

**FAITH AND REASON: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
ABŪ L-MUĀIN AL-NASAĪ AND THOMAS AQUINAS ON
INTELLECT, ASSENT, AND FREE WILL**

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the complex relationship between intellect, knowledge, and free will in the context of religious faith, *īmān* or *fides*. The paper focuses on the perspectives of two prominent theologians, Abū l-Muāin al-Nasaī (d. 508/1115) and Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), from the Middle Ages. The study begins its investigation by looking into the aforementioned theologians' ideas and interpretations related to the nature of religious faith. It then explores the specific roles assigned by al-Nasaī and Aquinas to intellect, assent, and free will in the act of faith. The article's final section presents a comparative analysis of their perspectives, highlighting the similarities, differences, and potential tensions between their positions. The findings of this

Ilahiyat Studies

Volume 14 Number 2 Summer/Fall 2023

Article Type: Research Article

p-ISSN: 1309-1786 / e-ISSN: 1309-1719

DOI: 10.12730/is.1317582

Received: June 20, 2023 | *Accepted:* November 2, 2023 | *Published:* December 31, 2023.

To cite this article: Saygı, Muhammet. "Faith and Reason: A Comparative Analysis of Abū l-Muāin al-Nasaī and Thomas Aquinas on Intellect, Assent, and Free Will". *Ilahiyat Studies* 14, no. 2 (2023): 469-506. <https://doi.org/10.12730/is.1317582>

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study suggest that Aquinas' argument, which asserts that grounding faith in knowledge or evidence undermines human free will, may have certain problematic aspects. According to him, one necessarily assents to the proposition at hand if there is conclusive evidence. However, as for al-Nasafî, it appears that one can rely on evidence and exercise his/her free will in the act of faith if religious assent, *taşdiq* or *agnitio*, is understood in a dual sense.

Keywords: Intellect, assent, free will, knowledge, evidence, Abū l-Muʿīn al-Nasafî, Thomas Aquinas

Introduction*

The interplay among intellect, assent, and free will within the context of religious faith has been a subject of perennial debate, captivating the minds of both philosophers and theologians alike. The evidentialist methodology emphatically emphasizes the idea that claims associated with a specific religious faith can only be justified if there is conclusive evidence supporting those claims or if the claims themselves are inherently self-evident. Unless the specified criteria are met, there can be no philosophical and moral justification for wholeheartedly embracing (i.e., with full confidence or complete certainty) religious claims as true. The words of William Clifford that follow have been transformed into a maxim, serving as a classic representation of this attitude: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence".¹ On the other

* Some of the research findings regarding Abū l-Muʿīn al-Nasafî presented in this article are part of the author's ongoing doctoral research at the University of Birmingham, which is dedicated to the study of Abū l-Muʿīn al-Nasafî's core theological sentiments.

¹ William K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief", *An Anthology of Atheism and Rationalism*, ed. Gordon Stein (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1980), 282. Plantinga calls into question this particular stance by asserting that evidentialism itself, in the first place, falls short of meeting these rigorous criteria, as it lacks self-evident or conclusive evidence to validate its premises. For more details, see Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God", *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga - Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 60-63. For a defence of evidentialist thesis see Richard Feldman, "The Ethics of Belief", *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology*, ed. Earl Conee - Richard Feldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 166-196. See also Richard Feldman - Earl Conee, "Evidentialism", *Evidentialism: Essays in*

hand, reformed epistemology, which is categorized as a particular variant of foundationalism and advocated by scholars like Alvin Plantinga, asserts that religious faith can be justified or regarded as meritorious, both rationally and morally, independently of evidence. They suggest that religious convictions can be seen as properly basic. In other words, religious beliefs are inherently justified or warranted, similar to our other basic beliefs, such as the belief in the presence of the external world and other minds.² In addition, some theories in religious epistemology focus on the practical benefits or value of adopting religious beliefs. Supporters of these theories maintain that religious beliefs are justified by the pragmatic outcomes they have on a person's life, ethical decisions, or overall well-being.³ Lastly, there is fideism, a doctrine that firmly asserts the supreme power of faith in the domain of religious epistemology. According to this perspective, religious beliefs are devoid of evidence or rational arguments, relying solely on faith as their foundation. Fideism has been associated with figures like Tertullian (d. 220 AD), a Christian theologian in the early Church, and Blaise Pascal, a 17th-century French mathematician and philosopher. Tertullian famously asked, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?". This phrase reflects his view that there should be a strict separation between faith and reason, with faith being the superior path to religious truth. And, of course, there is the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (d. 1855), who is perhaps the most famous thinker

Epistemology, ed. Earl Conee - Richard Feldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 83-108.

- ² See Alvin Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?", *Noûs* 15/1 (March 1981), 41-51. The coherence theory of belief, which draws inspiration from the coherence theory of truth in epistemology, should also be mentioned here. According to this approach, a particular belief can be justified only if it is grounded on its coherence with one's other beliefs. In other words, if a person's beliefs form a coherent system in which each belief aligns with others, and each belief mutually supports and reinforces the overall structure and interconnected web of the person's beliefs, then they are rationally and morally justified. See for more information, James O. Young, "The Coherence Theory of Truth", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Accessed June 7, 2023).
- ³ The writings of John S. Mill and William James are noteworthy examples of the aforementioned attitude. In short, they argue that, under specific circumstances, it is both rational and morally acceptable to hold a belief in a proposition because of the benefits it entails. See William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy and Human Immortality* (New York: Dover Publications, 1960), 46-75; John Stuart Mill, *Three Essays on Religion* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1874), 248-249.

associated with fideism. Kierkegaard stressed the necessity of a “leap of faith” to attain authentic religious belief, as he believed that religious truth could not be arrived at through rational means alone.⁴

This study examines two influential medieval thinkers, Abū l-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī (d. 508/1115) and Aquinas (d. 1274),⁵ who predominantly espouse the principles of evidentialism in their theological systems. However, it is essential to note that Aquinas adopts a more lenient or flexible perspective when dealing with the concept of sufficient reason or conclusive evidence, in contrast to the more rigid stance of al-Nasafī. The relationship established between intellect and religious assent appears to ultimately determine the rational and moral permissibility or praiseworthiness of religious faith. This inevitably raises the question of what sort of relationship exists between intellect and religious assent in the act of faith. The discussion is also closely related to the concept of knowledge or conclusive evidence and one’s freedom of will.

For now, we can conclude that, in Aquinas’ view, faith is praiseworthy rationally and morally only when it arises from one’s own

⁴ According to the fideist perspective, religious truths cannot be proven or grounded in reason alone but rather require a “leap of faith”, which cannot be regarded as an irrational and unethical attitude since reason itself commands us to do so. For more details, see Richard Amesbury, “Fideism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Accessed June 7, 2023).

⁵ There are scholarly works in Turkish academia that involve comparative analyses of Aquinas and Muslim thinkers such as Avicenna (d. 428/1037), al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), and Averroes (d. 595/1198). See, for instance, A. Gülnihâl Küken, *Doğu - Batı Felsefi Etkileşiminde İbn Rüşd ve St. Thomas Aquinas Felsefelerinin Karşılaştırılması* (İstanbul: Alfa Yayınları, 1996); Yaşar Türkben, *İbn Sînâ ve Thomas Aquinas’ta Kötülük Problemi* (Ankara: Elis Yayınları, 2012); Özcan Akdağ, *Tanrı ve Özgürlük: Gazâlî ve Thomas Aquinas Ekseninde Bir İnceleme* (Ankara: Elis Yayınları, 2016); Süleyman Dönmez, “İbn Rüşd ve Thomas Aquinas Bağlamında Hıristiyanlığın Rasyonel Yorumuna İslam Felsefesinin Etkisi”, *Çukurova Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 7/2 (June 2007), 21-38. In these studies, a common theme emerges: All scholars emphasise the profound influence of Islamic philosophy and theology on certain philosophical attitudes of Aquinas. This influence was transmitted through the teachings of the Jewish philosopher Maimonides (d. 601/1204), who, in turn, drew from the rich insights of Muslim philosophers and theologians such as al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), Avicenna, al-Ghazālī, İbn Bâjjah (d. 533/1139), and Averroes on a wide array of philosophical topics, which suggests a chain of intellectual influence on Aquinas. See Küken, *Doğu - Batı Felsefi Etkileşiminde İbn Rüşd ve St. Thomas Aquinas Felsefelerinin Karşılaştırılması*, 34-46; Akdağ, *Tanrı ve Özgürlük*, 85; Dönmez, “İbn Rüşd ve Thomas Aquinas Bağlamında Hıristiyanlığın Rasyonel Yorumuna İslam Felsefesinin Etkisi”, 21-38.

volition. Faith cannot find its foundation in knowledge, as the presence of knowledge, by its nature, necessarily leads one to assent to the proposition in question. The strength or compelling nature of the evidence leaves the subject with no choice but to accept it. It follows that for faith to be deserving of praise, the act of faith ought to lack conclusive evidence. Consequently, Aquinas unequivocally declares that faith and knowledge represent a strict dichotomy or mutually exclusive domains and, therefore, cannot coexist in the act of believing. However, it seems that al-Nasafi's dual interpretation of religious assent presents an intriguing and compelling counterargument to the position adopted by Aquinas. Al-Nasafi's statements on religious assent imply that the assent originating from knowledge and the one arising from faith possess distinct natures. Al-Nasafi emphatically argues against accepting anything other than knowledge as the foundation of faith, as it would inevitably result in an unacceptable scenario: the simultaneous acceptance of conflicting truth claims. According to him, the truth or falsehood of religions can only be determined by knowledge. Therefore, faith should be grounded in knowledge; however, this does not mean that one cannot exercise his/her free will in the act of faith. In other words, faith can be founded upon knowledge, and it can remain an act of free will.

