence because faith, from a Christian perspective, is a state of affairs that does not require the exercise of intellect. This does not presuppose that the one holding a certain doxastic attitude must accept such an attitude only when there is no concrete empirical evidence for such a state of affairs or if such a state of affairs is beyond the scope of empirical enquiry. On the contrary, as the anselmic motto, *fides quarens intellectum*, suggests, seeking further evidence or an enquiry to establish if one's doxastic attitude is justified is not an expression of a lack of faith. In other words, faith, as argued here, is a matter of the heart and not of the head. As the common saying goes, beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, so is faith. Faith requires no external evidence to authenticate if the belief system is justified or not.

To return to the question of whether there are grounds for doxastic justification of religious beliefs in a secular age, it is clear that the term justification in Christian thought has nothing to do with evidence but rather refers to a declaration or a statement of truth. Justification has to do with making right of doxastic attitudes by the object of belief contingent on the faith of the believer, that is, the one having faith. Because faith is a doxastic attitude that is exemplified by both religious and non-religious people, to conclude that religious beliefs cannot be justified would be unwarranted. Doxastic justification entails suspending further attempts at searching for concrete evidence to justify one's beliefs (Buchak 2012). In other words, it is realising that there is no further evidence that can be more sufficient than what now stares at the face of the believer. It does not matter whether searching for further evidence is costly or not.

We have faith (Buchak 2012) in mundane things in most cases because of utilitarian or what might be referred to as teleological motifs. If that is the case, religious beliefs are practically and epistemically rational, especially if there are no sufficient reasons for searching for further evidence or justification for one's beliefs. For instance, we have faith in our employers, employees or colleagues when we entrust certain responsibilities to them. A counterargument would be that we do so based on the fact that we know that they can execute the said assignment effectively, especially given their antecedent. However, it cannot be denied that every state of affairs that needs to be brought about by free moral agents has a probability of not turning out excellently as projected, no matter how minuscule the percentage of such a probability is.

## Internal justification of religious beliefs: Doxastic integrity?

Contrary to evidentialism, this article argues that the essential desiderata in determining if one is justified in holding a set of religious beliefs should be whether, doxastically speaking,

the person's actuality of doxastic attitude aligns with their belief system. Given that the notion of belief is a daily reality that cannot be expunged from the attitude of free moral agents through which we hold each other responsible, it is impossible to consider the doxastic attitude of a religious believer irrational or lacking credence unless everything that involves having faith becomes irrational (Buchak 2014).

From the foregoing, we must speak about doxastic integrity as the primary basis for determining the epistemic justification of any religious beliefs. To ascertain whether a belief system is not justified, it must lack internal rationality. Therefore, the one holding a set of religious beliefs must exhibit a belief-congruent doxastic attitude. If this is not the case, especially in praxis, then such a belief system is not doxastically justified. Further to ascertain if a set of religious beliefs is justified is to determine if there is an authenticity in religious commitment from the religious practitioner. In other words, taking from the vantage of virtue epistemology, religious beliefs should not only be regarded as justified because the one holding such a belief can provide rational justification for such a belief system but whether the religious practitioner does not doubt their set of beliefs. Additionally, there are also pragmatic considerations in determining whether religious beliefs are justified. In his 'Will to believe', James (1896) argues that one's doxastic attitudes must align with one's belief system; otherwise, it could result in epistemic insincerity.

In my estimation, for a religious belief to fail to be doxastically justified in line with the foregoing, it must be that the religious believer professes one thing but acts another. For instance:

- Speaking about faith but full of doubt and fear.
- Emphasising judgement over grace and mercy.
- Being hypocritical in contrast to maintaining integrity.
- Claiming God's generosity and love while being insatiable.
- Speaking about serving a just God while perverting justice among many.

In other words, a belief system can only be considered doxastically unjustified when contrasted against its internal evidence and not external ones. The rationality of Christianity and all other world religions must be justified first by their internal witnesses before it may be contrasted by external ones. In doing so, one may ask if it is okay to believe, to be gracious and merciful, to be a person of integrity, to be generous and to allow justice to flow like a river against taking someone's life or disrespecting a certain gender in the name of religion. Evidentialism should only challenge Christianity based on its internal witnesses in relation to praxis. That is, whether what is taught is against what is practised.

## Conclusion

In a pluralistic and secular age, justifying religious beliefs demands a careful balancing between doxastic and

epistemological frameworks. Doxastic justification, which emphasises the authenticity and coherence of a belief system, offers an internally justifiable reason for maintaining religious beliefs grounded in personal conviction. However, in a secular context, this method often encounters pushback, especially from evidentialism, given the alleged subjectivity of religious claims, which are considered to be disconnected from widely accepted epistemic standards. On the other hand, epistemological justification – validating beliefs through external evidence and reason – provides a pathway for religious beliefs to connect with secular epistemic criteria. Yet, this approach also faces hurdles, as many religious beliefs are based on metaphysical claims that cannot be empirically verified.

This article argues that notwithstanding the criticism of evidentialism, religious beliefs are justified because experience is also a form of evidence. I argue that to dismiss religious claims because they fail to meet certain criteria or desiderata from evidentialism or secularism is not warranted because everyone has faith, religious or non-religious. As a result, the justification of religious beliefs has to do with its internal coherences in relation to praxis. Ultimately, validating religious belief in a secular age requires a balance between acknowledging the constraints of secular rationality and affirming the existential and moral significance of faith.

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### Author's contribution

A.S.A. is the sole author of this research article.

### Ethical considerations

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The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research.



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