FAITH THROUGH THE DARK OF NIGHT: 
WHAT PERSEVERANCE AMIDST DOUBT CAN 
TEACH US ABOUT THE NATURE AND 
VALUE OF RELIGIOUS FAITH 

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Faith plays a valuable role in sustaining relationships through various kinds of challenges, including through evidentially unfavorable circumstances and periods of significant doubt. But if, as is widely assumed, both faith in God and faith that God exists require belief that God exists, and if one’s beliefs are properly responsive to one’s evidence, the capacity for faith to persevere amidst significant and well-grounded doubt will be fairly limited. Taking Mother Teresa as an exemplar of Christian faith and exploring the close connection between faith and faithfulness in the context of committed covenantal relationships, I set out a view of Relational Faith that does not assume that faith requires belief and allows wide room for honestly wrestling with doubt from within the Judeo-Christian tradition. 

1. Introduction 

Assessments of the value of faith differ widely and, unsurprisingly, are highly dependent on what one takes faith to be. Where “faith” functions primarily as a conversation stopper in response to legitimate requests for evidence, it looks more like a vice than a virtue. There is more agreement, perhaps, that there is an important and valuable place for faith in ordinary interpersonal relationships—in marriage, in friendship, and all kinds of social relations.¹ But even here faith can be a puzzling phenomenon. It is relatively easy to place your trust in someone when you have great reason to be confident that they are reliable and know that they are there for you. Yet those are the circumstances in which it is least clear that faith is needed or that there is a distinctive role for faith to play. 

My topic concerns the nature and value of religious faith and I want to approach this issue by reflecting on the value of perseverance in faith through periods of significant doubt. Not all religions call for faith or assign it equal importance. I will focus on the tradition that I know best, 

¹Preston-Roedder, “Faith in Humanity”; and Rice, McKaughan, and Howard-Snyder “Approaches to Faith.”
Christianity—though much of what I say could apply with only minor modifications at least to other Abrahamic traditions such as Judaism and Islam. In my view, what is most valuable and philosophically interesting about faith is most apparent amidst life’s challenges and uncertainties. I will argue that faith and doubt are compatible in a way and to an extent that belief and doubt are not and, consequently, that there is a lot more room to wrestle honestly with doubt from within these traditions than is often appreciated. In Section 2, I explain why I find a prevailing approach to trying to understand faith to be superficial and problematic, and then sketch an alternative framework for identifying faith as a particular kind of stance. I then consider two distinctive views about the nature of faith in Sections 3 and 4. Section 5 considers Mother Teresa as an exemplar of faith and presents doubt as a problem for what I call the Belief Plus view of faith. Section 6 illustrates the valuable role that the form of Relational Faith I defend can play in helping relationships to persist in the midst of challenges and also the far greater extent to which it is compatible with doubt.

2. Identifying the Phenomenon with a Rough Initial Profile of Faith

One of the goals of philosophy of religion should be to understand various religious and non-religious forms of life in a deep way. I see a problem here with typical approaches to faith. We’ve become accustomed to dividing people into three familiar categories, theist, atheist, and agnostic, according to whether they believe, disbelieve, or suspend judgment that God (as characterized in classical theism) exists. It’s often assumed that religious affiliation lines up neatly with belief. In many Christian communities, the question “Are you a believer?” has become a kind of marker for identifying oneself and others as Christians. I worry that this invites a distressingly shallow view of faith and, just as importantly, what I take to be the mistaken assumption that faith requires belief. Let me explain.

Many of us are aware that our religious lives, and associated attitudes, are often more complex than this trichotomy suggests—sometimes in ways that are acknowledged within the sacred texts of our traditions. Consider Daemon. Daemon, let us suppose, fully believes that God exists and yet is entirely indifferent (or even averse) to this state of affairs (along the lines of James 2:9). Asked to consider the central content of the gospel, Daemon responds coldly: “Yes, but what of it?”—he does “not love [God] at all, nor even try to, nor trust him at all, nor pray to him, nor adore him.”2

“Such a person,” H. H. Price writes, “might as well be an atheist. Perhaps there is even a sense in which he is an atheist, despite the strength of his theistic convictions.”3

Contrast Daemon with Ariel, a college student who loves God and has given her life to Jesus, but now finds herself in a sea of doubt. Her study

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of science, philosophy, historical criticism of the Bible, and world religions has surfaced a lot of pointed questions about the religious tradition in which she was raised. Some of the unpleasant exchanges that she has had in internet chatrooms, combined with her mom’s struggle with cancer and the suicide of her best friend, have shaken what she has taken to be the foundations of her Christian commitment to her core. She finds it hard to see through the glass even darkly (1 Cor 13:12), but continues to set her heart on Jesus and cleaves firmly to the promises of the gospel. But, for some time now Ariel has been in serious doubt. When she is honest with herself she finds herself thinking that it is more likely that death is the end. She is unable to believe that Jesus was raised and that there is a God who will someday wipe away all her tears. Let’s be clear that there is a difference between failing to believe that $p$ is true and believing not-$p$ (i.e., that $p$ is false). Ariel fails to believe that God exists. But she does not flat-out believe that God does not exist or that death is the end, nor is she intellectually committed to that. Her evidence remains ambiguous enough for her to continue to entertain the good news as a live possibility. Moreover, Ariel recognizes that, if there is a God who created us and loves us, living in relation to God is among the highest of goods there could be. She has not given up hope and she still lives more or less as she did when she strongly believed that God exists. She still feels a deep longing for God and continues not just to participate in public worship and prayer but also to seek God earnestly and with a sense of urgency, as Price says, “inwardly,” in her own heart.

Can we conclude, ah well, that’s tough: Daemon is a theist and Ariel is an agnostic, or maybe even an atheist, and leave it at that? A philosopher who does say that will be missing out on a lot that is crucial for understanding what it is to have religious faith. Here we begin to see just how unilluminating the question “Are you a believer?” is as a window into the state of one’s spiritual life.

What exactly, or even approximately, is faith—as faith is understood in the Judeo-Christian tradition? When we look at a complex phenomenon like faith, I find it helpful to use what I call a “CAB” analysis, attending to the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects that the complex stance of faith/faithfulness involves. By asking questions such as “What is distinctive or characteristic about what one thinks, what one cares about, and what one does when one has faith or is in a relationship in which faith plays a central role?” we can work toward a cluster of criteria that give us a rough profile of faith.\(^4\) Christian faith typically involves both faith in a person (as

\(^4\) Rather than treating these criteria as necessary and sufficient conditions, I understand faith as a family resemblance or cluster concept that allows for various kinds of departures from paradigm cases. Moreover, strengths in one dimension can compensate for a significant lack in others. Our present focus is on cases of intellectual doubt. However, this way of characterizing faith allows that, just as one might lean on one’s affection for God or a resolute commitment to continue to engage in relevant voluntary actions to weather periods of doubt, strong cognitive judgements (such as confident belief or resolute acceptance) might combine with relatively weak affective or behavioral dispositions to fit faith’s profile in distinctive
something or other, e.g., having faith in Jesus as Messiah, as Lord, or as a carpenter or fluent speaker of Aramaic, but perhaps not as a Pharisee) and propositional faith (faith that something is the case, e.g., that God exists or other salient content). Paradigm cases of both of these types of faith involve some sort of positive cognitive attitude and positive affective-evaluative attitude toward the person or content that is the object of one’s faith, and various relevant behaviors, each of these three aspects of which is disposed to what Daniel Howard-Snyder calls “resilience” in the face of challenges.

