Faith & Reason
What is Faith?

Meanings from the *Oxford English Dictionary*

(1) a set of propositions that one believes
   “The Jewish faith”

(2) a relationship to a belief
   “I believe that God exists on faith alone”

(3) a relationship to an individual
   “I have faith in Ed” (that he will keep his word, etc.)

(4) an attitude towards life
   To be willing to act in the face of uncertainty, hopeful that things will work out.
Meanings from the *Oxford English Dictionary*

(1) A verbal account that explains or justifies something

“He had his reasons for swallowing that toad, but they weren’t good reasons.”

“Her reasons persuaded him to stay home and avoid being lynched by the aroused mob.”

(2) A power or faculty of mind …

(a) To think and form valid judgements by a process of logic.

(b) To adapt thought or action to some end (means-end reasoning).

(c) In contrast with the *will, imagination, or passion*, reason is more rule-like or governed.
What is Faith?

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. (Hebrews 11:1)
Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. 

Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore, seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand.

Author of Hebrews
(1st c. CE)

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Augustine of Hippo
(354-430)
What is Faith?

Author of Hebrews (1st c. CE)

Believing something on faith means believing it to be true because God says it is true.

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What is Faith?
What is Faith?

Believing something on faith means believing it to be true because God says it is true.

Faith begins precisely where thinking leaves off. Therefore, seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand.
See that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit.

(Colossians 2:8)
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(Colossians 2:8)
How are Faith and Reason Related?

(1) Does faith *correct* reason?  (Augustine)

or

(2) Does faith *supplement* reason?  (Aquinas)
How are Faith and Reason Related?

Reason helps us discover credible authority but, once found, reason must submit to this authority.

Augustine of Hippo
(354-430)
There is a two-fold truth to religious claims. Faith *supplements* human reason.

- Knowable only by faith; reason can elucidate, but not prove.
  - Ex.: that the universe was created in time; that God is triune.

- Knowable through reason.
  - Ex.: that God exists; that God is the cause of the universe.

**Articles of Faith**

**Preambles to the Articles of Faith**

**How are Faith and Reason Related?**

[Image of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)]
Believing on Faith

Believing something on faith means believing it to be true because God says it is true.

2+3=5!  F=ma!  I exist!  Murder is wrong!  Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo!  The Cubs are a superior baseball team!

Believe Me, O Mortals!

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)
Believing something on faith means believing it to be true because God says it is true.

Given this definition of faith, which of the following statements may one “believe on faith”?

(1) Jesus is the Son of God.
(2) The world was created in time.
(3) The Bible is the word of God.
(4) God exists.
Bk. 1, Ch. 3: On the Way in which Divine Truth is to be Made Known

(§2) “There is a twofold mode of truth in what we profess about God”:

(1) Truths obtainable by natural reason (e.g., God exists, God is one): these truths were available to Aristotle.
(2) Truths obtainable by faith alone (e.g., God is triune): to these, Aristotle had no access and so could not have known.

Aquinas offers **four arguments** for accepting this second kind of truth that is beyond human reason, viz., supernatural truths:

(1) FROM THE ORIGIN OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE (§3): all our knowledge comes from our senses, but God is nonsensible.
(2) FROM THE GRADATION OF THE INTELLECTS (§4): just as it is folly for the simple-minded to reject the claims of the scientist, it is folly for the human to reject the claims of God.
(3) FROM OUR KNOWLEDGE OF SENSIBLES (§5): Our knowledge is limited even with sensible things; thus it will be even more limited with the nonsensible.
(4) FROM AUTHORITY (§§6-7). Both Aristotle and Scripture attest to knowledge that is beyond human reasoning.

[Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (written 1251-64)]
(1) **PROBLEM OF EXCLUSIVENESS** (§3)
   Without such revelation, there would be few people who would ever attain to those truths, either because they lacked ability, or lacked the time, or lacked the initiative (i.e., were too lazy).

(2) **PROBLEM OF TIME** (§4)
   Even those who could attain to those truths wouldn’t get them until late in life, due to the profundity and presuppositions of the truths, and the youthful passions of the person.

(3) **PROBLEM OF FALSITY** (§5)
   These truths, due to their complexity, would probably be mixed with error.

[Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (written 1251-64)]
Bk. 1, Ch. 5: Why there are supernatural truths, and why God should reveal them to us

(1) HIGHER GOOD (§2)  
Human beings are ordained to a higher good (e.g., heaven); but if humans have no knowledge of this higher good, they can hardly be expected to desire it. Thus, they need these higher truths.

(2) KNOWLEDGE OF GOD’S NATURE (§3)  
By revealing these truths, we gain a better understanding of the nature of God, particularly the fact that he is so beyond us in intellect and wisdom.

