IS KIERKEGAARD’S RADICAL FAITH A DEFENSIBLE JUSTIFICATION FOR RELIGIOUS BELIEF?

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of research, except where other sources are fully acknowledged by referencing. It does not contain material previously submitted for a degree at any University.

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Abstract

Fideism, or basing one's religious belief on faith, is popular especially amongst modern Protestant Christians. For the fideist, religious belief-systems are not subject to rational evaluation, and faith as the act of belief forms the essence of truth and the ultimate criterion for embracing a religion. Critics of fideism say that epistemologically, a hierarchy of methods can be used to derive the truth, and each method gives us varying confidence levels. These methods include mathematics and logic, science, personal experience, history, expert testimony, inference and Faith. Among these, the critic says, pure faith in something is the least successful in getting at the truth. Radical fideists like Kierkegaard do not cite logical reasons for defending their belief that God exists. Personal reasons are instead offered for their decision to believe. In this thesis I seek to demonstrate that the radical fideism advocated by Kierkegaard constitutes good justification for belief in the Christian God. I will begin with a discussion on fideism and some of its proponents, followed by a discussion on the place of faith (as a non-rational belief in God's existence) in religion. I will then appeal to Kierkegaard's philosophy in defending my view that religious belief in God is a matter of faith and personal commitment, feeling and passion, and this is an inner process not grounded in arguments. References will be drawn from Kierkegaard's themes of faith, subjectivity and inwardness. I conclude by saying that even if no objective grounds exist to justify our belief, Kierkegaard standpoint remains right in two ways: Firstly, the fideist rejection of the attempt to justify his belief through offering reasons for it is precisely what makes his decision to believe deeply meaningful in his life. Secondly, those who 'try to judge faith by objective, critical reflection will go on forever that way, and will never reach the point of having faith and of being religious'. (Peterson et al, 2003:53)