In my view, much of what is most central to the response of faith can be located in the realm of action (as discussed in Section 4). But consider, first, the positive affective or evaluative aspect of faith. Having faith in a person, involves valuing, endorsing, or having affections appropriate toward them. Similarly, someone who has faith that God exists or that God will be faithful to such and such promises will care about whether the propositions in question are true, will want them to be the case, or will consider the truth of these propositions or the obtaining of these states of affairs to be good or desirable. For example, one reason to think that Daemon lacks faith in God is that he lacks a positive affective or evaluative orientation toward God. He believes that God exists, but does not value or revere God. He doesn’t take God’s existence to be a particularly good thing and he feels no affection for God. He is indifferent.

Second, faith often involves some sort of positive cognitive stance on the truth of relevant propositions. For the sake of clarity, let’s take care to distinguish content and attitudes here. Christianity has content in the sense that it represents reality as being a certain way. It has a stake in some particular claims about reality: the basic Christian proclamation, or kerygma, includes or presupposes claims such as that God exists, that Jesus was raised from the dead, and so on. I will refer to such content, as the core or salient content of Christianity. Don’t confuse a subject’s psychological state (propositional attitudes like believing, desiring, or being afraid that p) with the propositional content (p) or with truth (p actually being the case). If claims that are part of the essential content of Christianity are false (if they fail to match reality), then Christianity is false (mistaken, incorrect). With respect to

ways. The approach thus places substantive constraints on what counts as faith, allowing for clear cases on both sides, while also leaving quite a bit of latitude for accommodating cases of faith in the midst of severe depression or other sorts of spiritual struggles (such as cases of low affection or deficiencies in pro-attitudes relevant toward persistence), acceptance of a doctrine as an article of faith that one doesn’t regard as a good thing (e.g., that hell is populated), or physical paralysis (which might severely limit the expression of faith in outward behavior while not precluding a flourishing interior faith). An account sensitive to these and other possibilities may be particularly relevant for the characterization of faith in the Judeo-Christian tradition, where faith is clearly thought of as something that comes in degrees, and even people who are held up as paradigms of faith in scripture are noteworthy for the ways that they fail, struggle, and falter, in just the ways that we understand that even deep and sustained relationships can.

content, I am taking for granted a kind of theological realism, in contrast to a religious fictionalism which either denies or is indifferent to the reality of God, as part of the discussion. As the Apostle Paul says, “If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain” (1 Cor 15:14).

The focus of our present discussion of faith and its relationship to doubt is not about what the content of Christianity is but rather on what range of attitudes or psychological state types one can have toward that content and still have Christian faith.

With this rough profile of faith before us, let’s now contrast two more specific views about what Christian faith is.

3. Faith as Belief Plus?

Christian faith clearly involves more than believing. But does it involve at least that? According to one widely held view of faith, which I call the Belief Plus view, whatever else faith involves, faith requires belief. In order to satisfy the cognitive aspect of faith, a person must be in a particular cognitive psychological state: only believing will do. More precisely, the Belief Plus view claims that S can have Christian faith only if S believes its salient content. Belief of the salient content is necessary both for propositional faith in the salient content and for any faith in a person which presupposes the salient content.

We can see the implications that this view has for Ariel. Ariel has the positive affective/evaluative orientation and the positive behavioral orientation needed for faith. But, to her sorrow, the serious intellectual doubts she is confronting leave her without belief. Does this entail that she lacks faith? She couldn’t have faith on the Belief Plus view. Believing is surely one attitude that can serve as the positive cognitive attitude involved in faith. But I reject the claim that only believing will do. I see a failure of imagination here. And I intend to argue for the perhaps surprising claim that someone like Ariel can still have Christian faith.

It is difficult to assess the Belief Plus view unless we are told what believing amounts to. Roughly, we might say that for you to believe that p is for you to have a tendency for p to seem to be true when you consider it—for you to feel confident about it. For example, you believe that \(7 + 5 = 12\) and that there are other people. A majority of philosophers today think of belief and doubt as largely passive, involuntary psychological states that we simply find ourselves in. If you have a toothache, or see an oncoming truck on the highway veering into your lane, you can’t just decide not to believe these things. Beliefs are not typically under our direct voluntary control. But philosophers have attempted to define belief in a dizzying

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variety of ways. This presents a problem, because if I simply assume one of those particular definitions for the purposes of discussion, the sly proponent of the Belief Plus view might well say, that’s all very well but that’s not how I think about belief.

Fortunately, there is a way around this potential impasse. All I need to run my objections to the Belief Plus view is the concept of being in serious doubt—cases in which the doubt is so significant as to preclude belief on just about any plausible understanding of belief. Let me specify the sort of doubt I intend to focus on more precisely. For you to doubt that \( p \) might mean at least three different things. First, it might mean merely that you are uncertain about \( p \). Belief does not require certainty, so we should allow that it is compatible with some degree of doubt. (Some zealous theologians and philosophers have insisted that Christian faith requires not just belief but knowledge or certainty or really high confidence of the salient content, but let’s set that suggestion aside.) Second, at the other extreme, for you to doubt that \( p \) might mean that you believe that not-\( p \) (disbelieve \( p \)). That’s incompatible with belief that \( p \). Neither of those are what I have in view. My focus is on a third idea—being in doubt about whether \( p \)—cases where one neither believes that \( p \) nor believes that not-\( p \). But I am using the qualifiers “serious” or “significant” to indicate that I don’t mean to include only situations in which a person thinks that it is, say, roughly equally probable that God exists. Ariel is in serious doubt when, although Christianity remains a live possibility for her, she finds herself thinking that naturalism is more likely given her evidence. Where one’s serious or significant doubts are well-grounded, rational belief is precluded.

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7McKaughan, Toward a Richer Vocabulary for Epistemic Attitudes; and McKaughan and Elliott “Introduction.”