I have articulated this preliminary conclusion in a cautious manner because, as the paper progresses, certain reasons may appear that could prompt a reassessment of the stated position. Yet, even in light of such a reassessment, one truth endures in Aquinas' thought: due to the absence of conclusive evidence comparable to scientific inquiry, individuals must possess a strong will to embrace faith. The will of humankind is destined to fall into sin, and without the grace of God, faith remains an elusive pursuit. Only God possesses the power or authority to bestow the will to believe. Nonetheless, individuals bear moral responsibility for the transgressions, including unbelief, they commit. God cannot be blamed for punishing those who lack faith despite their inherent incapability to believe.

Following this preliminary introduction, let us now initiate our analyses by examining the perspectives of the aforementioned scholars on the nature of religious faith and its intrinsic characteristics.

1. The Nature of Religious Faith and Its Place in the Spectrum of Human Cognition

Aquinas⁶ defines faith as "... the intellect assenting [*agnitio*]⁷ to the Divine truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God ...".⁸ In simpler terms, Aquinas believes that faith involves the mind believing in certain truths about God and the world, but it is also a matter of the will or the desire to accept and trust in those truths. He

⁶ A potential point of confusion must be clarified before proceeding further. One might rightfully wonder and ask why, even though Aquinas lived later, the study begins by presenting Aquinas' ideas before those of al-Nasafī. In other words, the order of presentation in the article seems to be different from what one might expect based on the historical timeline. Introducing Aquinas' ideas first could lead some readers to assume that Aquinas lived in an earlier time compared to al-Nasafī. The rationale behind the adopted presentation order in this study can be summarised as follows: While chronological presentation is the conventional method in academic discourse, in this context, a thematic approach better serves the study's purpose. Al-Nasafī's perspective on faith essentially goes against Aquinas' stance. Aquinas perceives the presence of knowledge within the act of faith as an impediment to free will, leading to the exclusion of knowledge or evidence from the act of faith. In contrast, al-Nasafī argues that free will and evidence can coexist within the act of faith. Consequently, for Aquinas, the inclusion of conclusive evidence or proof in the act of faith might undermine the voluntary and uncoerced nature of faith. In essence, genuine faith involves a deliberate and unpressured choice to believe in something without relying on conclusive evidence. If conclusive evidence were readily accessible, it could potentially reduce the act of faith from a personal choice to a matter of compulsion, which, Aquinas argues, makes faith no worthy of praise. Conversely, al-Nasafī posits that it is possible to maintain free will even while incorporating knowledge or evidence within the act of faith, representing an antithesis to Aquinas' standpoint. So, this thematic approach was adopted with the understanding that presenting contrasting ideas before those they contrast with can be a more effective strategy. Nonetheless, in order to avoid the impression that Aquinas (d. 1274) may have lived before al-Nasafī (d. 508/1115), the death dates of these thinkers are often provided in brackets throughout the article. This ensures that readers maintain a correct understanding of the historical context, even when the article employs a thematic organisation for presenting their ideas.

⁷ *Agnitio* refers to an individual's inward acknowledgement of the propositions proclaimed within the creeds, as well as the outward affirmation through verbal declaration. This concept is a standard for describing religious assent in Aquinas' theology and was later adopted by the Roman Catholic Church. It largely coincides with the Muslim Kalām tradition's concept of *taṣdīq*, which is commonly used to define faith (*īmān*). We will further explore this concept when discussing al-Nasafī's views.

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Epub: The Thomistic Institute, 1947), II-II, q.2, a.9, sed contra. Hereafter, it will be referred to as *ST*.

emphasizes the role of God's grace in enabling individuals to have faith, as he believed that faith cannot be achieved through human effort alone but requires the assistance of divine grace. This is because Aquinas considers faith to be a "theological virtue" along with "hope" and "charity", which are all given to the faithful without any effort on their part.⁹

Aquinas further asserts that faith can be understood as having two dimensions. The first dimension is internal, which involves an individual's acceptance and adherence to the articles of faith that are revealed within the creeds. This dimension is essentially a cognitive process wherein an individual recognizes the validity of certain propositions. The second dimension, on the other hand, is external and involves the expression of one's beliefs through speech.¹⁰ Although Aquinas stresses the significance of the internal act of faith, as it leads to the external act, he regards both dimensions as crucial to a comprehensive understanding of religious faith.¹¹

According to Aquinas, faith also has three distinct aspects: *credere deum* means "to believe in God". This aspect of faith is concerned with the belief in the existence and attributes of God. It involves accepting God as a reality and as the creator and sustainer of the universe. *Credere deo* means "to believe God". This aspect of faith involves trusting in the teachings and promises of God as they are revealed in Scripture or through divine inspiration. It involves believing that God is trustworthy and that what He says is true. *Credere in deum* means "to believe into God". This aspect of faith represents its existential nature and entails a personal commitment to God. It symbolizes the

⁹ Aquinas categorises virtues into two main groups: "theological virtues" and "acquired virtues". Theological virtues, such as faith, hope, and charity, are infused in individuals as divine gifts from God, without any participation on their part. They are often referred to as "instilled" or "infused" virtues since God is the source and efficient cause of these virtues. In contrast, acquired virtues, such as prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, are developed through an individual's own effort and practice. These virtues are attained through consistent practice and habituation. Unlike theological virtues, they require personal discipline and effort to acquire. See Aquinas, *ST*, I-II. q.55, q.4.

¹⁰ Aquinas, *ST*, II-II. q.3, a.1.

¹¹ Aquinas, *ST*, II-II. q.3, a.1, and ad.3.

act of submitting oneself to God's will, accepting His commands as the guiding principle in one's life.¹²

Aquinas argues that faith is a kind of cognition that falls between scientific knowledge and mere opinion.¹³ Faith and scientific knowledge are distinct because the latter relies on conclusive evidence, which inherently excludes belief in the unseen or the unknown. On the other hand, mere opinion is based on subjective beliefs and lacks the certainty of knowledge. Faith, according to Aquinas, involves an element of uncertainty or doubt because it involves belief in things that cannot be directly observed or proven. However, this uncertainty is not the same as mere opinion because faith is grounded in a certain level of evidence, such as the testimony of trustworthy witnesses or the authority of sacred texts. In other words, faith involves a degree of reasoned belief that is not based solely on empirical evidence but that is still supported by evidence and logical reasoning. This middle ground between scientific knowledge and opinion is what Aquinas refers to as the "mean" of faith.

Furthermore, the intellect cannot provide a firm assent when "opinion" is the case, for there is no conclusive evidence to support the proposition in question. Similarly, in the act of faith, the intellect cannot reach certainty due to the lack of conclusive evidence supporting the proposition. However, what sets faith apart from mere opinion is that one can arrive at a firm assent through the exercise of free will. Thus, according to Aquinas, a strong will is required to attain faith, as he states:

the intellect assents to something, not through being sufficiently moved to this assent by its proper object, but through an act of choice, whereby it turns voluntarily to one side rather than to the other: and if this be accompanied by doubt or fear of the opposite side, there will be opinion, while, if there be certainty and no fear of the other side, there will be faith.¹⁴

As the passage suggests, faith is unique among other cognitive processes in that it depends on the exercise of free will. However,

¹² Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q.2 a.2; Bruno Niederbacher, "The Relation of Reason to Faith", *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies - Eleonore Stump (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 339-340.

¹³ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *The Pocket Aquinas: Selections from the Writings of St. Thomas*, ed. Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), 287.

¹⁴ Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q.1, a.4.

according to Aquinas, faith is still a cognitive act of the human mind because faith cannot reside in the irrational part of the soul, as the mind is its proper subject.¹⁵

As for al-Nasafī, in his renowned work on Islamic theology, *Tabṣīrat al-adillab*, he begins his discussion of faith by noting the ongoing debate among Islamic scholars on its nature. Some scholars posited that faith consists of three parts: knowledge or awareness through the heart (*al-maʿrifab bi-l-qalb*), confession or verbal declaration through the tongue (*al-iqrār bi-l-lisān*), and practices or deeds which are in line with the core tenets and beliefs of Islam (*al-ʿamal bi-l-arkān*). This position is attributed to notable scholars such as al-Mālik (d. 179/795), al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820), and Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal (d. 241/855).¹⁶ On the other hand, some scholars believe that faith is limited only to *al-maʿrifab bi-l-qalb* and *al-iqrār bi-l-lisān*.¹⁷ Al-Nasafī notes several variations of these three and how each school or individual adopted one of these variations as their definition of faith. In short, some accepted one alone, others combined two, and some took all three as their definition of faith.¹⁸

One particular school within this group deserves special attention as their assertion is directly relevant to the topic being discussed by al-Nasafī. The followers of Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 128/745-46), known as the Jahmiyyah sect, argued that faith is merely knowledge by the heart (*al-maʿrifab bi-l-qalb*).¹⁹ They seem to have excluded all other aspects of faith, inward or outward, such as submission (*taslīm*) and verbal declaration.

Al-Nasafī disagrees with the view of the Jahmiyyah and emphasizes the significance of voluntary internal conviction in the act of faith. In

¹⁵ Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q.55, a.4, ad.3.

¹⁶ Abū l-Muʿīn Maymūn ibn Muḥammad al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adillab fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Hüseyin Atay - Şaban Ali Düzgün (Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2003), 2/404.

¹⁷ Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adillab*, 2/404.

¹⁸ For further information about the adherents of each view and their interpretations of religious faith, see al-Nasafī's *Tabṣīrat al-adillab*, 2/404-415.