(3) HUMILITY (§4)  
Being revealed these truths curb human presumption, showing to us the limits of our intellects.

(4) JOY (§5)  
There’s a great deal of joy to be gained in contemplating these truths.

[Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (written 1251-64)]
Bk. 1, Ch. 6: The truths of revelation are justified by miracles

Aquinas has two kinds of miracles in mind:

(1) The Standard Kind
Turning water into wine, raising the dead, curing the incurable, etc.

(2) The Conversion of Europe to Christianity, despite its …
(a) supernatural truths, which are repugnant to reason, and
(b) ascetic requirements, which are repugnant to our passions.

• These two aspects of Christianity are not readily accepted by people and so the fact that they were accepted, and by so many, is explainable only through recourse to divine intervention.
• This latter miracle is central for Aquinas: if we deny (1), then (2) is an even greater miracle.

[Thomas Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles (written 1251-64)]
“We may conclude that the Christian Religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity.” (Section 10, pt. 2)

[David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748)]
Three Positions

**Strong Rationalism**

In order for a religious belief system to be properly and rationally accepted, it must be possible to prove that the belief system is true.

**Fideism**

Religious belief systems are not subject to rational evaluation.

**Critical Rationalism**

Religious belief systems can and must be rationally criticized and evaluated although conclusive proof of such a system is impossible.
Critical Rationalism

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Assessing a world view for…

(a) internal (logical) consistency.
(b) external consistency (with the known facts).
(c) theoretical explanatory power (making sense of the world).
(d) practical explanatory power (making sense of the human condition).
(e) remaining open to new truth.
Fideism

Religious belief systems are not subject to rational evaluation.

Problems with Fideism:

(1) Religious diversity: over which abyss do I leap?
(2) Fundamental belief: is it really axiomatic?
(3) Modifying belief: we often do this, in the light of reason.
(4) Self-contradiction: we use reason to avoid this.
(5) Self-serving: Fideists use reason until they start to lose.
Revelation!
Two Kinds of Revelation

**General**: available to all.

**Special**: available to some.
**General Revelation**: given directly to *all* people, typically through nature and with the help of reason.
Special Revelation: given directly to one person or group, as found in scripture, prophecy, divine inspiration.
What reason would we have to believe that a revelation comes from God?

How would we recognize God’s voice?

What do you think?
TYLER, Texas (Reuters) - A Texas woman who beat two of her sons to death with a rock and badly injured another because she believed God told her to do it was found not guilty by reason of insanity on Saturday.

A jury of eight men and four women deliberated for nearly seven hours before reaching their verdict.

Deanna Laney, 39, broke down in tears and shook when state judge Cynthia Kent read the jury's decision in the hushed courtroom in the eastern Texas city of Tyler.

She could have faced life in prison if convicted, but instead will go to a state mental institution until the judge decides she is well enough to be released. [...]
If God should really speak to man, man could still never know that it was God speaking.

*Sacrifice of Isaac* (1603)
Caravaggio (1571-1610)

Immanuel Kant
(1724-1804)
Religion, Revelation, and Morality

It is quite impossible for man to apprehend the infinite with his senses, distinguish it from sensible beings, and recognize it as such.

Sacrifice of Isaac (1603)
Caravaggio (1571-1610)

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)
If God should really speak to man, man could never know that it was God speaking. It is quite impossible for man to apprehend the infinite by his senses, distinguish it from sensible beings, and recognize it as such. But in some cases man can be sure that the voice he hears is not God’s. If the voice commands him to do something contrary to the moral law, then no matter how majestic the apparition may be, and no matter how it may seem to surpass the whole of nature, he must consider it an illusion.
Natural religion is the set of religious beliefs that can be known through reason alone as it reflects on the phenomena of nature.

Revealed religion is the set of religious beliefs that can be known only through God’s special revelation, either scripture or mystical insight.
Deism: the belief that natural religion is adequate for one’s salvation; special revelation is unnecessary or even deceptive and harmful.

Some Famous Deists:
(in America) Ben Franklin, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine
(in France) Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau
(in Germany) Leibniz, Lessing, Kant
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<th><strong>Fideism</strong></th>
<th><strong>Deism</strong></th>
<th><strong>Theism</strong></th>
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<td>is the belief that reason and evidence can play, at best, a minor role in religion. Our belief is based on faith.</td>
<td>is the belief that natural religion is adequate for salvation; rejects special revelation.</td>
<td>is the belief that God exists.</td>
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Latin: *fides* (faith), *deus* (God). Greek: *theos* (God)