8Whereas many would maintain that one couldn’t believe that \( p \) if one’s probability for \( p \) was less than 0.5, a focus on serious doubt can also be used to preclude belief in the contrastive sense described by Richard Swinburne in Faith and Reason, 5–7. To illustrate, consider a group of competing football teams. You might think that the Patriots aren’t very likely to win the Super Bowl next year (maybe you take them to have just a 20% chance). But if you thought that it was more likely that they would win than any of the relevant competitors—that the Patriots are more likely to win than that the Seahawks will win (15%), or that the Steelers will (10%), or that the Browns will win (1%)—there may be a sense in which we might be willing to attribute belief that the Patriots will win next year, even though you think that they are still not likely to win overall.

9Howard-Snyder, “Propositional Faith”; see also Moon, “The Nature of Doubt.”

10In “Action-Centered Faith” I argue that, given the certain sorts of sets of values and affections, one can have faith that is epistemically and practically rational for any non-zero probability that one assigns to God’s existence so long as one does not regard the possibility as negligible (i.e., so long as one refuses to ignore the possibility in one’s deliberations and actions). With respect to epistemic rationality, evidence against God’s existence will lower a rational agent’s personal probability for God’s existence. As long as (1) your probability is non-zero in such a way that you can see the possibility that God exists as a live option or take it seriously and (2) you also value a potential relationship with God far more than the alternatives you take to be relevant (such as the rejection of anything supernatural), a commitment to God can be rational. I here focus on cases in which faith is arguably compatible with having serious doubts that could include such attitudes as believing that naturalism is
As part of this discussion about faith and doubt, we do well to bear in mind just how provocative and striking the central claims of Christianity are. The Apostle Paul freely acknowledges the scandal of the cross—the fantastic quality that he calls the “foolishness of our proclamation” of a crucified and risen Messiah (1 Cor 1:18–31). That’s not the sort of thing that happens every day, folks. Nor is it what Jews had expected of a Messiah. These are untameably wild claims—about matters that do not strike Ariel as plausible, everyday events. We should not be at all surprised to find examples of people, even people of faith, who find themselves in serious doubt.

What other options might be available to Ariel? Are there really no other ways of embracing, receiving, affirming, assenting to, or championing the central proclamation? Is there a way Ariel can remain honest in her doubt while undertaking to continue to live in relation to God—a way of responding that, given Ariel’s evidential situation, we might expect to be just what God would desire of her (if there is a God)? Even in the absence of belief there are a variety of other positive cognitive attitudes that could accompany or constitute the cognitive aspect of her faith response. Ariel might, for example, resolve to accept that God exists or to assume that the gospel is true, making a commitment for which she is willing to live and die, despite what she sees as the risk of being mistaken. Or she might decide to place her trust in Jesus or to rely on the testimony of his followers and, on that basis to trust in or rely on the gospel message they proclaim. Even a profound hope that God exists might be sufficient to ground or to initiate and sustain a person in Christian faith.

She might recover the Old English meaning of the word “believe,” pledging her love, loyalty, and allegiance to Jesus as Lord or cherishing God and holding God dear, connotations all but lost to philosophers today. The Latin word *credo* was distinguished from opinion—*opinio* (n. opinion, belief, supposition) and *opinor* (v. to be of the opinion, to believe). *Credo* is a compound of *cor*, *cordis*, “heart” and -*do*, -*dere*, “to put” derived from the proto Indo-European root for placing one’s heart upon something, *kred-dhē*. *Credo* literally means “I set my heart on” the person, object, or doctrines in question.11

4. Relational Faith

My approach to understanding what Christian faith is does not take the question “What do you believe?,” at least in the modern sense of “believing,” as a focus or even as a starting point. The writings of the Greek New Testament use words in the *pistis*-pisteúō group to present faith as the

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11McKaughan, “Authentic Faith and Acknowledged Risk.”
central response that God is said to desire of humans. But what sort of re-
sponse is God said to desire? Can it really be that what is so important is a
particular psychological state, belief—a state which is for the most part not
under our direct voluntary control? Why would God, or anyone else, care
so much about that? And if God does care so much about that, why remain
so hidden, silent, and ambiguous? Why not provide, as Bertrand Russell
once requested, more evidence? In my view, what is most fundamental
to and precious about faith is to be sought in what Ariel has and Daemon
lacks rather than the other way around. Perhaps the questions “Who do
you rely on?” and “To whom have you pledged your allegiance?” take us
more quickly to the heart of the concerns that I take to underlie the sort of
faith that was of most direct interest to biblical authors.

What is envisioned is a life-orienting response and commitment to
remaining engaged in a relationship centered upon God. The view of Re-
lational Faith that I defend understands faith as perseverance in a covenan
tal relationship with God. To be clear at the outset, nothing in the account
of Relational Faith, my use of the term “relationship,” or “response,” or
indeed anything in this paper presupposes that God does (or does not)
exist. If God does not exist, there is no relationship and insofar as faith
is a response it would be a response to something other than God (e.g.,
other people’s claims that there is a God or particular experiences misin-
terpreted as encounters with God, etc.). The account of faith is focused on
what would remain in either case: the complex of actions and whatever
psychological attitudes underlie them that constitute a person’s (perhaps
mistaken) attempt to relate to God, with a particular interest in the shape
such a response can take when the existence of the person toward whom
such faith is directed is in question.

I take paradigm cases of Judeo-Christian faith typically to involve two
core forms of personal response: to have Christian faith is (1) to trust in or
rely on Jesus and/or God and (2) to pledge one’s allegiance to Jesus and/or
to God. I intend this first aspect, trust and reliance, to pick out the kind of
turning toward God and entrusting oneself to God’s care that God is said
to desire of humans as a proper response to God’s pistos (faithfulness). My
use of “allegiance” in the second aspect is shorthand to refer to a steadfast
commitment or fidelity to Jesus and/or to God—to following Jesus and/
or to walking in God’s ways. Notice that Daemon’s belief does not lead
him to respond with acts of repentance, engagement, following Jesus or
walking in God’s ways.