¹⁹ Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adillab*, 2/405-406: Cf. Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ismāʿīl Ibn Abī Bishr al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa-ikbtilāf al-muṣallīn*, ed. Hellmut Ritter (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1963), 132-133. Izutsu notes that this group may have been among the earliest to seriously investigate the internal structure of faith. See Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantic Analysis of Īmān and Islām* (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1965), 82.

line with this, he declares that faith can be defined only as assent by the heart (*al-taşdiq bi-l-qalb*).²⁰ He states that Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767) and Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) were the pioneers of this view. In his extensive work, *al-Tabṣirab*, he devotes a whole chapter to supporting the idea that faith is assent by the heart. In the aforementioned chapter, al-Nasafī ultimately asserts that faith (*īmān*) is the antonym of unbelief (*kufṛ*), which refers to the rejection of something as false or untrue (*takdhīb*).²¹ He goes on to state that upon examining the antonyms of *kufṛ* and *takdhīb*, we find the notion of assent (*taşdiq*) rather than knowledge (*maʿrifab*). Therefore, he concludes that faith is equivalent to assent and cannot be reduced to knowledge alone. To put it concisely, he maintains that assigning any other meaning to *īmān* would strip it of its intended significance (*maʿnā*).²²

Al-Nasafī critiques the idea that actions (*aʿmāl* or *afʿāl*) are an integral part of faith. He disapproves of this view, stating that if we associate *īmān* only with the religious obligations of Islam (*sharāʿi al-Islām*), such as daily prayers and fasting in Ramadan, we would be extending its meaning beyond its intended scope. According to him, adherence to Islam is not determined by one's actions, but by the sincere belief (*iʿtiqād* or *ʿaqīdab*) in the Islamic creed one embraces within his/her heart.²³ This is because a person, in fact, can perform the Islamic rituals without having genuine loyalty or adherence to the creed of Islam. The Qurʾān refers to those who have not fully internalized the principles of Islam as hypocrites²⁴ and contains several verses that illustrate the motives and psychological states of those who perform Islamic rituals in a similar manner, highlighting their pursuit of materialistic gains rather than a genuine love for God.²⁵

²⁰ Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-adillab*, 2/406; Id., *al-Tambīd fī uşul al-dīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥayy Qābil (Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1987), 99. For a study that examines the views of al-Nasafī and his teacher, al-Māturīdī, regarding the concept of faith, see Ahmet Altıntaş, "Ebū Mansur Muhammed el-Māturīdī ile Ebu'l-Muʿīn en-Nesefī'nin İman Görüşü", *Kabramanmaraş Sütçü İmam Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 16/32 (December 2018), 311-355.

²¹ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-adillab*, 2/406.

²² al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-adillab*, 2/406-408.

²³ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-adillab*, 2/406.

²⁴ al-Nisāʾ 4/142-143.

²⁵ al-Baqara 2/8-9; al-Nisāʾ 4/142; al-Māʿida 5/41; Āl ʿImrān 3/167; al-Tawba 9/42; al-Munāfiqūn 63/1-8.

In the discussion so far, both thinkers seem to have acknowledged faith as an inner assent. However, they also recognize that the outward expression of faith through language and its impact on human action cannot be disregarded. These external dimensions are seen as supplementary components of faith. The internal assent, or the inner acceptance and belief, is considered the fundamental and indispensable aspect of the act of faith. It is the core component that gives meaning and value to the other two elements. In other words, without the internal assent, the external manifestation of faith and its consequence on deeds would lose their significance and purpose. Let us now proceed with examining the roles that thinkers ascribe to reason, knowledge, and free will in the act of faith.

2. The Relation of Intellect to Religious Assent in the Act of Faith

According to Aquinas, there exist two distinct cases in which an individual grants his/her assent to a proposition. The first instance occurs when the proposition in question is either inherently true (i.e., self-evident) or when it is supported by conclusive evidence or demonstrative reasoning. In such situations, it is natural and necessary for one to assent firmly to the proposition in question.²⁶ This type of assent is commonly associated with “scientific knowledge”.²⁷ On the other hand, in the second case, the proposition is neither a self-evident truth nor is it supported by conclusive evidence or demonstrative reasoning. Here, assent to the proposition is subject to one’s own command and volition, and it is not a firm assent – except “to believe (*credere*)”,²⁸ which will be explained later. In simpler terms, individuals may choose to either accept or reject the proposition at hand, and this choice is not a result of a precise epistemic state of the intellect.

²⁶ Aquinas, *ST*, I, q.16, a.1, a.2, and a.8; Also see Frederick R. Tennant, *Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 1/301.

²⁷ In this context, the term ‘science’ (*scientia*) should not be conflated with its contemporary connotations. In the Middle Ages, theology and science were not clearly distinguished and were both considered sources of knowledge. The primary distinction between them was in their respective principles for generating knowledge. While science relied on self-evident principles, theology depended on principles originating from God, considered the ultimate source of all principles during that era.

²⁸ Aquinas, *ST*, I, q.16, a.1, a.2, and a.8.

Faith is not relevant to the first scenario. Therefore, Aquinas focuses on the latter and defines four cases in which the intellect can voluntarily grant its assent to a proposition. The first three cases are related to situations where the intellect leans toward one of the two sides, even though it cannot arrive at firm assent. First, the intellect may remain neutral and leave its assent suspended, as is the case with someone who “doubts”. Second, it may lean toward one side due to “some slight motive”, as in the case of someone who “suspects”. Third, it may lean toward one side with some degree of certainty but still fear that the other option might be true, as with someone who “opines”.²⁹ In addition to these three cognitive states, Aquinas identifies a fourth one, where one accepts one of the two parties with complete certainty. Aquinas refers to this as the state of “believing (*credere*)”. Faith is just as certain as *science* and *understanding*, or even more so, in certainty. Nevertheless, due to the absence of conclusive evidence, belief shares some similarities with “doubt”, “suspicion”, and “opinion”.³⁰ In other words, belief involves a strong conviction, comparable to that of *science* and *understanding*, but its epistemic value is equivalent to “doubt”, “suspicion”, and “opinion” due to the lack of conclusive evidence. Therefore, according to Aquinas, faith lies somewhere between “science” and “opinion”.³¹

It seems, in Aquinas, the certainty of one’s faith or conviction is not necessarily rooted in the epistemic capabilities of the intellect but rather in the will itself. In certain instances, an individual may choose between two options based on a motive or cause that is powerful enough to move the will but not the intellect. This is the position of the faithful, as there cannot be conclusive reasons or evidence enough to persuade and move the intellect towards faith. However, in the act of faith, there can be a sufficient and persuasive motive enough to move the will toward faith. The promise of eternal life offered by religion is what leads one’s will towards having faith, according to Aquinas.³²

Aquinas maintains that if a proposition has a conclusive reason or evidence, it becomes necessary for a person to accept it, leaving no

²⁹ Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q.2, a.1.

³⁰ Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q.4, a.8.

³¹ Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q.1, a.2 and q.2, a.1.

³² Thomas Aquinas, *The Disputed Questions on Truth*, trans. Robert W. Mulligan et al. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952-1954), q.14, a.1.

room for exercising discretion in the decision-making process. In simpler terms, if there is evidence, one necessarily assents to the proposition at hand. However, faith lies beyond the realm of natural reason, where propositions are verified through evidence. Therefore, as the act of faith is not based on conclusive evidence but rather on the exercise of one's free will, while knowledge, on the other hand, is based on conclusive evidence and objective verification, Aquinas concludes that faith and knowledge are mutually exclusive concepts.³³ It seems, according to Aquinas, that the merit of an act of faith lies in its freedom from conclusive evidence because it is only in such cases that one can freely give assent to the proposition in question.

Up to this point, Aquinas has argued that if faith is based on conclusive evidence, it cannot be considered meritorious, as it would limit one's freedom of choice. However, this idea raises another issue: if the will has such great authority over the intellect, it could potentially move the intellect to accept a different religion instead of Christianity. In other words, what motivates one to embrace Christian faith over others? Aquinas also recognizes that faith without sufficient rationale is blind and unreasonable. Therefore, a Christian believer should possess sufficient reasons for his/her faith.

He argues that the miracles in the Church's history, the fulfillment of prophecies, and the world's conversion to Christianity are sufficient motives that lead people to accept the Christian faith.³⁴ In addition, ordinary and simple people have convinced the world "... to believe things so arduous, to accomplish things so difficult, and to hope for things so sublime", all without any marvelous signs or proofs that the intellect can comprehend.³⁵ This is, according to Aquinas, one of the most persuasive motives regarding the authenticity of the Christian faith.

According to Aquinas, accepting divine revelation as a sufficient motive for embracing the Christian faith is both reasonable and

³³ Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q.2, a.1, ad.1.

³⁴ Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q.2, a.1, ad.1; Id., *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Laurence Shapcote, OP (Green Bay, Wisconsin: Aquinas Institute, Inc., 2018), bk. 1, ch. 6. The text has been further edited and revised by the Aquinas Institute, and the e-text version is available with parallel English and Latin on their website (Accessed November 27, 2023). See the bibliography for the link. Hereafter, it will be abbreviated as *SCG*.

³⁵ Aquinas, *SCG*, bk. 1, ch. 6.

necessary. This is because all human beings require the grace of God to attain salvation, and divine revelation is the only way of knowing this very fundamental truth.³⁶ Aquinas further argues that once believers accept God as the ultimate authority, they can trust what they hear from the scriptures, given that God cannot lie or be deceived.³⁷ In many areas of life, people often rely on the authority and testimony of others when making important decisions. Similarly, in matters of faith, it is reasonable to rely on the authority of God, just as we trust doctors for our health or historians for our understanding of the past. Since God is the most trustworthy of all authorities, it is reasonable to trust mostly or even only Him when it comes to matters of faith.³⁸

Although Aquinas considers these motives to be sufficient reasons for accepting the Christian faith, he admits that certain aspects of divine truths are destined to remain beyond human understanding. For, according to Aquinas, by its very nature, the mind is weak, and therefore, certain aspects of divine truth, which are intrinsic to faith, are beyond the limits of human cognition. One such example is the doctrine of the Trinity, which suggests that God is three in one. The human mind is limited in its capacity to fully comprehend or understand this concept, as it goes beyond the boundaries of human cognition.³⁹ Consequently, one might wonder whether it is fair for God to expect humans to believe in matters that surpass their intellectual capacity. After all, this raises questions about whether it reflects God's wisdom and justice.

Aquinas suggests that it is not unreasonable for God to require belief in such concepts, as they are crucial to attaining salvation. Moreover, while human intellect is limited, it is not entirely incapable of grasping such concepts, as God has revealed them to us through divine revelation. No one desires or makes an effort to attain something of which they are unaware or lack prior knowledge. Thus, humanity has been driven towards a higher good that surpasses its limited capacity and weak nature in this life by divine grace and the

³⁶ Aquinas, *ST*, I, q.1, a1.

³⁷ Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q.2, a.4 and q.4, a.8, ad.2.

³⁸ Aquinas, *ST*, I, q.1, a2c and II-II, q.9, a2, ad.3. For a detailed discussion of testimonial knowledge in Aquinas, see Matthew Kent Siebert, "Aquinas on Testimonial Justification: Faith and Opinion", *The Review of Metaphysics* 69/3 (March 2016), 555-582.

³⁹ Aquinas, *SCG*, bk. 1, ch. 3.

scriptures. Aquinas argues that exposing frail minds to things that exceed human cognition is necessary for humans to learn to desire and strive for eternal happiness, which itself transcends the human mind.⁴⁰ According to Aquinas, it appears that the mind and its reasoning power must be tested and strengthened through exposure to the transcendent articles of faith in this world. This process is regarded by him as a necessary preparation for eternal happiness.

If the truths of faith, according to Aquinas, were left to natural reason alone, most people would not know them. Acquiring knowledge in this field requires both the ability to learn and a willingness to do so, but many people do not possess one or both of those qualities. Further, some people may be too busy acquiring the necessities for the continuation of human life, or some may simply be too lazy to seek the truth. In addition, the intellect may not be mature enough in youth to comprehend profound truths, given the heightened nature of bodily desires. Excelling in theology and philosophy also demands a vast amount of specialized knowledge on many subjects and experience; thus, it takes years of rigorous practice to develop a comprehensive understanding of God through natural reason. Consequently, if God had not revealed the truths of faith, most people would remain ignorant of Him: God's divine grace ensures that all truths, including those accessible through natural reason, are revealed to humanity.⁴¹

Furthermore, according to Aquinas, although the intellect alone is insufficient to attain faith and understand some divine truths, it is also not entirely irrelevant to the process. He recognizes the intellect's demonstrative power in establishing the existence and oneness of God.⁴² We know that he praised the philosophers for their attempts to establish conclusive proofs regarding the existence of God through

⁴⁰ Aquinas, *SCG*, bk. 1, ch. 5.

⁴¹ Aquinas, *SCG*, bk. 1, ch. 4.

⁴² Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason, and Following Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 84. Aquinas regarded these arguments as highly compelling, to the point where he criticised those who rejected them using the following words: "... he who lacks the aforesaid knowledge of God seems very much to be blamed, since it is a very clear sign of a man's stupidity if he fails to perceive such evident signs of God's existence -even as a man would be deemed dull who, seeing man, did not understand that he has a soul". See Aquinas, *SCG*, bk. 3, ch. 38.

natural reason.⁴³ Aquinas also utilized *The Five Ways*, his well-known attempts to demonstrate God's existence through rational arguments.⁴⁴ However, Aquinas also acknowledges that such arguments may not be accessible to everyone, especially those who lack the time, education, or intellectual capacity to engage with them. He also notes that while reason can help individuals understand some truths about God, such knowledge should not be seen as the "articles of faith". Rather, they should be regarded as the "preambles to faith", which prepare individuals for a mature Christian faith.⁴⁵ In other words, natural reason can provide a framework for understanding and exploring God's existence and nature, but it cannot fully reveal God's plan for humanity or the means of attaining salvation. To achieve these aims, one must turn to divine revelation and the teachings of the Church. A mere intellectual understanding of God based on natural reason, devoid of charity, is referred to as "formless faith", which is regarded as lifeless and cannot be considered a virtue in the Christian sense.⁴⁶ In contrast, a believer is expected to possess a "formed faith", which is not only considered a virtue but also an active and dynamic expression of faith. To have a fully formed faith, one should accept even the preambles of faith through the authority of God rather than through rational arguments. In Aquinas' philosophy, a true believer does not give assent to anything unless it has been revealed by God in the Scriptures.⁴⁷

Despite the limitations of natural reason in comprehending divine truths, it has various functions in the realm of religion. For instance, it plays an essential role in defending divine teachings against heretics and demonstrating that the articles of faith do not go against our natural knowledge. Even though reason cannot prove the articles of faith, it

⁴³ Aquinas, *SCG*, bk. 1, ch. 3. For a comprehensive analysis of Aquinas' perspective on what natural reason can reveal about God, refer to Brian Davies, "Thomas Aquinas", *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jorge J. E. Gracia - Timothy B. Noone (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2003), 644-652.

⁴⁴ For an examination of Aquinas' justifications for the existence of God, see Timothy Pawl, "The Five Ways", *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies - Eleonore Stump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 116-126. For an analysis of the differences between Aquinas and Anselm on demonstrative reasoning concerning the existence of God, see Eric L. Mascall, "Faith and Reason: Anselm and Aquinas", *The Journal of Theological Studies* 14/1 (April 1963), 67-90.

⁴⁵ Aquinas, *ST*, I, q.2, a.2, ad.1; Id., *SCG*, bk. 3, ch. 38.

⁴⁶ Aquinas, *The Disputed Questions on Truth*, q.14, a.6.

⁴⁷ Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q.1, a.1. See also, *ST*, I, q.1, a.1.

also cannot contradict them.⁴⁸ Any arguments that go against the core principles of faith or seem to contradict them are either based on faulty reasoning or groundless assumptions. Therefore, as per Aquinas, the primary duty of natural reason in this respect is to identify and resolve any so-called conflicts between faith and reason.⁴⁹

It appears that the previous investigation of Aquinas conducted thus far has sufficiently revealed the roles played by intellect, knowledge, and will in the act of faith. Now, let us move on to al-Nasafī's views on the matter.

According to al-Nasafī, men have the capacity to attain knowledge (*'ilm*) of both the physical and metaphysical realms.⁵⁰ Although it is possible to acquire knowledge of God, comprehending His complete reality or essence is beyond human capacity. To express this in accordance with al-Nasafī's own terminology, one can know (*ya'lam*) God but cannot comprehend (*yudrik*) His divine essence. In other words, the verb "to know" (*ya'lam*) should be used exclusively when referring to God, rather than the verb "to comprehend" (*yudrik*). This is because *idrāk* implies a complete understanding of something to the extent of knowing all its boundaries or limits (*ḥudūd*) and its ultimate end (*nihāyah*).⁵¹ Therefore, the terms *idrāk* and *iḥāṭah* are inappropriate for discussing the infinite and all-powerful nature of God. Finite human intellects are unable to fully comprehend the immeasurable nature of the omnipotent God.

Following this brief discussion on knowledge and its limitations, al-Nasafī asserts that faith can only be justified by knowledge or conclusive evidence. This is because, according to him, the authenticity or falsehood of religions can only be discerned through

⁴⁸ Aquinas explains the impetus behind his use of defensive reasoning as follows: "... some of them, like the Mohammedans and pagans, do not agree with us as to the authority of any Scripture by which they may be convinced in the same way as we are able to dispute with the Jews by means of the Old Testament, and with heretics by means of the New. But the former accept neither. Thus we need to have recourse to natural reason, to which all are compelled to assent. And yet this is deficient in the things of God". See Aquinas, *SCG*, bk. 1, ch. 2.

⁴⁹ Aquinas, *ST*, I, q.1, a.8; Id., *SCG*, bk. 1, ch. 7.

⁵⁰ For a study that examines al-Nasafī's assessments regarding various definitions of knowledge (*'ilm*), see Adnan Bülent Baloğlu, "Doğru Bilgi Tanımına Ulaşma Çabası: Ebu'l-Mu'in en-Nesefi Örneği", *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 18 (2003), 3-20.

⁵¹ Al-Nasafī, *Tabşirat al-adillah*, 1/15.

evidence (*dalil*) and demonstrative reasoning. Consequently, the most persuasive rationale for an individual to choose one religion over another can only be justified by knowledge.⁵² In various parts of *Tabşirat al-adillab*, he emphasizes the significance of mental practices such as contemplation (*ta'ammul*) and profound thinking (*tafakkur*) in distinguishing between true and false religions. These practices entail engaging in deep reflection, introspection, and meditation on a specific subject, leading to a greater understanding and insight. Al-Nasafî deems these practices crucial for cultivating a deeper comprehension of one's faith and for discerning between genuine and spurious beliefs.⁵³

Similar to Aquinas, al-Nasafî places significant emphasis on and holds deep reverence for human reason (*'aql*). He states that when making decisions, humans have a natural inclination towards choosing the appropriate option. Al-Nasafî regards the faculty of reasoning as the most trustworthy instrument to do so in such situations. Reason is the capacity that sets humans apart from other beings. In fact, according to him, by contemplating the subtleties and mysteries of the human mind, one can recognize that it is God who instilled the faculty of reasoning within human nature.⁵⁴

Al-Nasafî argues that everything that exists in the universe (*maujūdāt*) serves as evidence for the existence of its Creator (*Şāni'*).⁵⁵ Through reason and contemplation, one can not only recognize the existence of the Creator but also know many of His divine attributes.⁵⁶ He maintains that it is unthinkable to assume that the universe, with its complex and intricate design, stunning aesthetics, and sturdy and flawless foundation, could have been fashioned by an inert, ignorant, or impotent entity. Anyone proposing that an embroidered silk fabric, a majestic palace, or a splendid painting could originate randomly from a stone or an unintelligent, inanimate entity would promptly be deemed foolish (*safih*) and stubborn by those possessing sound reasoning.⁵⁷ For al-Nasafî, transforming the signs present in the universe into knowledge through human reason is the

⁵² Al-Nasafî, *Tabşirat al-adillab*, 2/35 and 1/34-38.