“Allegiance” also, fittingly enough, has connotations intended to
remind us that in ancient Hebrew faith and faithfulness are closely associ-
ated. Hebrew vocabulary for faith and faithfulness derives from the stem
ʾmn, from which we get the English affirmation amen, “so be it, truly.” Faith is a person’s “yes” to God. The noun ʾemûnâ typically emphasizes
“faithfulness, fidelity, trustworthiness, steadfastness,” but can also mean
“faith, trust” (Hbk 2:4). The verb for faith, ʾaman, takes on the connotation
of standing firm in trust or in loyalty/fidelity depending on how the verb
is conjugated. Deuteronomy 7:9, for example, presents God as trustworthy in covenantal relations—as “the faithful (ne’ĕmān) God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.” And God is said to desire that people respond by trusting in or relying upon Him as trustworthy and dependable—by holding firmly to or to being securely set on (he’emin) God.12

Notice that both a decision to rely on someone and a decision to follow or to pledge one’s allegiance to a person are actions or can be initiated and sustained by voluntary actions. The kind of ordinary human relationship which the biblical authors most often use to illustrate faith and faithfulness is marriage, understood as a sacred covenantal relationship.13 Mother Teresa, for example, made a personal vow to God in 1942. She, like other nuns in the Missionaries of Charity, took herself to have entered into a sacred relationship with Jesus, akin to marriage. This promise to remain engaged as a “spouse of Jesus crucified” gave her faith relationship an anchor as she was tossed about on the dark sea of doubt and various other kinds of adversity she faced along life’s way. As we shall see, her resolve in honoring this promise to continually rely on and to remain loyal to God was a source of resilience that sustained her faith in the midst of experiences of significant doubt of a depth and variety that are incompatible with belief. More than seventeen years after taking her vow, she wrote:

Since then I have kept this promise—and when sometimes the darkness is very dark—and I am on the verge of saying “No to God” the thought of that promise pulls me up.14

Just as in a marriage relationship, at its best, one can remain committed to one’s spouse through good times and bad times and the waxing and waning of one’s momentary passions and desires, one can be committed to cultivating and maintaining a relationship with God/Jesus in a way that is not simply dependent on the ups and downs of either belief or desire and one can resolve to remain actively and faithfully engaged in a long term relationship even if one comes to doubt God’s existence or faithfulness.

It is easy to see why relationships characterized by Relational Faith can be worth having and why this sort of response would be one that God is said to desire. Words used to characterize faithfulness in the Judeo-Christian tradition—like “allegiance,” “fidelity,” “loyalty,” “stability,” “reliability,” “steadfastness”—direct our attention to the quality that makes faith so valuable. As Daniel Howard-Snyder has argued, what is precious about faith is that it gives relationships resilience in the face of difficulties.15 The value of this resilience, this steadfastness and perseverance

14Kolodiejchuk, Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light, 187.
15Howard-Snyder, “Propositional Faith.”
that makes faith so desirable and worth having in relationships, shows itself most clearly in circumstances of difficulty, risk, and uncertainty.

Regrettably, proponents of the *Belief Plus* view often neglect to say much about what the “Plus” might involve. But suppose they say the following:

_Ditto. We agree with everything, or almost everything, that you just said. Thanks for filling in what we might mean by the “Plus.” Maybe that stuff even gets to the heart of what is most fundamental to faith. But we proponents of the *Belief Plus* view differ chiefly with respect to the cognitive component, where we insist that only belief will do._

One way forward in the discussion is to turn to questions about the range of circumstances under which it could be both valuable and rational to have either of these kinds of faith.

5. Mother Teresa and the Problem of Doubt

Notice that the *Belief Plus* and *Relational* views of faith have very different consequences for how we think about the relationship between faith and doubt.

On the *Belief Plus* view, since belief is compatible with only a fairly limited range of doubt or uncertainty, faith is compatible with only a limited range of doubts. If a person is in serious doubt about whether \( p \), then she does not believe that \( p \). And if, as the *Belief Plus* view maintains, a person does not believe that \( p \), then she cannot have faith which presupposes \( p \) as part of its salient content. It follows that if a person is in serious doubt about whether \( p \), she cannot have faith which presupposes \( p \) as part of its salient content. People who, like Ariel, find themselves with significant doubts will be unable to respond to God in faith for reasons of intellectual honesty, regardless of how much they love Jesus, desire to give their lives to God, or choose to live.

Serious doubt is a problem for the *Belief Plus* view. The problem is that the *Belief Plus* view seems unable to accommodate the apparent coexistence of faith with serious doubt in the lived experience of many Christians. Contrary to the *Belief Plus view*, it very much seems that robust faith in God, undergirded by hope or trust that there is a God, sometimes fiercely coexists with extensive doubt in people whose lives are fraught with trouble, tragedy, and loss—doubts serious enough as to be incompatible with belief. Suppose we formulate the *Problem of Doubt* in this way:

(1) If someone can have Christian faith only if she believes salient content (e.g., that God exists), then there are no cases in which someone has Christian faith in the absence of belief of salient content.

(2) But there are cases in which someone has Christian faith in the absence of belief of salient content.

(3) So, it is not the case that someone can have Christian faith only if she believes salient content.
Proponents of the *Belief Plus* view are committed to premise (1). The conclusion follows from (1) and (2) by *modus tollens*. And we have some really good candidates for premise (2), including—as we shall see—Mother Teresa. Perhaps premise (2) isn’t obvious to all? Proponents of the *Belief Plus* view must reject premise (2), which is just what you might expect given how they define faith. The *Problem of Doubt* turns on pointing to counterexamples to the *Belief Plus* view: cases in which someone arguably has faith that \( p \) and yet lacks belief that \( p \).

Mother Teresa, now known in the Catholic Church as Saint Teresa of Calcutta, is widely admired for the seriousness with which she attempted to live out the good and noble teachings of Micah 6:8 to “do justice, to love mercy, to walk humbly with thy God” and Jesus’s central call to love God and neighbor in concrete and meaningful ways. She left behind her worldly possessions to serve the poor, downtrodden, and marginalized. She touched the untouchables, cared for lepers, provided hospice care to the dying, and rescued infants who had been left on the street to die.

Saint Teresa is arguably one of the great exemplars of Christian faith in the twentieth century. Let’s take a closer look at her lived experience of faith. It would be easy to assume that behind her smile lay serene untroubled confident belief. But if you did assume that, you would be mistaken. We have her letters. Excerpts from her private writings, made public in *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*, reveal her complicated interior life which combine haunting expressions of doubts so serious that she regards them as blasphemous with a firm resolve to remain faithful to her commitment to God and to Jesus. She writes the following:

> Did I make the mistake in surrendering blindly to the call of the Sacred Heart? . . . The whole time smiling—Sisters & people pass such remarks.—They think my faith, trust & love are filling my very being & that the intimacy with God and union to His will must be absorbing my heart.—Could they but know—and how my cheerfulness is the cloak by which I cover the emptiness & misery. In spite of all—this darkness & emptiness is not as painful as the longing for God.—The contradiction I fear will unbalance me.\(^{16}\)

In 1937, while still a Sister at Loreto, she wrote: “Do not think that my spiritual life is strewn with roses—that is the flower which I hardly ever find on my way. Quite the contrary, I have more often as my companion ‘darkness.’”\(^{17}\) Her letters in the years to follow describe a “terrible darkness within me” from the time she left the Loreto convent in 1949 to serve on the streets in the slums of Calcutta continuing until her death in 1997—a period of some five decades during which she felt abandoned by God.\(^{18}\) As she wrote in an undated letter, probably from 1961:

\(^{16}\)Kolodiejchuk, *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*, 187.