⁵³ See, for instance, al-Nasafî, *Tabşirat al-adillab*, 1/40.

⁵⁴ Al-Nasafî, *Tabşirat al-adillab*, 1/29; Id., *al-Tambîd*, 4.

⁵⁵ Al-Nasafî, *Tabşirat al-adillab*, 1/62.

⁵⁶ Al-Nasafî, *Tabşirat al-adillab*, 1/62.

⁵⁷ Al-Nasafî, *al-Tambîd*, 21; Id., *Tabşirat al-adillab*, 1/246-255.

ultimate means of knowing the Creator and discerning the right religion or path that leads to Him.

Al-Nasafî further argues that reason is the only way to discern the authenticity of a religion from superstitious beliefs because, as mentioned earlier, the truth or falsehood of something can only be known through reason. However, he reports that during his era, some individuals argued that it is right to adhere to a particular religion if one holds a feeling or thought regarding its virtuousness or goodness in his/her heart (*mā yaqaʿ fî l-qalb ḥusnukū*).⁵⁸ Again, according to his narrative, certain groups frequently used intuition or inspiration (*ilhām*) as evidence to justify their religions during his time.⁵⁹ Al-Nasafî argues that none of these methods can serve as a valid way to determine the truth of a given religion, as adherents of different religious traditions can use the very same methods to assert the validity of their respective religions. This would result in accepting contradictory truth claims as valid concurrently, which is unacceptable to rational minds.⁶⁰ Last but not least, al-Nasafî firmly maintains that the imitator (*muqallid*) cannot rely on blind imitation or uncritical faith (*taqlid*) to distinguish the truth of religions. He consistently critiques imitators who accept the doctrines of others, including a teacher (*ʿālim*) or spiritual master (*shaykh*), without objectively verifying the truthfulness of their teachings.⁶¹

While it is true that al-Nasafî places great emphasis on providing evidence to justify religious beliefs, it is important to state that he uses the concept of evidence in a broad sense.⁶² First of all, he maintains

⁵⁸ Al-Nasafî, *Tabşirat al-adillab*, 1/34.

⁵⁹ Al-Nasafî, *Tabşirat al-adillab*, 1/34-35.

⁶⁰ Al-Nasafî, *Tabşirat al-adillab*, 1/27, 34.

⁶¹ Al-Nasafî, *Tabşirat al-adillab*, 1/35-36. The notion of sufficient evidence at the heart of al-Nasafî's interpretation of religious faith brings to mind Clifford's renowned essay *The Ethics of Belief* in modern philosophy of religion. According to Clifford, it is morally unacceptable for an individual to adhere to a belief more strongly than the evidence supports. He contends that accepting a belief without sufficient evidence is not legitimate. See Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief", 282. For a study dedicated to faith through *taqlid* in al-Nasafî, see Süleyman Akkuş, "Ebû'l-Muîn en-Nesefî'ye Göre Taklidin İnanç Boyutu", *Sakarya Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 10/18 (December 2008), 99-128.

⁶² Al-Nasafî's works are characterised by a sophisticated vocabulary that reflects his rigorous approach to understanding and evaluating the concept of "evidence". His use of key concepts such as *ḥujjab*, *istidlāl*, *burbān*, *taʿammul*, and *tafakkur* demonstrates the depth of his engagement with the problem. However, when al-

that the evidence should be strong enough to persuade the listener of the truth of religion. Further, the evidence might possess a sophisticated and complicated framework obtained by means of intricate reasoning about the universe, the essential nature of things, the Creator's unity, His divine attributes, and so on. Alternatively, it could have a more straightforward structure, such as contemplation of the lives of esteemed prophets and the miraculous events that they had performed by the will of God. This might seem simpler than the former, however, according to al-Nasafī, both methods can lead one to the conclusion. Therefore, the key aspect is that the evidence should be accurate and compelling enough to lead the listener to the truth. Consequently, al-Nasafī regards both methods as equally meritorious. According to him, those who embrace faith through either method deserve to be rewarded by God.⁶³

Al-Nasafī uses the narrative of Prophet Abraham from the Qur'ān to exemplify how reasoning and evidence can be efficiently and accurately utilized. By meticulously observing celestial objects such as stars, the moon, and the sun, Prophet Abraham inferred that a supreme power –God– governs their movements according to His divine plan. According to al-Nasafī, this serves as a remarkable example of utilizing reasoning and inference (*istidlāl*) to obtain solid evidence in matters of faith.⁶⁴ He asserts that any intellectually mature individual who has reached the age of responsibility (*taklīf*) should emulate Prophet Abraham's example and use their intellect to acknowledge the existence of a creator in the universe.⁶⁵

Nasafī specifically wants to discuss evidence or justification in matters of faith, he consistently employs the term *dalīl*. This Arabic term can be translated into English as “sign”, “guide”, “proof” or “evidence”. See Hans Wehr, *The Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, “دليل” (Accessed November 9, 2023). Al-Nasafī highlights the importance of providing clear and compelling reasons to support one's claims. This emphasis on rigorous argumentation is a hallmark of al-Nasafī's works and reflects his commitment to precision and clarity in philosophical discourse. For a thorough examination of the concept of evidence in Islamic theology, see Josef van Ess, “The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology”, *Kleine Schriften by Josef van Ess*, ed. Hinrich Biesterfeldt (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 1/238-271.

⁶³ Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adillab*, 1/39-40.

⁶⁴ Al-An'ām 6/75-79.

⁶⁵ Abū l-Mu'īn Maymūn ibn Muḥammad al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-kalām*, ed. Muḥammad Sālīḥ al-Farfūr (Damascus: Maktabat Dār al-Farfūr, 2000), 64-65. Al-Nasafī refers to the story of *Ahl al-kahf* (the Companions of the Cave) in the Qur'ān to highlight the idea that evidence can lead to knowledge of God. This demonstrates his broad

According to al-Nasafī, based on the available evidence –whether it pertains to the first sort or the second– two issues need to be clarified: the credibility (*ṣidq*) of the claimant and the veracity of the message being conveyed. As previously established, according to al-Nasafī, the soundness (*ṣiḥḥah*) or falsity (*fasād*) of religious beliefs can only be determined through evidence.⁶⁶ Al-Nasafī systematically applies these two principles when examining the Islamic Prophet’s assertion of his prophethood. In a meticulous effort to demonstrate that his prophethood has solid rational and historical foundations, al-Nasafī provides an extensive explanation of the reasons for accepting the truthfulness of the Prophet’s claim in a dedicated and lengthy chapter of his magnum opus.⁶⁷

Al-Nasafī justifies the necessity of providing evidence in matters of faith through the concept of adversity or hardship (*mashaqqab*). Accordingly, the wise person, before embracing any religion, engages in contemplation (*ta’ammul* and *tafakkur*), conducts research, employs sound thinking (*baḥṭh*) and reasoning (*naẓar*), and seeks refuge in God during times of adversity or hardship. On the other hand, those who indulge in worldly pleasures and disregard these practices often blindly follow the beliefs of others without questioning them.⁶⁸ The term *mashaqqab* refers to the importance of persisting and making efforts to eliminate doubts by using evidence and rational arguments, even when faced with challenges, to achieve genuine faith. Al-Nasafī argues that the level of effort one exerts to acquire knowledge and understanding directly correlates with the intellectual and moral merit of one’s faith.⁶⁹ In other words, individuals who make an effort to gain knowledge and understanding in matters of faith are more deserving of praise and recognition for their faith compared to

interpretation of the concept of evidence. See al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-kalām*, 82-83. Al-Nasafī reports that, according to Mu’tazilī, the intellect (*‘aql*) inherently possesses knowledge of God, and therefore reasoning is not necessary to know God. “*lā yajib ‘alaybi an yastadill bi-l-‘aql wa-lākinna l-‘aql yūjib ‘alaybi an ya’rifā’llāh ta’ālā*”. See al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-kalām*, 83. An interesting subject for an independent study could be exploring whether the Mu’tazilīs put forth a concept akin to Alvin Plantinga’s idea that “belief in God is properly basic”. See Plantinga, “Is Belief in God Properly Basic?”, 42; Id., “Reason and Belief in God”, 28.

⁶⁶ Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adillab*, 1/34.

⁶⁷ See al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adillab*, 2/45-106.

⁶⁸ Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adillab*, 1/39-40.

⁶⁹ Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adillab*, 1/40.

those who do not prioritize such pursuits. Conversely, those who cannot bear the challenges and troubles in the path of faith may not acquire the rewards and benefits commonly associated with faith.⁷⁰

Another condition for religious faith to be considered praiseworthy or meritorious, according to Islamic and ethical principles, is that one must demonstrate unwavering devotion to the objective of drawing closer (*taqarrub*) to God.⁷¹ In other words, the core intention behind the act of faith and the actions (*aʿmāl*) that stem from it should be to develop a closer relationship with God and bring oneself nearer to Him. Further, what matters most is that the decision to embrace the Islamic faith is made freely and willingly, without any form of external force or compulsion (*iḍtirār*).⁷² It becomes clear at this point that al-Nasafī does not perceive evidence as an external force that compels free will in the act of faith. We will come back to this point later and explore it in more detail.

Al-Nasafī notes that faith adopted by an individual on the brink of death also holds no merit in accordance with Islamic teachings. As a person approaches the end of his/her life, certain realities and truths become more apparent, such as his/her ultimate destination in the afterlife, paradise or hellfire. Consequently, the divine test that God has set for humanity becomes void, as the veil is lifted, and the truth is no longer hidden.⁷³

Despite the noteworthy emphasis on proof, al-Nasafī aligns with the views of Abū Ḥanīfah and Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī and reluctantly acknowledges that, ultimately, the faith of the imitator (*muqallid*) may be genuine and benefit them in growing closer to God, as long as the last two conditions are met. However, these individuals are considered sinful because they fail to make use of their intellect to comprehend the fundamental principles of their faith.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adillab*, 1/40.

⁷¹ Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adillab*, 1/39.

⁷² Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adillab*, 1/39.

⁷³ The Qurʾānic narrative of the Pharaoh demonstrates that even the most mighty and dreaded rulers can comprehend their own mortality and embrace faith based on the truths they witness during their last moments. However, according to Islamic teachings, at the moment of death or in the throes of dying, faith is considered null and void because God shows all men the truth before they die in a way they cannot refuse. See Yūnus 10/90-91.

⁷⁴ Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adillab*, 1/41.

It is crucial to clarify that al-Nasafī's emphasis on the significance of knowledge in matters of faith does not suggest that faith can be entirely reduced to knowledge. Despite acknowledging the weighty role of knowledge in developing and strengthening faith, al-Nasafī contends that faith encompasses more than mere intellectual understanding of God. As previously mentioned, al-Nasafī views faith as the assent (*taṣḍīq*) of the heart, that is, the inward movement of the heart. He censures those who conflate faith with knowledge and conducts a detailed linguistic analysis of the related concepts to support his argument. As a result of this analyses, al-Nasafī posits that knowledge (*maʿrifah*) cannot be equated with faith (*īmān*).⁷⁵ Faith and knowledge are distinct concepts that cannot be used interchangeably.

Al-Nasafī's second argument in support of this idea is that the lack of knowledge regarding a proposition does not always result in rejecting its truth, and again, possessing knowledge does not necessarily lead to accepting the truth of a proposition. He cites a Qurʾānic example to illustrate this point: "*Those to whom We gave the Scripture know him as they know their own sons. But indeed, a party of them conceal the truth while they know [it]*".⁷⁶ He emphasizes that faith cannot be spoken of here because they lack assent in the heart despite possessing knowledge.⁷⁷ In other words, this group of people mentioned in the verse cannot be considered believers as they do not truly believe in their hearts, even though they hold knowledge. According to al-Nasafī, there is a difference between not knowing about something (*jabālah*) and deliberately rejecting (*takdhīb*) its truth content. Not all ignorance results in disbelief (*kufī*), and not all knowledge leads to assent. In other words, the presence of knowledge does not preclude disbelief, nor does it always mandate faith.⁷⁸

According to al-Nasafī, knowledge does not eradicate one's free will in choosing to believe. Knowledge serves merely as a cause (*sabab*)

⁷⁵ It is a lengthy analysis that cannot be included here due to the limitations of this paper. See, for the analysis, al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adillab*, 2/406.

⁷⁶ *The Quranic Arabic Corpus - Sabih International* (Accessed February 23, 2023), al-Baqara 2/146.

⁷⁷ Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adillab*, 2/415; Cf. Id., *Baḥr al-kalām*, 166.

⁷⁸ See al-Baqarah 2/146; al-Anʿām 6/20; al-Tawbah 9/74; al-Kahf 18/29; al-Naml 27/:14.

that may lead to belief, just as ignorance can lead to disbelief.⁷⁹ Therefore, knowledge (or evidence) in the act of faith is only a cause, drive, or motive, not something that necessarily leads one to have faith. To put it another way, the role of knowledge is that of a trigger, an incentive, or an inducement rather than a guarantee of belief. Faith requires assent by the heart, rendering knowledge alone insufficient for its attainment. The act of faith involves a volitional, emotional, and spiritual dimension that cannot be replaced by knowledge alone. This is because, as al-Nasafī contends, the essence of faith lies in the heart's motion towards embracing the truth: *al-īmān huwa l-taşđīq* (faith is assent), *bi-l-qalb yakūn al-taşđīq* (and assent is actualized through the heart); *al-īmān yakūn bi-l-qalb* (thus, faith is actualized through the heart).⁸⁰

As a result, al-Nasafī regards *taşđīq* as a movement of the heart and rejects the notion that *maʿrifah* inevitably leads to *īmān*. This implies that he ascribes a dual meaning to *taşđīq*. The first meaning of *taşđīq* refers to the cognitive recognition of something, where free will is not involved, as knowledge necessarily leads to *taşđīq*. As for the second meaning of *taşđīq*, it relates to volition, that is, the power or faculty of making choices or decisions by one's own will. According to al-Nasafī, upon acquiring knowledge in the pursuit of faith, individuals are still at liberty to adopt or reject the moral principles and teachings of that faith as the guiding force in their lives. This second *taşđīq*, which is mainly associated with one's faculty of choice, is thought of by al-Nasafī as the thing that is most deserving of being called *īmān*, as it functions as a controlling, commanding, and guiding force.⁸¹ Al-Taftāzānī's remarks in *Sharḥ al-ʿAqāʿid* support the idea that Māturīdī theologians commonly held the belief in the dual interpretation of assent:

⁷⁹ The Arabic term *sabab* denotes "cause", "occasion", or "motive". Al-Nasafī argues that this term can also be used in a non-causal sense. For further details, see al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-kalām*, 67.

⁸⁰ Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adillāh*, 2/415.

⁸¹ It has been observed numerous times that al-Nasafī was a dedicated disciple of al-Māturīdī, and his comprehension of *taşđīq* is in harmony with that of his teacher. *Taşđīq* is understood by both scholars as having a dual sense. Meric Pessagno's study of the idea of *taşđīq* in al-Māturīdī has been instrumental in shaping the analysis presented here, for which I am thankful, see Jerome Meric Pessagno, "Intellect and Religious Assent: *The View of Abū Manşūr al-Māturīdī*", *The Muslim World* 69/1 (1979), 18-27.

... there is a distinct difference between the cognition of the judgments and deciding that they are true on the one hand, and the assent to them and conviction about them on the other. So[,] it is sound to call the second kind Belief [*īmān*] in distinction from the first. ... Some of the Early Theologians mention the suggestion that assent is an expression for binding the heart to that which is known of the narratives given by the Narrator; and it is something acquired (*kasbī*), established by the choice of the one who assents. Therefore[,] it is to be rewarded and considered the chief of religious duties (*al-ibādāt*) rather than cognition which sometimes occurs without any acquisition, as when one's glance falls on some body and there results to him knowledge that it is a wall or a stone. ... assent means that by your choice you ascribe veracity to the Narrator. Thus, if it were to occur in the heart without choice, it would not be assent, even though it were cognition.⁸²

This passage implies that in the first *taṣḍīq*, the term *qalb* pertains to man's cognitive faculty, as it is exclusively through this faculty that one can differentiate between truth and falsehood. On the other hand, in the second *taṣḍīq*, the term *qalb* denotes man's faculty of choice.⁸³ In the latter context, man's cognitive faculty holds no importance as this *taṣḍīq* is solely a matter of the heart.⁸⁴ Put differently, the *taṣḍīq* concerning knowledge does not necessarily lead to the second *taṣḍīq* concerning free will. The latter *taṣḍīq* involves going beyond the mere intellectual understanding obtained from the former *taṣḍīq* and wholeheartedly committing oneself to the veracity of the former *taṣḍīq*. Al-Nasafī's interpretation of faith as "a light in the heart" (*nūr fi l-qalb*) emphasizes the voluntaristic character of the second *taṣḍīq*.⁸⁵ According to this view, individuals voluntarily embrace this light as their primary principle for grappling with their existential inquiries,

⁸² Sa'ad al-Dīn Mas'ūd ibn Fakhr al-Dīn al-Tāftāzānī, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam: Sa'ad al-Dīn al-Tāftāzānī on the Creed of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī*, trans. Earl Edgar Elder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 123.

⁸³ When distinguishing between the mind and the heart, al-Nasafī employs the term *bāl* to refer specifically to the former, as evidenced by his use of the phrase *khaṭāra bi-bālibī* to describe mental thoughts. See al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-kalām*, 164-165.

⁸⁴ Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adillab*, 2/415.

⁸⁵ Al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-kalām*, 67.

including the purpose of life and the meaning of existence in the world.

Lastly, although it is essential to have a strong commitment to the form of *taşdıq* known as faith, which pertains to free will, there is no obligation to be committed to the *taşdıq* related to knowledge. Faith transcends mere acknowledgment of truth through cognition and logical reasoning, but it should also rely on conclusive evidence, as unfounded faith is blind. Al-Nasafî upholds a close relation between knowledge and religious faith, portraying faith as the light of knowledge in the heart (*nūr al-maʿrifah*).⁸⁶ Concepts that evoke knowledge and lead to it, such as evidence, reasoning, and sign, occupy a central place in al-Nasafî's interpretation of religious faith. Upon careful examination of his works, one can observe that al-Nasafî repeatedly stresses the importance of refraining from blindly accepting the beliefs of others without a foundation in knowledge. Faith that lacks rational justification is not praiseworthy. Considering that both reason and free will are divine gifts, they should not be in conflict. Therefore, reason should illuminate the path that leads to faith and make it easier for individuals to assent to its truth content.

3. Examining Two Sides of the Coin: A Comparative Analysis

The first section of the discussion revealed that both scholars are in agreement regarding the concept of faith as an inward assent, referred to as *agnitio* or *taşdıq*.⁸⁷ However, they also recognize the significance

⁸⁶ Al-Nasafî, *Bahr al-kalām*, 67.