\(^{17}\)Kolodiejchuk, *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*, 20.

\(^{18}\)Kolodiejchuk, *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*, 149.
Since [19]49 or [19]50 this terrible sense of loss—this untold darkness—this loneliness this continual longing for God—which gives me that pain deep down in my heart—Darkness is such that I really do not see—neither with my mind nor with my reason—the place of God in my soul is blank—There is no God in me—when the pain of longing is so great—I just long & long for God—and then it is that I feel—He does not want me—He is not there.19

The relevance to our discussion of the Belief Plus view is straightforward. Mother Teresa’s faith persevered through various kinds of challenges during her five decades of service to the poor in Calcutta from 1949 until her death, including through the profound and serious doubts she experienced during this period. The serious doubts that she expressed during this period, including doubts about whether God exists and other content she takes to be part of the core Christian teachings, are so significant that they are arguably incompatible with believing. So, the Belief Plus view is mistaken: faith does not require believing. I call this the Mother Teresa Objection.20 To see how this relates to the Problem of Doubt, we can run this as a sub-argument for premise (2):

(2.1) Mother Teresa is an exemplar of Christian faith.
(2.2) If someone is in serious doubt about \( p \), then she lacks belief that \( p \). (by definition of being in serious doubt)
(2.3) Mother Teresa found herself in serious doubt about the salient content of Christianity. (see her letters)
(2.4) Mother Teresa lacked belief of the salient content of Christianity. (from 2.2 and 2.3)
(2.5) So, Mother Teresa had Christian faith but lacked belief of the salient content of Christianity. (from 2.1 and 2.4)

I take premise (2.1) to be a widely held and relatively uncontroversial claim. The Catholic Church, for example, officially claims her as a saint and she is widely seen as an exemplar of Christian faith with few peers in the latter half of the twentieth century. But acceptance of (2.1) need in no way appeal to alleged authorities. The idea is rather that in theorizing about faith we should start by looking at exemplars, or individuals widely regarded as candidate exemplars, and then try to understand how faith works in those cases. Apart from specific attempts to resist the conclusion of the Problem of Doubt or occasional and highly controversial claims that her letters suggest that Mother Teresa was a closet atheist, I have seldom heard people deny (2.1) whether they admire her or not. Premise (2.2) just says what it means to be in serious doubt. For support of (2.3), see her

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19Undated letter from Mother Teresa to Father Joseph Neuner, S. J., probably during the retreat of April 1961. Kolodiejchuk, Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light, 349.
20McKaughan, “Authentic Faith and Acknowledged Risk.”
letters. (2.4) follows from (2.2) and (2.3) by *modus ponens*. And (2.5) follows from (2.1) and (2.4).

What of the key premise (2.3), the claim that there are times during which she lacked belief of propositions that she took to be part of the salient content of Christianity, including that God exists and that there are souls? If a person is in “serious doubt” about whether \( p \), in the sense that I stipulate, then she does not believe that \( p \). So there is a legitimate question about whether Mother Teresa is a good example of someone who found herself with serious doubts about salient content of Christianity, as I take her to be. In an undated letter addressed to Jesus enclosed with her confessions to Father Picachy on September 3, 1959, she writes:

They say people in hell suffer eternal pain because of the loss of God—they would go through all that suffering if they had just a little hope of possessing God.—In my soul I feel just that terrible pain of loss—of God not wanting me—of God not being God—of God not really existing (Jesus, please forgive my blasphemies—I have been told to write everything). That darkness that surrounds me on all sides—I can't lift my soul to God—no light or inspiration enters my soul.—I speak of love for souls—of tender love for God—words pass through my words [sic, lips]—and I long with a deep longing to believe them.—What do I labour for? If there be no God—there can be no soul.—If there is no soul then Jesus—You also are not true.21

The content of the doubts here expressed explicitly include “God not really existing” and other items she takes to follow from it: “If there be no God—there can be no soul.—If there is no soul then Jesus—You also are not true.” And the level of doubt seems serious: She reluctantly reports experiencing doubts of a level so profound that she worried that even to articulate them is blasphemous. Rather than saying that she believes in the reality of God and souls, she can say only that “I long with a deep longing to believe them.”

In another letter addressed to Jesus, sent to Father Picachy on July 3, 1959, she writes:

Lord, my God, who am I that You should forsake me? . . . I call, I cling, I want—and there is no One to answer—no One on Whom I can cling—no, No One.—Alone. The darkness is so dark—and I am alone.—Unwanted, forsaken.—The loneliness of the heart that wants love is unbearable.—Where is my faith?—even deep down, right in, there is nothing but emptiness & darkness.—My God—how painful is this unknown pain. It pains without ceasing.—I have no faith.—I dare not utter the words & thoughts that crowd in my heart—& make me suffer untold agony. So many unanswered questions live within me—I am afraid to uncover them—because of the blasphemy.—If there be God, please forgive me.—Trust that all will end in Heaven with Jesus.—When I try to raise my thoughts to Heaven—there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives & hurt my very soul.—Love—the word—it brings nothing.—I am told God

loves me—and yet the reality of darkness & coldness & emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul.\footnote{22}{Kolodiejchuk, \textit{Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light}, 186–188.}

There are also places in which she says that she lacks the belief that there are souls—a proposition which she takes to be central to Christian teaching and the falsity of which (as we see above) she thinks would imply that Jesus “is not true” and that there is no heaven.

He is not there. Heaven, souls—why these are just words—words that mean nothing to me.—My very life seems so contradictory. I help souls—to go where?\footnote{23}{Kolodiejchuk, \textit{Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light}, 210.}

As part of her retreat notes from March 29 to April 12, 1959 she writes:

> Do I value the salvation of my soul? I don’t believe I have a soul. There is nothing in me. Am I working in earnest for the salvation of the souls of others? There was a burning zeal in my soul for souls from childhood until I said “yes” to God & then all is gone. Now I don’t believe.\footnote{24}{Kolodiejchuk, \textit{Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light}, 349.}

Her condition is such that, with respect to questions about whether there are souls or whether there really is a God, she can say only “Now I don’t believe,” “I want to believe” and “I long with a deep longing to believe them.” This condition seems to have spanned years. Even in 1965, in a letter to Archbishop Knox on June 19, she writes: “And because I want to believe, I accept the darkness of faith with greater joy and confidence.”\footnote{25}{Kolodiejchuk, \textit{Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light}, 253.}