⁸⁷ One might rightfully ask why the comparison of the scholars' ideas was conducted under a separate heading rather than being integrated throughout the study. One who thinks that the latter is a better option than the former may even assume that the study has structural flaws. However, first and foremost, I believe it is crucial to ensure that readers have a complete understanding of the positions and perspectives held by the thinkers under discussion before proceeding to assess their views. This is because the viewpoints of each thinker regarding a particular matter are strongly connected and interrelated with their viewpoints on other topics. If assessments or comparisons were made without first presenting these interconnected perspectives and the general picture, it might lead to confusion among the readers. Therefore, introducing this interconnection at the outset will make the subsequent comparison more effective and easier for the readers to follow. This approach also provides dedicated space for detailed assessment. I also believe that in this way, each scholar's ideas can be explored in-depth within their respective sections. Then, by bringing these separate threads together in the

of the outward expression of faith through speech and its influence on human deeds. While these last two aspects of faith are not inherent to its nature, they serve as complementary factors. Inner assent is required and indispensable for faith because outward declaration and deeds have no meaning in the absence of inner assent. Therefore, the expression “faith is assent by the heart” does not exclude the external declaration and deeds from faith; rather, it emphasizes that without inner assent, the other two become futile.

Furthermore, it is evident from the writings of both authors that they each attribute profound value to human reason. For instance, according to Aquinas, human reason plays an essential role in defending divine teachings against infidels and in demonstrating that the articles of faith align with our natural knowledge. Similarly, al-Nasafī constantly employs human reason to safeguard the teachings of his school and refute heretical views held by certain groups. Human reason can also unveil numerous truths concerning the existence of God, although it has limitations in comprehending certain divine realities, such as the concept of the Trinity, as emphasized by Aquinas. Al-Nasafī, too, affirms the value of reason in acquiring knowledge about God but admits that fully grasping His reality or essence surpasses human capacity. As previously mentioned, according to him, one can know (*yaʿlam*) God but cannot fully comprehend (*yudrik*) His divine essence.

There is a remarkable difference, however, even a complete contrast, in the positions of these two scholars regarding the relationship between religious assent and conclusive evidence. According to Aquinas, faith stands somewhere between scientific knowledge and mere opinion, serving as a distinct form of cognition. Its distinction from mere opinion lies in the profound certainty that can be attained through the voluntary exercise of free will, while its difference from scientific knowledge lies in the absence of conclusive evidence. Therefore, faith resembles scientific knowledge regarding complete certainty but shares similarities with opinion due to the lack of conclusive evidence. The merit of an act of faith seems to stem from

comparative section, the study can highlight the divergences and convergences more effectively. Thus, while I appreciate this concern, I believe our approach was methodically chosen to yield the most reliable and insightful outcomes for the purpose of the study.

its independence from conclusive evidence. In other words, faith is meaningful when it is not based on conclusive proof because truly voluntary assent (*agnitio*) to a proposition may occur only when there is freedom to choose without being forced by evidence. This means that faith, according to Aquinas, cannot be forced or coerced even by reason or knowledge itself; it must be a voluntary and sincere act of the will. If there were unambiguous and undeniable proofs of God's existence and the truths of faith, then faith itself would become unnecessary, as assent would become a necessity in such circumstances. Nevertheless, the capacity of the will to choose in favor of faith can only be achieved through the assistance of God. In other words, Aquinas believes that the ability to have a will inclined towards faith depends on divine aid or intervention, for, as his predecessor Augustine once claimed, the human will, if not guided by God, is destined to sin, let alone attain faith.⁸⁸ This implies that faith is not solely a result of rational thinking or human effort but rather a theological virtue and, ultimately, a gift from God. It is a quality that is cultivated through an intimate relationship with God. Aquinas believes that for individuals to truly understand and fully embrace the truths of faith, they require divine intervention from God. It is through this guidance that they can attain a deep and unwavering conviction in their beliefs. Therefore, the ability to have faith and make virtuous choices is viewed as a manifestation of God's grace.

Al-Nasafi, on the other hand, distinguishes between assent (*taşdiq*) originating from knowledge and that arising from faith. He acknowledges that when it comes to knowing, the act of assenting to a proposition becomes an ineluctable reality. Faith, however, does not represent the initial involuntary assent; instead, it is a subsequent assent that entails freely embracing the truth imparted by the earlier assent and incorporating it as a guiding principle in one's life. In other words, simply knowing of something does not necessarily make its content the guiding principle by which one lives. Knowledge, the former assent, merely serves as a motive that encourages one toward

⁸⁸ For further information regarding the relationship between human free will and divine intervention within the context of Christian faith as interpreted by Augustine and Aquinas, see Muhammet Saygi, "The Predominant Christian Interpretation of Religious Faith in the Middle Ages: Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas", *Darulfunun İlabiyat* 34/1 (June 2023), 211-242.

the latter assent, which is what faith (*īmān*) is, according to al-Nasafī. He maintains that despite possessing knowledge, individuals can deceive themselves and lead a life that contradicts the content of the truth revealed in the initial assent. Consequently, he argues against the idea that knowledge inherently and inevitably eradicates free will in believing, thereby negating its rational and ethical merit.

Some philosophers and theologians have questioned the idea that faith is exclusively a theological virtue given by God, without any involvement or contribution from the believer. For instance, Paul J. Griffiths draws attention to the devastating repercussions and undesirable outcomes that would arise if the rational defence of faith were abandoned. If the use of knowledge and demonstrative reasoning in favour of religious beliefs is discarded, religious traditions, according to Griffiths, would be reduced to the level of mere personal opinions. In other words, without a rational apologetic enterprise, religious beliefs would lose their intellectual grounding and become subjective views devoid of objective legitimacy or significance. Furthermore, if religious beliefs that guide the lives of religious individuals lack rational justification, it will undermine their credibility in public discourse. As a consequence, their perspectives and contributions may be marginalised or disregarded, restricting their opportunity to actively participate in shaping public policies and decisions.⁸⁹ Eventually, it appears that if the fundamental beliefs of a particular religion cannot be adequately defended and protected against opposing arguments, that religious tradition is unlikely to survive in the long run.

Anthony Kenny argues against the claim of some theologians, including Aquinas, that faith is a theological virtue. According to Kenny, certain criteria need to be fulfilled for faith to be considered praiseworthy or meritorious. The first criterion is that the rational justifications or arguments supporting the existence of God should be established without depending on faith. In other words, arguments supporting God's existence should be based on demonstrative reasoning rather than solely relying on faith or revelation. The second criterion is that the historical events claimed by believers to be divine

⁸⁹ Paul J. Griffiths, *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

revelations must be verified or, at the very least, shown to be rationally possible by historians using the methods of historical science.⁹⁰

Terence Penelhum argues that Aquinas' theory, which states that religious faith can only be considered praiseworthy if the evidence supporting it is not conclusive, is misguided. According to Penelhum, this perspective implies a dichotomy between faith and knowledge, suggesting that they cannot coexist or be reconciled. In the words of Penelhum:

... Aquinas, and a great many other thinkers who follow him, are mistaken in holding that the voluntariness, and hence the merit, of faith depends upon the inconclusiveness of the grounds for it. Perhaps acceptance can be given voluntarily even though the grounds are conclusive. If this seems absurd, let us reflect first that there are two ways in which one can accept what is proved to one: one can be reluctant to accept it, as Thomas's devils are, or one can be glad to accept it. Perhaps the man of faith has merit because he is glad to accept the truths of faith when the devil is not. Perhaps what makes faith voluntary is not that its grounds are inconclusive, but that even if they are conclusive, men are free to deceive themselves and refuse to admit that they are. Faith would be the outcome of a willingness to admit this, and faith and knowledge need not then be exclusive at all. ... Faith might be, or include, supposed knowledge.⁹¹

It is true also for al-Nasafī that faith must be freely chosen to be deserving of praise. Nevertheless, al-Nasafī differs in that he does not see a need to discard knowledge in favour of free will. One can still exercise his/her freedom of choice by either accepting or rejecting the truth content that arises from his/her initial assent as the fundamental criterion to guide his/her life. In other words, the praiseworthiness of faith can also be attributed to voluntarily adopting such a criterion or willingly and gladly embracing it as the guiding force in one's life, as Penelhum argues. It is worth noting that, according to many religious traditions, even demons or evil spirits possess knowledge about God. However, their faith is not deemed praiseworthy because it is coerced

⁹⁰ Anthony Kenny, *What Is Faith?: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 57.

⁹¹ Terence Penelhum, "The Analysis of Faith in St Thomas Aquinas", *Religious Studies* 13/2 (June 1977), 152-153.

or forced upon them due to the immediate presence of God. To put it another way, their faith is not based on their free will since they have direct knowledge of God's existence. Therefore, their faith is not meritorious because they do not willingly or voluntarily accept God's authority over them.

It might be said that al-Nasafī, due to the simplicity of Islamic beliefs he encountered, adopted a strictly rational approach to the subject being discussed. In contrast to his Christian colleague, al-Nasafī did not have to grapple with complex issues such as the Incarnation and Trinity that are elusive to explain by natural reason. This distinction likely had a notable influence on their adoption of different perspectives. It is worth noting that even Aquinas himself, in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, acknowledges the straightforward nature of Islamic teachings, although his comments seem to be directed towards diminishing their significance by emphasising their simplicity. Aquinas' words are as follows:

... the lessons of truth which he [the Prophet of Islam] inculcated were only such as can be easily known to any man of average wisdom by his natural powers—in fact, he mingled the truths which he taught with many fables and most false doctrines.⁹²

In the passages immediately preceding these statements, Aquinas addresses several elusive doctrines of Christianity, which he refers to as the “mysteries” of faith. For instance, according to Aquinas, the Incarnation—the belief that Jesus Christ is both fully human and fully divine—is extremely difficult for human understanding to wholly grasp. Despite the elusive nature of these doctrines, Aquinas interprets the worldwide spread of Christianity as compelling evidence of its truth and divinely ordained status. In other words, he regards the embrace and spread of Christianity across diverse cultures and regions as a manifestation of its authenticity and divine nature. In Aquinas' words:

Now, such a wondrous conversion of the world to the Christian faith is a most indubitable proof that such signs did take place ... For it would be the most wondrous sign of all if, without any wondrous signs, the world were [was] persuaded by simple and lowly men to believe things so arduous, to accomplish things so difficult, and to hope for things so sublime.⁹³

⁹² Aquinas, *SCG*, bk. 1, ch. 6.