The case for (2.3), then, looks strong. There are two main ways that proponents of the \textit{Belief Plus} view can resist the \textit{Mother Teresa Objection} as a route to establishing premise (2) of the \textit{Problem of Doubt}: either deny (2.1) that Mother Teresa had faith or claim that she did not lack belief by downplaying the alleged seriousness of her doubts in (2.3). Alternatively, one might just deny (2.4) and maintain that she believed but that either the beliefs or doubts were irrational. But cases of irrationality are less interesting philosophically.\footnote{26}{If you think that we should say either that the real Mother Teresa was irrational or that she was not in serious doubt, then consider Mother Teresa* who is in all respects otherwise like Mother Teresa, except that she is more rational or has slightly more serious doubts. Here’s how that would change the sub-argument for (2). Rather than arguing that “what’s actual is possible, and Mother Teresa is an actual case of (2)” the argument would be “Here’s a case of Mother Teresa* such that it is (arguably) not plausible to deny that she has faith and yet (by stipulation) does lack the relevant beliefs.”}

Proponents of the \textit{Belief Plus} view of faith might be tempted to insist that, despite what she says, throughout this period deep down Mother Teresa did believe all of the propositions that she took to be part of the salient content, including that \textit{God exists} and that \textit{there are souls}. But what evidence is there for such a claim? Given the kind of evidence we have just seen above, which strongly suggests otherwise, I don’t find this response

\footnote{22}{Kolodiejchuk, \textit{Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light}, 186–188.}
\footnote{23}{Kolodiejchuk, \textit{Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light}, 210.}
\footnote{24}{Kolodiejchuk, \textit{Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light}, 349.}
\footnote{25}{Kolodiejchuk, \textit{Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light}, 253.}
\footnote{26}{If you think that we should say either that the real Mother Teresa was irrational or that she was not in serious doubt, then consider Mother Teresa* who is in all respects otherwise like Mother Teresa, except that she is more rational or has slightly more serious doubts. Here’s how that would change the sub-argument for (2). Rather than arguing that “what’s actual is possible, and Mother Teresa is an actual case of (2)” the argument would be “Here’s a case of Mother Teresa* such that it is (arguably) not plausible to deny that she has faith and yet (by stipulation) does lack the relevant beliefs.”}
plausible. The comforting suggestion that Mother Teresa’s belief in God never wavered radically underestimates the source and depth of expressed anguish we see in her now publicly available writings. Notice, however, that it also seems hard for this response to avoid the implication that her faith is epistemically defective. Believing on insufficient evidence is epistemically defective and, insofar as her doubts were well-grounded, this interpretation makes it difficult to avoid seeing Mother Teresa as clinging dogmatically, perhaps even simplistically, to her beliefs on insufficient evidence, even in the face of significant counterevidence. Moreover, so as not to risk trivializing just how deep her doubts ran, we do well to bear in mind how reluctant Mother Teresa was to speak of the darkness that she was experiencing. She rarely spoke of these matters and shared what she did only in obedience to and at the direction of her confessor. Mother Teresa eventually found the more plausible and quite beautiful turn of phrase “to live by faith and yet not to believe” to describe her spiritual condition in a letter to Father Neuner on May 17, 1964.

Pray for me—for the life within me is harder to live. To be in love & yet not to love, to live by faith and yet not to believe. To spend myself and yet be in total darkness.—Pray for me.

Another way of questioning whether any of the serious doubts she found herself with were really directed at the existence of God, or other salient content of Christianity, situates Mother Teresa in the mystical tradition. Mother Teresa took herself to have had a heightened religious experience or series of experiences, particularly in 1946–1947, which she understood to be interactions with Jesus and/or God. One can see how it might be that, even through trials or feelings of abandonment by God that she would later experience, a confident belief in the reality of God persisted—anchored in or reinforced by those earlier experiences. On this reading, the doubts that Mother Teresa expresses should be understood as directed at something other than questioning the reality of God, perhaps as doubts about some aspect of God’s character such as God’s trustworthiness or love for her while her belief that God exists never wavered and remained firmly intact. However, it is not clear that Mother Teresa’s own

\[27\text{But suppose you are unconvinced or think that the limited evidence Mother Teresa has left us cannot decisively rule out either of these interpretations. What turns on this for our present philosophical discussion? Suppose that one could show that the real Mother Teresa doesn’t illustrate exemplary faith in the absence of belief. There might yet be other sub-arguments for (2) worth considering. Consider, for example, Mother Teresa**, someone in other respects very much like the real Mother Teresa, who also struggles with serious doubts of the sort I am focused on. If the real Mother Teresa was a mystic, who enjoyed a powerful encounter with God that left her without any doubt as to God’s existence, then she might in that respect be even more unlike many of the rest of us than Mother Teresa**. But again, I don’t concede that my reading of Mother Teresa is incorrect. And to the extent that we can illustrate the points that we want to make with real-life cases that are at least in the neighborhood of the sort of faith under consideration, our philosophical reflections on this topic will be all the more rich, interesting, and experientially grounded.}

\[28\text{Kolodiechuk, Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light, 248.}\]
writings bear out this interpretation. Moreover, it is easy to see how a prolonged sense of the absence of God, particularly as one is daily encountering extreme suffering, might understandably lead someone to have intellectual doubts about whether those earlier experiences one took to be experiences of the presence of God were veridical (i.e., are open to plausible alternative naturalistic interpretations).

If denying (2.3) doesn’t look particularly promising, proponents of the *Belief Plus* view might be pressed to look for ways to deny (2.1). What of the suggestion that Mother Teresa lost her faith? There are, after all, a few places where she says herself “I have no faith—I don’t believe.” That is just what we might expect someone struggling with serious doubt to say, if they have long been immersed in community in which there is a widespread tendency to assume that belief is required for faith.

Where is my Faith?—Even deep down, right in, there is nothing but emptiness and darkness.—My God—how painful is this unknown pain—I have no Faith—I dare not utter the words & thoughts that crowd in my heart—& make me suffer untold agony.

On this view, the claim would be that Mother Teresa’s faith did not persevere continuously through the challenges she faced from 1949 to 1997. There were moments when she did not believe salient content and, therefore, lost her faith.

Alternatively, proponents of the *Belief Plus* view might maintain that Mother Teresa was a pillar of faith in terms of an overall assessment of her life and work and yet that she went through extended periods of time when she carried on even though she had lost her faith. One could thus grant (2.1), or something in the neighborhood of (2.1), while insisting that Mother Teresa lacked faith at every moment that she lacked belief of salient content presupposed by such faith.

Each of these two ways of finessing one’s stance on (2.1) involves interpretations and judgments about Mother Teresa’s religious struggles that I think are incorrect. But perhaps the available information alone does not decisively rule out such alternatives. For example, someone already firmly committed to the *Belief Plus* view might simply insist that insofar as Mother Teresa experienced serious doubts about salient content, during those times *by definition* she lacked Christian faith. Those of us theorizing about the nature of faith face decisions about how best to balance the extent to which we allow our accounts of faith to be shaped by consideration of specific cases or allow our preconceived general ideas about faith to dictate judgments about whether or not Mother Teresa had faith. But unless someone who replies in this way can offer both an independent defense of the *Belief Plus* view and plausible interpretations of texts such as those


under consideration, we might worry that it is simply held dogmatically, in
a way that isn’t open to testing or revision in light of particular examples.

Notice some potential costs one takes on board when one maintains that
Mother Teresa’s faith lapsed during her moments of serious doubt. Are
we to say that Mother Teresa is better classified as an atheist or agnostic
during those times (whether or not one maintains that she is an exemplar
of faith overall), perhaps frequently popping in and out of faith in ways
that track day-to-day fluctuations in her level of confidence? Given that
there is some reason to think that the prolonged darkness Mother Teresa
describes never lifted, can proponents of the Belief Plus view square that
with the claim that she was nevertheless a pillar of faith?

Moreover, if we take on board the idea that Mother Teresa lacked faith—
perhaps over this entire period —what shall we make of the fact that many
of the letters in which these doubts are expressed are addressed to Jesus or
to the Lord, cast in the form of prayers, and are—despite lacking a feeling
of God’s presence—intermingled with expressions of complete surrender
and resolutions to continue to say “Yes” to God: “I am ready to wait for
You for all eternity.—Your little one”? To say that her faith lapsed during
these extended periods of doubt, despite their coexistence with these sorts
of profound expressions of submission to God, is to set the bar for having
and maintaining not just ideal faith but any faith at all rather high. To deny
that she persevered in faith, despite the fact that her attitude toward God
was to remain steadfastly and unwaveringly “at His disposal” throughout
all of these years, is to insist on using the word “faith” in such a way that
might call into question its relevance for describing the sort of response
that God is said to desire of humans. This is a woman who had committed
to following Jesus come what may, and it is spectacularly implausible to
deny that Mother Teresa had faith.

So what of the question: Are you a “believer”? I do not doubt that
Mother Teresa would have been happy if you could answer yes. But those
who insist that faith requires belief would do well to hear her words:

Jesus has a very special love for you. As for me—the silence and the empti-
ness is so great that I look and do not see, listen and do not hear. As she understood herself, throughout the period from 1949 until her
death in 1997 she kept her promise “never to refuse” Jesus, even during
those periods through which she appears to have had serious doubts
about what she took to be salient content of Christianity. In Mother Teresa,
I have argued, even in the absence of belief, faith lives on:

31Kolodiejchuk, Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light, 192–194.
32See also McKaughan, “Authentic Faith and Acknowledged Risk” and McKaughan, “On
the Value of Faith and Faithfulness.”
33Kolodiejchuk, Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light, 288.
6. Missing in Action Cases and the Value of Perseverance

Part of what motivates the *Belief Plus* view starts from the thought that you can’t sensibly place your *trust in* Santa Claus, if you *believe that* Santa does not exist. That’s right. But, again, don’t confuse disbelieving *p* (believing not-<em>p</em>) with mere lack of belief that <em>p</em>. Sometimes we have to act in situations of considerable uncertainty. Quite generally, for some person or object <em>X</em>, relevant domain <em>F</em>, and presupposed content <em>p</em>, one can both trust in <em>X</em> (as an <em>F</em>) and one can trust that <em>p</em>, without believing that <em>p</em>.

Consider a non-religious example of faith at work on the level of ordinary human relations. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, the hero Odysseus tries to return to his wife Penelope after the decade-long Trojan War. His journey home from the siege takes another ten years. Consider Penelope’s point of view. When Odysseus departs, she trusts in her husband as a faithful spouse and as a courageous warrior. She also knows that he exists. We can use a case like this to explore the essence of faith, allowing that during those twenty years of absence her faith is challenged in all kinds of ways.

Does Penelope’s faith in Odysseus as a faithful spouse require belief that *Odysseus is faithful*? Her allegiance to him clearly does not require it. Reliance also takes the form of actions that remain available to her even given significant doubt, risk, and uncertainty. Trust is, like belief, a more disputed notion. But there are forms of action-oriented trust available to Penelope which also do not require belief. Penelope could (1) act on the assumption that Odysseus will be faithful (acting in ways that are worthy of her trust and doing for her what he knows that she wants or needs), (2) when the evidence gives her some reason for supposing that Odysseus may not be faithful, and (3) where there will be bad consequences and she will feel betrayed if her assumption is false. Such trust leaves her vulnerable, both with respect to what is at stake and with respect to her epistemic situation. She is not naïve. Might not Odysseus have already betrayed her trust in him? Is it likely that a strapping champion such as he could resist the siren calls of beautiful young maids and goddesses all that time? Nevertheless, she continues to place her trust in Odysseus and to rely on him, such that, if he is alive, he will remain faithful to his promises and make every effort to return to her.

But does Penelope’s faith in Odysseus or faith that he exists require belief that *Odysseus exists*? Arguably not. Circumstances change. New evidence is introduced. And now the question: “Is he even alive?” becomes pressing. Some reports of Odysseus’s death or capture raise significant

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and reasonable doubts about whether he is still alive. Suppose that the new evidence is strong enough to make it unreasonable for her to believe that Odysseus is alive, but not so conclusive as to make it unreasonable not to believe that he is dead. Can Penelope persevere in faith? Could you? There is no conceptual difficulty here. Penelope could, for example, (1) act on the assumption that Odysseus is alive, (2) when the evidence gives her some reason for supposing that Odysseus may not be alive, (3) where there will be bad consequences if her assumption is false, and where (4) her commitment to such actions is contingent on Odysseus’s existence in such a way that learning that Odysseus is not alive would cause her to lose or abandon her faith. Her doubts might present motivational challenges or temptations that she would be less inclined to face if she had good evidence that Odysseus is alive. And maybe it would take a kind of heroic and admirable grit for Penelope’s faith to persevere in the face of such challenges. But none of that implies that she cannot continue in faith in the absence of belief that Odysseus is alive.

There is a difference between Penelope’s situation (hoping that someone she once knew to be alive and well will safely return from war) and Ariel’s (coming to be in doubt about whether God has ever existed all). But what turns on it? The Penelope example illustrates that a central part of what it is to have faith in a context in which doubts about the existence of the object toward which one’s faith is directed are pressing can consist primarily in remaining faithful by attempting to continue to engage in the relationship in various ways. If Penelope (or a child who has never met her biological mother) can do this, even while merely hoping that Odysseus is alive while being painfully aware of the fact that she could be mistaken, why couldn’t Ariel do something similar while having doubts about the existence of God? For someone who takes a vow to God as the result of a heightened religious experience that she takes to be an encounter with God and then ceases to have this experience, such experiences could continue to serve as grounds for remaining committed much in the same way Penelope does. Similarly, someone who makes a commitment to God while believing that God exists might continue to honor that commitment after losing this belief.