⁹³ Aquinas, *SCG*, bk. 1, ch. 6.

If, based on our discussion so far, one concludes that Aquinas holds or advocates a fideist attitude, this would be a misinterpretation. It must be clarified that within Aquinas' theological framework, when we say knowledge and faith are mutually exclusive, we refer to a specific process in which one gives "intellectual assent" to the propositions of Christian faith, or, as Aquinas calls it, to the articles of "formed faith". This should not be understood as Aquinas suggesting a fundamental contradiction between intellect (knowledge) and faith in a general sense. Aquinas does not advocate the idea of making a significant "leap of faith", nor does he assert that faith and reason are in constant and irreconcilable conflict. The conclusion of this study, that "knowledge and faith are mutually exclusive in Aquinas", as mentioned earlier, primarily pertains to a specific context: the process of forming one of the three theological virtues, faith.⁹⁴ Here, Aquinas still maintains that faith and reason do not contradict each other. However, he admits that there are some articles of faith, such as the Trinity and Incarnation, that transcend or surpass the limits of human intellect. Therefore, excluding knowledge from the act of having faith within this context does not imply that faith and reason are fundamentally incompatible in Aquinas' thought.

Otherwise, at all stages of his theological framework, Aquinas employs reason just as intensively as al-Nasafī does. Specifically, this role of reason in Aquinas is more prominent during the stage of "formless faith", which serves as a preparatory phase leading to the actual destination known as "formed faith". Yet, in the stage of "formed faith", Aquinas continues to rely on reason, but he does so with more moderation compared to the earlier stage, where reason plays a more assertive role. In the latter stage, Aquinas attempts to demonstrate through the intellect the reasons why an act of Christian faith should be grounded in free will rather than intellect. In other words, reason still plays a role in this stage but in a less dominant or assertive manner. He seeks to show that faith is not solely a product of intellectual

⁹⁴ In Aquinas' philosophy, "faith", as explained earlier, is considered one of the three theological virtues, alongside "hope" and "charity". And all these virtues are bestowed upon the servant as a free gift from God, without any effort on the part of the individual. For more information regarding how Augustine influenced Aquinas on the matter of human will in the act of faith, see Saygi, "The Predominant Christian Interpretation of Religious Faith in the Middle Ages", 211-242.

processes. It should be acknowledged that even in this latter stage, Aquinas does not abandon reason. He continues to use intellectual means to explain the rationale behind grounding faith in free will. As a result, Aquinas believes that faith and reason can coexist and complement each other, even though faith, according to him, becomes more about one's free choice and less about intellectual persuasion.

Even after these reconsiderations, one aspect of Aquinas' philosophy remains unchanged: the will plays a significant role in the acquisition of Christian faith. Aquinas' writings on this matter are so clear and unambiguous that there is no room for different interpretations. This privileged position of the will in his theology is evident in contemporary studies, including those that defend Aquinas' account of faith.⁹⁵ When one believes (*credere*), his/her act of intellectual assent is not caused by the "evidentness" of the object itself or by the inherent clarity or obviousness of the thing being believed but by his/her willpower.⁹⁶ To elaborate, when the intellect evaluates the proposition, it deems the proposition to be highly probable or likely to be true. However, the available evidence is not strong enough to fully convince the intellect to accept the proposition at hand as true.⁹⁷ This is what we mean when we say that the will plays a significant role and knowledge and faith are mutually exclusive in Aquinas' account of faith. Aquinas argues that the will naturally tends towards what is good.⁹⁸ When the evidence or information presented to the intellect is not strong enough to make it fully accept, the will can step in to bridge this gap.⁹⁹ In other words, the will can influence the

⁹⁵ See, for instance, John A. West, "Aquinas on Intellect, Will, and Faith", *Aporia* 13/1 (Spring 2003), 1, 8.

⁹⁶ West, "Aquinas on Intellect, Will, and Faith", 4, 8.

⁹⁷ West, "Aquinas on Intellect, Will, and Faith", 6.

⁹⁸ In Aquinas' philosophy, the will, which is a faculty of the human soul, is inherently inclined toward the good. However, it is important to note that "good" in this context does not refer to any specific or particular good thing; rather, it signifies goodness in a general or universal sense, namely, the First Truth, God himself. As a result of this inherent disposition, the will can, in certain situations, influence or direct the other powers of the soul, leading them to act in accordance with the pursuit of the universal good rather than individual or specific goods. See West, "Aquinas on Intellect, Will, and Faith", 2-3, 6.

⁹⁹ Because of this prominent role of the will in the act of faith, Aquinas is characterised as an "indirect and descriptive volitionalist". See West, "Aquinas on Intellect, Will, and Faith", 8. However, as Kenny points out, it should be noted that the process in which the will influences the intellect also begins with the intellect itself, which is

intellect to choose to assent to the proposition because it recognises that doing so is a way to attain the universal or absolute good, namely, God himself.

Conclusion

The relation of intellect to religious assent remains an elusive and complex issue, with various approaches and interpretations. This study examined two alternative approaches, specifically those of al-Nasafi and Aquinas, and analysed their perspectives on religious faith. In conclusion, according to Aquinas, the object of faith cannot sufficiently move the intellect to give assent to the propositions of faith. In other words, there cannot be conclusive evidence in the acquisition of faith strong enough to fully convince the intellect to accept the proposition at hand as true. However, the will can, in certain situations, such as in the act of faith, influence or command the intellect to give assent because of its inherent disposition towards goodness. Yet, grounding faith in knowledge introduces a challenge to human free will, as knowledge compels the intellect to assent, leaving no room for free will. According to Aquinas, faith is worthy of praise only when it emerges as an authentic expression of the will, unencumbered by conclusive evidence or knowledge. To put it simply, in the presence of knowledge, assent arises from the intellect necessarily, but faith should be a genuine act of the will. This is Aquinas' stance that leads us to the conclusion that, within Aquinas's account of faith, religious assent and knowledge are mutually exclusive entities. Otherwise, it should be explicitly stated that he does not advocate for a fideist attitude. In fact, he skilfully rationalises why he adopts this position, as demonstrated in the discussions throughout the current study. He does utilise reason and rational explanations to support his theory of faith, and he certainly distinguishes his approach from fideistic discourses.

responsible for comprehending and assessing the qualities or characteristics that make a particular thing good. Once the intellect recognises these qualities, it informs the will, which is the faculty associated with desire and decision-making. The will, informed by the intellect's evaluation, then generates the desire to pursue the perceived "good". In essence, the intellect first comprehends what is good, and the will subsequently responds by fostering the desire to attain or pursue that perceived good. See Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 59.

Al-Nasafī, on the other hand, offers an alternative way of addressing the relation of intellect to religious assent. He argues that faith consists of holding two assents. The first assent (*taṣḍīq*) is related to knowledge (*maʿrifah*), and free will does not play a role in this assent because knowledge necessarily leads to assent. In other words, once the intellect engages with the object, free will no longer plays a role, as cognition is inevitably realised by the human mind after such engagement. Therefore, faith cannot be reduced to *maʿrifah*, or *maʿrifah* cannot be called faith because faith is not an intrinsically inevitable conclusion that emerges from reasoning or an intellectual argument. Faith arises only when the truth content of the first assent is voluntarily adopted as a guiding criterion for one's life through a second assent. Faith (*īmān*), occasionally defined as *iʿtiqād*, can be seen as the conscious act of binding or tethering (*ʿaqd*) one's innermost being, referred to as *qalb* by al-Nasafī, to the Divine. Faith represents a sincere and deliberate commitment to living a virtuous life grounded in knowledge and an unwavering love for God. This act of binding (*ʿaqd*) or establishing a genuine connection with the Divine necessitates a prior state of knowledge, understanding, or consciousness of the Divine. For human beings bind their hearts only to what they are conscious of or have knowledge about. As a result, according to al-Nasafī, faith is not an arbitrary or irrational leap but rather a moral attitude that emerges when individuals consciously turn towards God. Although it is true that faith cannot be reduced to *maʿrifah*, there is also no mutual conflict between intellect and religious assent in al-Nasafī's perspective. The intellect prepares a person for faith and eases the transition from the first assent (in the sense of cognition) to the second (in the sense of voluntary commitment). For al-Nasafī, religious faith can only be justified by knowledge or conclusive evidence (*dalīl*). Imitating the beliefs of forefathers (*taqlīd*), relying on intuition (*ilbām*), or trusting in the goodness of those beliefs cannot be a means of acquiring true knowledge of religions. Holding a religious faith that is not based on *dalīl* is problematic both from epistemological and moral perspectives. Knowledge, evidence, or reason (*ʿaql*) is the only ground that al-Nasafī deems sufficient for an individual to accept a religious faith, as it is the only means by which the truth or falsity of any claims can be known.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Dr. Richard Todd for his feedback on sections related to Abū l-Muʿīn al-Nasafī, and to Prof. Nicholas Adams, for his constructive criticism on Thomas Aquinas. I would also like to express my gratitude to Prof. İlyas Çelebi and Dr. Sami Turan Erel for their assistance with Arabic sources. Special thanks to the anonymous referees whose contributions greatly improved this study.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

FUNDING

The author received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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