But what about religiously interested doubters whose faith did not originate in this way? Is it even possible, psychologically or rationally, for someone to decide to commit to God while lacking the belief that God exists? I think that it is (keeping in mind that there is a difference between lacking the belief that p and being committed to its denial). It is crucial to see that the responses at the core of Relational Faith are actions (e.g., deciding to follow Jesus or to commit to pursuing a way of life called to mind by the phrase “walking in God’s ways” and/or trusting in or relying on others in ways that involve decisions to act). Even if Ariel, or someone who comes to be in her state by a different route, finds it difficult to initially commit or to remain committed directly to God in such circumstances, in the case of Christianity one might, for example, place one’s trust in people who
once lived (such as Jesus of Nazareth or in the authors of the New Testament) and, on that basis, trust that the message proclaimed—including the proposition that God exists—is true. (If Christianity is true and there is a life to come, Ariel might even come to see her previous actions as having related herself in certain ways to Christ, even if she could not be confident in that at the time.) Anthony Kenny takes it that an agnostic praying to a God whose existence he doubts is “surely no more unreasonable than the act of a man adrift in the ocean, trapped in a cave, or stranded on a mountainside, who cries for help though he may never be heard or fires a signal which may never be seen.” More recently, Shieva Kleinschmidt has challenged the idea that atheists cannot pray, using similar cases in which people direct communication to someone whom they believe does not exist to argue not only that “it is possible for an atheist to direct communication toward God, though they believe God does not exist” but also that “if God exists, atheistic prayer may allow atheists to communicate with God and form a lasting and evolving relationship with Him, all while believing that God does not exist.”

Many of the same forms of active commitment and response that constitute the heart of Relational Faith are available to Penelope and to Ariel or other religiously interested doubters, just as they were to Mother Teresa. In Homer’s epic poem, suitors challenge the most concrete expression of Penelope’s faith: her own faithfulness. Penelope chooses not to remarry but, in spite of all her doubts, to await Odysseus’s return. Her faith in Odysseus, as expressed in the form of life she adopts, does stake everything on his existence. She recognizes all too painfully the real possibility that he has perished and will never return. But if her love is great enough, if she deems this hope good enough and important enough to risk her life on, it seems clear to me that she could do this—remain steadfast in the faith she has placed in Odysseus—even where her opinion about whether he is alive has diminished to a mere hope that it is so.

Notice that there is something of value here that Penelope’s faith couldn’t have if it required belief: a much wider range of resilience. We can see why Odysseus would care about a faith that can persevere through hardships, challenges, and significant uncertainties like that. Odysseus might well recognize what a precious good his wife’s response adds to their relationship while he is struggling to make his way home and upon his return.

Let me close with some remarks about how we should understand resilience. Clearly there is value in a faith that perseveres through challenges. But can a faith that perseveres through specifically evidential challenges and counterevidence be valuable? The valuable resilience of faith, even in the face of intellectual challenges, needs to be carefully distinguished

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36 Kenny, The God of the Philosophers, 129.
38 For a hint about how she could do this in a way that comports with standard criteria for epistemic and practical rationality, see n. 4 above.
from something with which it is often confused but which is clearly not of value: believing on insufficient evidence.

Regrettably, all too often through the centuries people have tried to capture the resilience of faith in terms of maximal belief or confidence. Calvin, for example, follows Aquinas in taking it that faith “must be sure and firm,” requiring certainty of a kind ordinarily appropriate only to matters about which we have knowledge grounded in direct experience or proof. Kierkegaard enjoins the knight of faith to be subjectively certain about matters that are objectively uncertain (or even absurd or paradoxical). What’s of value here is misidentified or, at best, misleadingly described and with damaging consequences. Certainty in such circumstances is a poor substitute for the resilience that paradigm cases of faith involve—for the noble ways in which, having set our heart on someone or something, we might hold fast in our loyalty to and reliance on God with firmness and grit, even where nothing even remotely close to certainty is to be found.

We should acknowledge that believing on insufficient evidence is problematic. Sometimes a degree of tenacity even in our beliefs is important and perhaps in some circumstances we do well to allow moral concerns, or our goals and values all-things-considered, to override narrowly epistemic ones. But even if there are exceptions like that we should tread carefully here, taking care to avoid holding our epistemic opinions dogmatically, in a way that is insensitive to counterevidence.

With faith of a sort that does not assume that faith requires believing, such as Relational Faith, we are free to seek truth wherever it is to be found in a way that is sensitive to our evidence. So long as the particular claims of Christianity remain so much as a live option for you, not only can you have faith, but you can remain epistemically rational in doing so. In deciding how to act, we quite properly take not only our epistemic opinions about how likely it is that the possible states of affairs under consideration obtain, but also how much we care about and value the various courses of action we are considering in light of those possibilities. If you love God

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39Calvin, *Institutes* III, ii, 15. Aquinas takes propositional faith to involve a voluntary act of intellectual assent (*credere*) with a fearless certitude, maximal firmness, or adherence appropriate to scientific knowledge (*scientia*). But the conviction involved in faith is not based on objective evidence: faith is needed precisely on matters with respect to revealed propositions which are not evident to us on the basis of reason or argument (see *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae Q. 5, Art. 2).

40Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 177–188.

41There are all sorts of ways that believing on insufficient evidence is problematic (e.g., from internalist, externalist, individual, and social perspectives in epistemology or on moral grounds, etc.). Here is one sense in which you might think that it is problematic from a first-person voluntarist point of view. The main point of adopting epistemic opinions finds its place in the context of an activity aimed at reaching a sober assessment of how likely it is that propositions we care about are true or false, given our evidence. Believing on insufficient evidence frustrates this aim.

42Preston-Roedder, “Faith in Humanity.”
enough and are committed to following Jesus and walking in God’s ways, this can also be practically rational for almost any nonzero probability.\textsuperscript{43}

In this way, a dynamic interplay between the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of faith/faithfulness can confer a durability or resilience on faith that gives it such value in relationships.\textsuperscript{44} And the core of that response—one’s continuing allegiance and trust in or reliance on God—can take the form of voluntary actions that remain directly under your control. Even in those moments of life when light is overtaken by darkness, when storms threaten to wash everything away, when thorns threaten to choke out tiny seeds of faith sown along the path, and when it’s hard to see through the glass even dimly, though belief be weak or even absent, faith may yet be strong.\textsuperscript{45}

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\textbf{References}


\textsuperscript{43}McKaughan, “Action-Centered Faith.”

\textsuperscript{44}McKaughan, “Action-Centered Faith” and McKaughan, “On the Value of Faith and Faithfulness.”

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